

# WHAT IS THE LENGTH OF AN ARM?

How "arm's length distance" is used in art and cultural politics in Sweden today



By Susanna Dahlberg



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## **ABSTRACT**

The principle “arm’s length distance” is seen as central in Swedish cultural politics. The interpretations of the principle differ and there is a current public debate about that. This thesis is about “arm’s length distance” in art and cultural politics in Sweden today and gives examples on how it is used.

Based on this study it can be said that the principle arm’s length distance rules the cultural politics in Sweden today on a structural level. However, when the principle is applied it does not always lead to as much autonomy for the arts as put in the meaning of the principle.

The instrumentality and norms expressed in regulations from the politics connected to public funding, like wish for equality and inclusion, are shared in the cultural field as in most parts of society as a whole. The steering is not always seen as steering and not questioned as much as it might have been if there were less consensus regarding those values.

The study shows that the forms of public management might be a risk to artistic development and quality and might not be aligned with the needs of producing art. This shows a possible conflict between cultural politics and artistic freedom as well as a possible conflict between the need to control tax-money versus artistic freedom.

Direct interference from politicians in artistic questions is rare but experienced and expressed as growing.

Another main conclusion is that cultural politics built on the principle arm’s length distance is handling many paradoxes. This thesis points at compromises between ideals and practices, both among politicians and artists as well as officials and professionals. These compromises are linked to the conflicts mentioned above.

In Sweden today most actors involved in the field agree that an ideal cultural politics should be grounded in the principle “arm’s length distance” as much as possible. This research shows that there is no absolute definition of an “arm’s length distance” but that the principle is relative.

**Keywords:** arm’s length distance, cultural politics, artistic freedom, instrumentality, overlapping zone.

**Nyckelord:** armlängds avstånd, kulturpolitik, konstnärlig frihet, instrumentalitet, overlapping zone.



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## 1 PROLOGUE

Spring 2018 chairman of the Göteborg City Executive Board, Anne-Sofie Hermansson, questions a cultural event planned by Göteborgs stad. This leads to a heated political debate where the expression “arm’s length distance” is central.

The showing of the film *Burka Songs 2.0* with a following talk was cancelled by its organizers, Göteborgs stad, after critique from Hermansson, among others. Then the critique itself was questioned in the public debate. The expression “arm’s length distance” was often used. “Keep extremism on an arm’s length distance” Hermansson writes (Hermansson 2018). Björn Werner, editor of culture (kulturchef) at Göteborgsposten, responds that the expression “arm’s length distance” is usually used to motivate a cultural politics that do not interfere with how the culture is expressed and continues writing that Hermansson’s acting as well as statements erodes the principle “arm’s length distance” (Werner 2018 a, 2018 b). Hanna Högstedt, the creator of the film, writes in the same paper that the cancelling and the debate in real life illustrate what the event was supposed to discuss, who’s opinion is accepted to be heard (Högstedt 2018). When Göteborgs litteraturhus, a non-profit association (idéell förening) with public economic support plan to take over the cancelled event Hermansson questions the economic support given to the association. This statement gives new fuel to the discussions. After some time the film *Burka Songs 2.0* is shown, together with other artistic expressions and talks, at Folkteatern, since Göteborgs litteraturhus did not have space enough hosting the big audience interested. The film has been shown both before and after this. It could be that the difference between showing the film per se and adding a talk shows an example of the collision between art and politics where the film represents the art and the talk the politics.

But what exactly is this “arm’s length distance” so many are referring to? What does it mean? And why does it upset so much when experienced violated?

That is what this study is about.





## 2 INTRODUCTION

In Sweden art and culture is supported with tax-money. Art and freedom of expression is seen as fundamental parts of the open and democratic society (Svensson and Tomson, ed, 2016). Cultural politics is not the same as culture or art, this is important to keep in mind during the discussion. Cultural politics is an area of politic where the elected representatives should have ambitions and a directions while art and artistic and cultural expression is an area where they should not. The guiding principle for cultural politics in Sweden is the “arm’s length principle”, there should be “arm’s length distance” between the politicians and the art. This means that politicians should make it possible, support conditions, but not interfere with the content of the art. Recent development shows interference from politicians like in the case and debate described above. In parallel there is a strong support for “arm’s length distance” as the guiding principle. This takes us to the discussion about what arm’s length distance is.

### 2.1 BACKGROUND

In cultural politics there is a principle that politicians should keep the distance “the length of an arm” to art and culture. This “Arm’s length principle” was formulated by British national economist, and first chairman of the Arts Council of Great Britain, John Maynard Keynes after second world war. One of the reasons to do that was the attempt to prevent the use of art in purpose of propaganda from the politicians in power, like in Nazi Germany. This British cultural politics became standard for the way western democracies have supported art and artists and their freedom to criticize those in power (Hanke 2014). It is notable that it was Keynes, normally acting in the more instrumental context of economy, that founded this concept of artistic freedom and non-instrumentality.

The principle has been a guide for Swedish cultural politics on national level, as well as regional and municipal, and is mostly used meaning that the public should support artists and artistic institutions but not interfere with the content of the art and the institutions. It is seen as a very important defence to the freedom of expression in the arts and as a shield to nepotism, corruption and art characterized by politics. It is also a central piece in the self-



image of the cultural institutions and the artists together with the strong idea about the importance of art to democracy and freedom of speech.

“The words *length of an arm* is a metaphor for a structure of decision making that set the rules for how public economic support is given. The linguistic reference to the closeness of the body and the stretched arm is a way of expressing that the politicians never can come that close to the artist or the expert that an embracement or a firm handshake could influence the donations in a politically coloured direction” (Hanke 2014).

## 2.2 TODAY'S SITUATION IN SWEDEN

The regional cultural plan of Västra Götaland 2016-2019 (the overall plan for culture in Västra Götaland) starts by stating “When it comes to the development of the fine arts it is the ambition from the politics to act on arm’s length distance. Politics contribute by giving conditions and putting resources available, but it is the creators of the art that drives the development of artistic quality” (Västra Götalands regionala kulturplan 2016-2019, author’s translation).

Recent development in Sweden points in another direction. Interventions from politicians (Degrér 2016), growing demands on art fulfilling purposes of other political areas than culture, making art more instrumental (Hanke 2010) and discussions in popular media questioning conditions and resources connected to the content of the art are several. The first example (intervention from politicians) is a direct conflict with the arm’s length principle. The others (growing demands, instrumentality, questioning resources connected to the content of the art) are not, but maybe an indirect conflict.

Cultural politics, both in democratic and non-democratic societies, wishes to influence the society and the citizens (Vestheim 2009). The difference is that in democratic societies this influence is going on under the circumstances of freedom of speech, democratic open elections and a public debate. While the influence in authoritarian societies is going on with censorship and limitation of the freedoms of the citizens (Vestheim 2009).

“The content of the arm’s length principle varies due to the many interpretations of the meaning”, Doracic and Edlund (2005 p. II) concludes in their study on distribution of power in Swedish cultural politics. In Sweden the principle has been actualized during the last decade by the Governmental investigation about culture (*Kulturutredningen*) and the



introduction of *Kultursamverkansmodellen*, the model to distribute national economic support to culture in the regions. Andersson and Johansson (2013) discusses (with a regional focus) that even if the principle is found in many regional cultural plans, and described somehow like “artistic decisions are not to be made at a political level”, this contains a paradox. What is a political decision and what is an artistic decision is not always clear – a political decision on what will get public financing and what will not in practice becomes an artistic decision when it decides the conditions under which the art will be produced. Even if not in first hand.

There is a lively debate going on in popular and social media in Sweden around cultural politics, which has historically not been that common, not even in times of upcoming elections (Karlsson 2018). Many commentators have been involved in the debates. Journalist and writer Ola Wong is one of those questioning Swedish cultural politics. He warns that we are moving towards political steering of for example national museums and publishing. Wong means that the directives connected to financial support affects the content of culture (Björkman 2018) and finds it problematic when Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs (Kulturrådet) is acting under influence of what Wong calls one overall ideology while distributing resources, criticism of norms (normkritik) (Wong SVT 2018). There have been many reactions to Wongs theories. For example from Alice Bah Kuhnke, at that time Minister of Culture and Democracy, defends the current politics, agrees on that there is a healthy worrying about political steering of culture but states that for example the new law for museums is an example of politics that protects the independence of the museums (Bah Kuhnke 2018).

### 2.3 USE AND APPLICATION

Degrér (2016 p. 2) writes “Since you can find many examples where the arm’s length principle has been challenged one can draw the conclusion that it has not been isolated circumstances but some common variable that has made for example municipalities regard the artistic freedom not that important to maintain”. In his study on independence of municipal artistic venues (konsthallar) he finds that single politicians and parties several occasions have intervened and changed decisions on areas they earlier have delegated to the manager of the artistic venue.



Research and current debate in media shows that the principle of arm's length distance is interpreted differently depending on the context, the time, the content of the art and the view of the individual or group. This thesis is part in this ongoing discussion and a study about how the arm's length principle is described, interpreted and used in cultural politics and in the field of art in Sweden today.

## 2.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

How is "arm's length distance" used in art and cultural politics in Sweden today?

In order to explore this question in detail I will use two of Geir Vestheims theories, *All cultural politics is instrumental* (Vestheim 2009) and *The overlapping zone* (2012).

When analysing the data I am interested in the similarities and differences between the agents/groups interviewed (artists, politicians, professionals and officials), where they connect and where they differ in interpretation and practical use of the principle arm's length distance.

## 2.5 PURPOSE

The purpose is to describe how the principle arm's length distance is interpreted and to capture possible paradoxes in the use of the principle. Putting actions, choices, consequences and possible compromises by those using the principle in focus I wish to contribute to the ongoing discussion in Sweden as well as inspire to further research. Using Vestheims theories about the instrumentality of cultural politics and about the overlapping zone I hope to put some light on how challenges and paradoxes coming together with using the principle is handled. This study will contribute to an understanding of the public steering of art and artistic institutions.

Cultural politics always need to find legitimacy and therefor adapt to the political winds of the time. Art for art's sake is an impossible concept in politics but is a firm idea among artists. The idea of an inborn value of art is spread and anchored in our society. To adapt a view that cultural politics could be instrumental (= serving as an instrument or mean in pursuing an aim or policy) without necessarily making art itself instrumental could be useful while analysing the question how "arm's length distance" is used.

Another purpose is to contribute to the academic research by combining theories and empirical findings in the field of cultural politics and art.



### 3 THEORY

#### 3.1 ALL CULTURAL POLITICS IS INSTRUMENTAL

Vestheim (2009) presents the theory that *all* cultural politics is instrumental. His research is showing:

1. all cultural politics is in one way or another instrumental in that understanding that it is used as a way to reach some certain effects on the citizens,
2. it is not logic to stress that art has a value of its own in a cultural political reasoning,
3. art can only have a *relative* autonomy in relation to other areas of activities in society since art is created and distributed in a certain historical, economic, material and social context, and last
4. cultural politics has not a complete autonomy in relation to other areas of politic (Vestheim 2009).

Many researchers and artists share the view that cultural politics over the last decades has become more instrumental and that art has been used for other purposes than art itself, like social development, strengthening the local community, give work opportunities, promote health etc. And many, like Hanke (2010), are critical to this development. Vestheim counter that cultural politics that is *not* instrumental would be politically un-logical. The instrumental motives can be different but they are always there. From a political perspective there is no value of art itself, there is only value in relation to a person as an individual, as audience or citizen. Vestheim uses four ideal types in his model that he identifies as the most common types of instrumentality; the aesthetic, the economic, the social and the democratic.





Figure 1. Vestheims type of argument, target-group and instrumentality for public support to art and culture:

<i>Type of argument</i>	<i>Target-group for the argument</i>	<i>Type of instrumentality</i>
A/ Support the “good” art because of art’s intrinsic value	Individual as a private person	Aesthetic and formative
B/ Support art and culture to create economic growth	Individual as an economic being	Economic
C/ Support art and culture to create social development and integration	Individual as a social being	Social
D/ Support art and culture to contribute to education and citizenship	Individual as citizen	Politically mobilizing

(Vestheim, Geir (2009). *All kulturpolitikk er instrumentell*. Kultursverige 2009 pp 56-63.)

### 3.2 THE OVERLAPPING ZONE

To complement Vestheims theory about instrumentality I will use another theory of his, *The overlapping zone*. It is described in an article about cultural policymaking and inspired by Bourdieu’s theory about social fields. Besides the meeting place *The overlapping zone* his theory includes a description of four agents which corresponds to the four categories of interviewed I have chosen for this thesis.



*The overlapping zone* between culture and politics is a “socially constructed arena or ‘space’ where agents from different social fields meet, discuss and decide about matters in which they are all interested. The different agents of the field are bearers of ideas, values, interests and arguments about the matter they negotiate” (Vestheim 2012). Vestheim sees the overlapping zone as a space for negotiations between on one hand the social field of cultural and artistic interests and on the other hand the social field of political, administrative and economic interests, i.e. the field of power. The theoretical approach and the format for the figure he borrowed from Bourdieu's *Les règles de l'art* (Bourdieu 1992). “In democratic societies, agents or representatives of different interests in the two fields will negotiate about the value of culture and the arts, and they will discuss and decide on which forms and how much public support should be invested in selected sub-areas of the cultural field. This happens on the national, regional as well as on the local level” (Vestheim 2012). “Since such process also house interests that are irreconcilable” Vestheim describes the activities in the overlapping zone and continues that the communication cause to these irreconcilable interests can be both tense and laded with conflicts even though the surface might seem harmonious. The overlapping zone is both formal and informal and agents move in and out Vestheim points out. In the theory about the overlapping zone Vestheim also discusses instrumentality, which strengthens the connection between the two theories and the applicability of them together for answering the research question in this thesis. Politicians do not act on their own but on mandate from the voters, the citizens. This gives that the concept of intrinsic value of art becomes self-contradictory due to democratic political reason. In a political context art has no intrinsic value, only a value for someone, the voter on whose mandate the politician is acting. Politics go beyond the instrument itself, the art, and the instrumentality is always there in the intentions of the politics (Vestheim 2012). The discussion on instrumentality versus intrinsic value takes place in the overlapping zone.

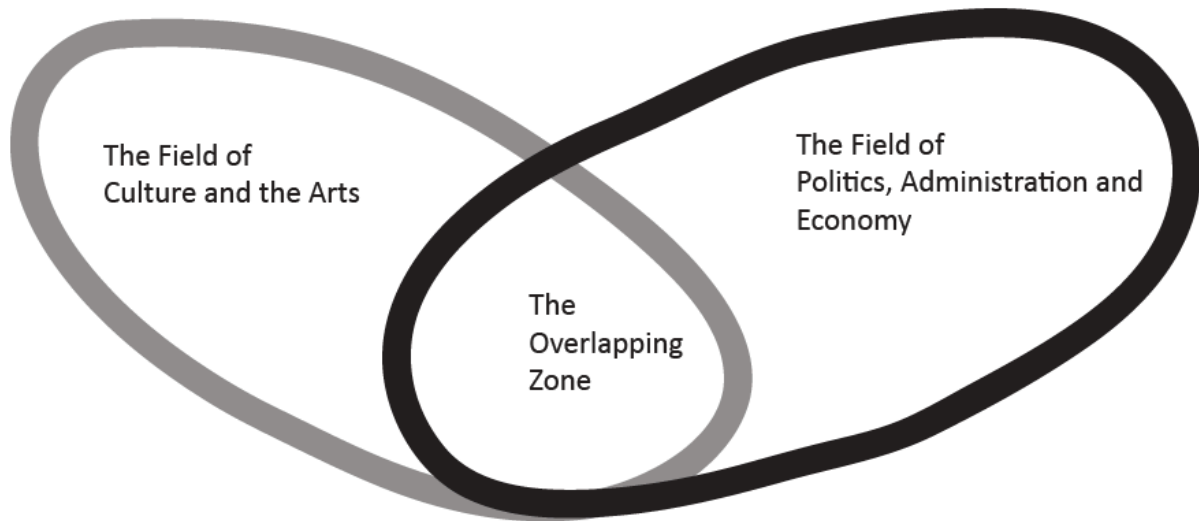
There are four different groups of agents in the overlapping zone according to Vestheim. (These four groups of agents are the same as the categories interviewed in this thesis.) The first (1) group of agents are the politicians, with mandate from the voters. Contact with the field of art and culture brings them into the overlapping zone and experiences from there goes back in to their other arenas as politicians. The second (2) group of agents are the officials (bureaucrats, civil servants) whose function is both to prepare political discussion and to implement political decisions once they have been made.



Officials in practice have a lot of influence and power, among other activities by producing reports and other documents that underlies decisions made by the politicians. Acting in the overlapping zone the rationalities of the officials are double according to Vestheim, they represent a political and administrative system but often have an education in humanities and social sciences. Professionals, working either in the cultural institutions or interest organisations, are the third (3) group of agents acting in the overlapping zone. They often have higher education in humanities or social sciences which means they have their main intellectual anchoring not in administration, economy or law. Vestheim lifts in his article the results from researchers Blomgren and Blomgren (2002) who in a report on theatre policy in Sweden conclude that “strong professions and professional networks to a high degree can hinder the implementation of democratically adopted cultural policies” (Vestheim 2012). Vestheim describes these agents standing with “one leg in each world”, they have their professional integrity but have their mandate defined by political decisions. The fourth (4) group of agents are the professional artists. They are represented in committees and boards which for example decide upon applications for project support, grants, scholarships or artist salaries. Artists are less trade union oriented than in the 70s (Vestheim 2012) but have strong interest organisations. In the overlapping zone the artists position is used mostly to defend the necessity of freedom and autonomy of the arts. They also defend their economic and material interests. Vestheim sums his reasoning by quoting Eräsaari (2009) who describes the activities that take place in the overlapping zone, the “negotiations and exchange of rationalities, ideas, values, interests and money”, as a *polyphonic complexity of voices*. “It seems that the communication between parties and interests here strives to obtain some form of consensus where each stakeholder obtains a minimum of benefits that makes it reasonable to continue to take part in the play.” Vestheim describes the overlapping zone also as an arena for power struggle at the same time ruled by an interdependence between the agents.



Figure 2. Vestheims overlapping zone between culture, politics and money:

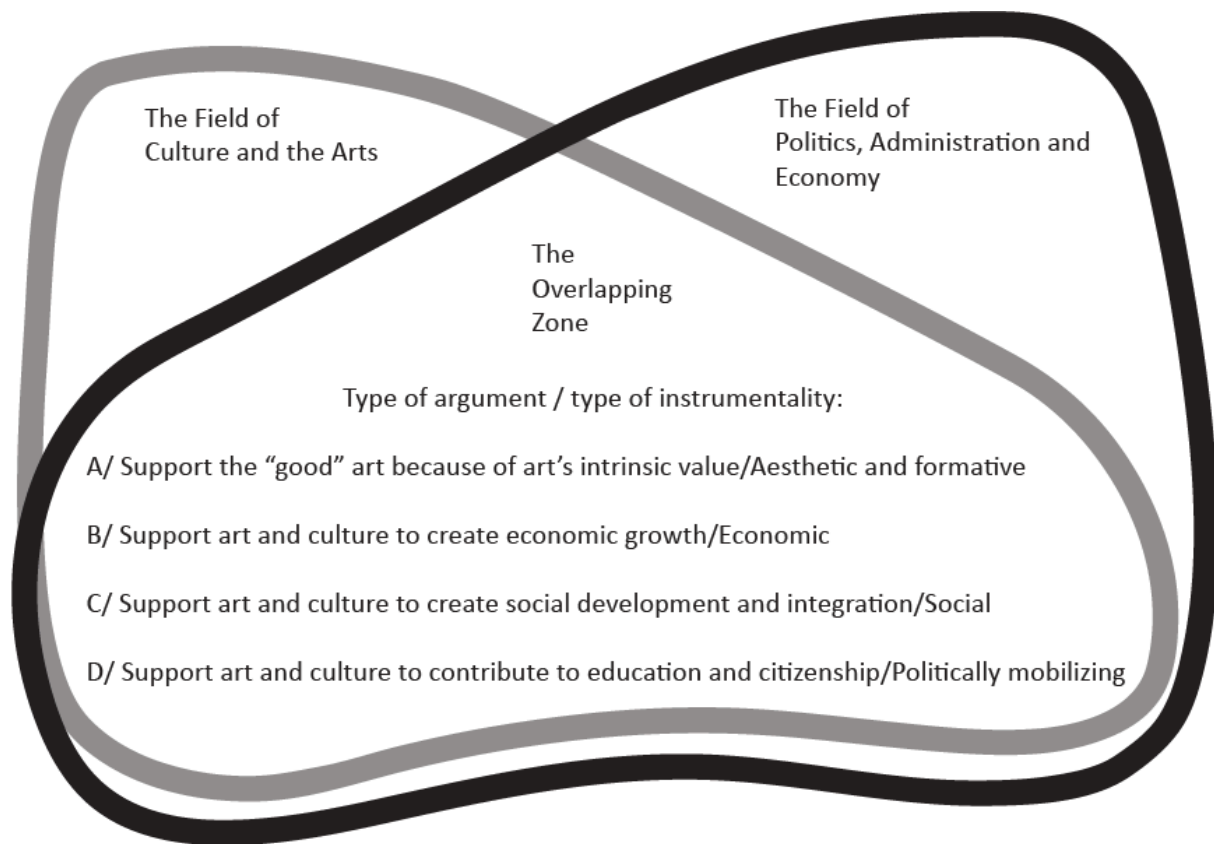


(Vestheim, Geir (2012). *Cultural policy-making: negotiations in an overlapping zone between culture, politics and money*. International Journal of Cultural Policy, 18:5, pp 530-544.)

### 3.3 USE OF THEORIES

Vestheim's two theoretical frameworks, on instrumentality and about the overlapping zone, both play a vital role in this study. I see common denominators aligning them, as presented in the theoretical analysis model in figure 3. By putting the model of instrumentality into the overlapping zone I create a new model used for this thesis, see figure 3.

Figure 3. Combined Model; Instrumentality in the overlapping zone.



Together with the Swedish context described in the following chapter Setting this model creates a frame within which the analysis of the empirical data later will be made. By weighing and contrasting the empirical findings against this model with support from the Swedish context described I aim to answer the research question about how arm's length distance is used in Sweden today in art and cultural politics. In the chapter Setting both contradictions, criticism and different definitions of the principle will be described as well as the role of the state, acting on different levels with more or less tendency to intervene, in supporting art. Vestheims theories, and the combined model, might also release some tensions created by mixing the purpose of cultural politics with the purpose of art itself. With a better understanding of concepts, perspectives and the possibility of one phenomenon having many, sometimes contradictory, purposes hopefully this could lead forward in a constructive understanding discussion. The critical and pragmatic perspective in Vestheims research supports the approach in this thesis.



## 4 SETTING

### 4.1 ART, CULTURE & ARTISTIC FREEDOM

“There are three distinct segments of contemporary art: the fine arts, the commercial arts and the amateur arts. In each, the source of all is the individual artist. The fine arts are professional activity that serves *art for art’s sake* just as *knowledge for knowledge sake* is the rationale for *pure research* in sciences” (Chartrand & McCaughey 1989; Chartrand 1980). The fine arts are what is meant by *art* in this thesis. The fine arts are the type of art that gets public financial support according to the arm’s length principle, for example opera, poetry or contemporary art. (Also amateur arts and commercial arts can get public support in many ways, ruled by other principles than arm’s length distance.)

*Artist* in this study includes all kinds of artists; musicians, writers, sculptors, artists, directors, actors, dancers, choreographers etc. Mangset (2008) discusses the autonomy of the arts and stresses that the use of the principle arm’s length distance has no meaning without reference to artistic autonomy as a fundamental value. This fundamental value is often referred to as *artistic freedom*. Artistic freedom/freedom of expression is the same according to the law for all citizens, there is no special kind of freedom for artists.

Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs (Statens Kulturråd) (2008, p. 5) states that “It can’t be underlined enough that art and culture has a value of its own, intrinsic value, and that the activities of Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs must as starting point have the independence of art.” Swedish artist Viktoria Günes (2012) concludes that “Artistic quality requires respect for artistic integrity” and compares the artist with a researcher and the artistic process with basic research, referring to interviews with Lobell and Sederholm as well as the Swedish cultural proposition (2009/10:3).

### 4.2 ART & POLITICS

There are four alternative roles for the state when it comes to public support of the fine arts: Facilitator, Patron, Architect and Engineer (Chartrand & McCaughey 1989). The facilitator funds the art mainly through individual and corporate donors and makes the donations tax deductible. The USA are one example of the Facilitator way of funding arts. The Patron, like in Sweden, funds the arts through arm’s lengths distance with an arts council making the granting decisions. The Architect, like France, tends to support the arts as part of its social welfare objectives, art that meets community needs rather than professional standards of



artistic excellence. Chartrand and McCaughey write 1989 that Sweden is going in this direction, towards the Architect role. In the Forth alternative, Engineer, the state owns all the means of artistic production and supports art that meets political standards of excellence. As an historical example the Soviet Union is most often agreed on. Recent examples are more debated. "Roles and objectives are not mutually exclusive, that is, a single government may play more than one role and may seek to achieve more than one objective" (Chartrand & McCaughey 1989). When taking the USA as an example of the Facilitator role in cultural politics one should remember that the aversion against governmental interference goes for all business areas in the USA, art and cultural production included (Vestheim 2005). Also, these four roles can be used to describe the difference between different levels of financing, like state level, regional or municipal level, within one country at the same time.

The Chartrand & McCaughey model from 1989 is both seminal and questioned. The Norwegian researcher Per Mangset (1992) is one of the critiques and he calls the model undifferentiated. Mangset suggests a differentiation between four European models for cultural politics: The French – that contains considerable elements of central national steering, The British – that nowadays is clearly market oriented, The German – where responsibility almost completely lies on a regional level and The Nordic – that contains several levels of decision making and that is more corporate.

Hugosson (2000) also questions this possibility of combining two contradictive poles, and he calls cultural politics an "unthinkable combination of rule based bureaucracy and irregular creativity". Frenander (2001) reminds us that before the 70s Sweden did not have much of a separate politic for culture but relied on the idea that the growing standard of living automatically would stimulate culture. This is relevant to keep in mind discussing the principle arm's length distance, that the whole field cultural politics is relatively new compared to other political areas. The responsibility now lies with the government, like the Swedish, to define goals for the cultural politics and place it in a political and administrative overview. This could be resembled by making a drawing or a design, that's why the metaphor Architect in cultural politics is used (Vestheim 2005).

Political steering in the cultural field is not an ongoing activity, rather it is about settle an infrastructure by organisations, rules and resources. Politicians by this show that culture



is a political area of importance but at the same time shows that they will not interfere (Jacobsson p. 58 in Svensson & Tomson 2016).

#### 4.3 STEERING & CONTROLLING

##### 4.3.1 ARTS COUNCIL

To avoid a total political control over the art, countries use the principle arm's length distance. Countries that call themselves democratic need to establish mechanisms and procedures that secures an extensive representation in configuration and execution of cultural politics. One mechanism to secure art from political alignment is the independent organizations and institutions in the cultural field and that representatives in boards, councils and committees come from different environments and represent different interests, not only political or professional special interests (Vestheim 2005).

Frenander (2010) refers to the Swedish Government (Regeringsformen) where so called ministerial rule (ministerstyre) is forbidden. From this point of view we can say that the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs functions on arm's length distance. But Frenander questions this from another angle and stresses that the council is subordinate to the government and the Cultural department by being bonded by the directives in the yearly appropriation (regleringsbrev). There the department clearly tells what goals the council should achieve on a national level. In light of this we must consider the council as a subordinate to the government and incorporated in the Swedish State apparatus (statsapparaten).

Doracic and Edlund (2005) makes a deep study of the relation between the government and the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs that concludes the same as Frenander. The results from their research underlines the contradictions in this relationship, that the council as an authority lies very close to the government and that this distance in some aspects is shrinking since the 80s. At the same time there are essential parts of the structure and organization that shows arm's length distance, like the circumstance that the council itself nominates delegates in working- and reference groups.

Vestheim (2005) puts the question "how long should the distance between the political power and the cultural life be to be called arm's length distance?" and points out that studying the formal structure and distances is not enough to determine if the division of power in the cultural politics is democratic or not. Swedish National Council for Cultural



Affairs is, according to Vestheim (2005), not on arm's length distance from the Swedish government. As an authority, like other authorities, it is executing the governmental decisions. "The metaphor arm's length is maybe not that good when it comes to describing the Swedish model and the place for the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs in it" (Vestheim 2005).

#### 4.3.2 MONITORING

Mangset (2017) describes how steering for results and goals challenges the principle of arm's length distance. In many areas of public administration the importance of steering on goals and results, New Public Management, has been growing during the last decade. Also in the cultural sector. This is described as challenging the autonomy of the cultural institutions and thereby also the principle arm's length distance. Hanke (2010) holds that opinion and discusses what he calls the growing institutionalism, that society demands a form of steering that he thinks contradicts the innovation and creativity art and culture content. He writes "It is of course nothing wrong putting demands on correct management of trusted means, regardless private or public money. But to what extent is it healthy for the cultural life to be driven like public institutions on the same level as health sector, road administration or school authorities?" (Hanke 2010 p. 77).

Anthropologist Graeber (2015) describes a cultural transformation that during the 90s has come to its full maturity and that he calls "the age of the total bureaucratization".

The reason for the growing focus on measuring result and steering on goals is the wish to look after that public means is used as efficient as possible and what has happened in the cultural field do not differ from what is going on in other areas in society (Jacobsson 2014).

#### 4.4 PROBLEMATIZING THE USE OF ARM'S LENGTH

Mangset (2008) means that even though the arm's length principle governs the cultural politics in many countries the understanding and interpretation is different, depending on national and cultural context. With context in this case he means specific historical and political traditions.

When comparing Sweden with Norway, which both use the arm's length principle and work through an arts council, Mangset finds that the Swedish governments arm is shorter than the Norwegian. Mangset suggests that from a research perspective it is more fruitful to



look at the arm's length principle as a dimension more than a principle. In Nordic countries the arm's length principle is generally not as much respected as in for example Great Britain and Mangset refers this to a strong social-democratic and corporatist tradition

In France for example neither politicians nor artists refer to the arm's length principle. There is a strong tradition in France that both ministers and even presidents have a direct impact on the cultural scene (the Architect model, according to Chartrand and McCaughey). And artists in general (according to Mangset) do not bother much about this intervention. This shows a very close relationship between arts and politics. Mangset also illustrates a gap and an ambivalence between the concrete political implementation of the arm's length principle and the rhetoric use of it.

“When politicians can't influence a certain area in politics by direct orders there is instead created an indirect influence and demands about controlling the activities. This gives a bigger focus on general measurable KPI's (Key Performance Indicators) that will always be the political responsibility to finances” (Hanke 2014). Hanke develops the thought that arm's length distance is an obstacle to a discussion on artistic quality among politicians. The principle leads to a “touch anxiety” he writes, due to a fear of being seen as authoritarian expressing opinions about artistic quality the politicians express no view at all about the content. This affects the development of artistic quality negatively when the only things allowed and possible to discuss are numbers and not the content. Quinn (1997) has the same opinion and criticizes the British governments use of the arm's length principle as a way to disclaim responsibility for cultural politics and lower the priority for culture as a political field. Culture is put in the periphery both economically and politically she means and calls the explanation, that art should be autonomous and therefor politicians should not intervene, as inconsistent: “In short, one cannot intervene in an area without influencing, the two are intrinsically linked” (Quinn 1997, p 157, Vestheim 2005).

A report on governmental steering of cultural institutions from Swedish National Audit Office (Riksrevisionen) published 2019 points out that the Swedish Model starts in a separation between politics and administration, arm's length distance, and builds on trust. The report notes that since there is always a possibility for the government to steer both close and intense, when considered needed, this could create challenges in relation to the norm of autonomy (arm's length distance) regarding the cultural field (RIR 2019:10 p. 9).





#### 4.4.1 ARM'S LENGTH AS AN OBSTACLE TO ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT

The way Hanke (2010) discusses institutionalism he finds that the arm's length principle inhibits the development of art itself and the artistic institutions. Hanke's argument is that arm's length distance is an obstacle to a discussion on artistic quality among politicians, that the principle leads to a "touch anxiety" and this affects the artistic quality development negatively when the only thing "allowed" to discuss is numbers and not the content. Hanke calls both politicians and artists, as well as managers of artistic institutions and the citizens, victims in this system. The form for steering is not only a mismatch but a real obstacle for artistic development.

Another discussion that connects to Hanke's thesis about "touch anxiety" is that cultural politics itself contributed to this by focusing on the instrumental, societal aspects of art and culture. This raises an interesting question about arm's length distance and democracy, as discussed among others by Blomgren (2012). If the artists and institutions themselves are to decide what is preferred quality and the politicians has no saying as representatives, where does the opinion of the citizens come in? As an audience or visitor of course but is this enough? (Blomgren 2012).

#### 4.4.2 VIOLATING THE AUTONOMY

Degrér (2016) defines three different dimensions when it comes to politicians violating the arm's length principle and categorizes them according to who or what that has been challenged in their autonomy: 1/political control of the art itself, 2/ political control of the employees (i. e. managers) of the artistic venue (konsthall) and 3/ political control of the institution, the artistic venue itself.

#### 4.5 DEFINITIONS OF ARM'S LENGTH

##### 4.5.1 BALANCE CENTRE OF POWER

Vestheim (2005) describes the principle arm's length distance as something that balances centre of power in democratic states, used in many political fields like for example law. In the cultural field this applies to the relationship between the government and an authority or council whose task is to implement the cultural politics. The idea that such a council or authority should operate quite independent is the idea behind arm's length distance. The



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ambition is to establish a cultural politics that “supports but not influences”, to quote the first French cultural minister, the writer André Malraux (Vestheim 2005).

Vestheim 2005 puts Sweden in the Architect role, not the Patron role like Chartrand and McCaughey do in 1989. This might show either that the roles are somewhat floating or maybe that Sweden has moved and developed its cultural politics further in that Architect direction. Vestheim also leaves the forth role, the Engineer, some way out of the discussion. This is because the Engineer role is used in non-democratic countries and the other three are used in democracies.

Vestheims definition is mirrored in the theories of his used for this thesis. This view is also the most common one. There are though other perspectives:

#### 4.5.2 GIVE AWAY POWER

Langstedt (2015) take a different view stressing that by using arm’s length principle the politicians give away their power. He sees the arm’s lengths principle as something completely different from the commissions and agreement writings between the public owners and the cultural institutions and claims that many, both politicians, artists and officials, mix this.

Langstedt (2002) defines the principle arm’s length distance by saying that “On one side the political system takes the decision on what superior artistic and cultural purposes that will receive public support and how much money in the budget that will be reserved to that. On the other side the concrete decisions about distribution are made by small, expert councils and boards, which consists of artists and other experts. These councils and boards make the decisions. Their members are shifted after a short period of years.” Langstedt hereby makes a more narrow definition on the practical use of the principle arm’s length distance. He calls it a “dimension” between artistic autonomy and political steering or a “field for battle and discussion”. This corresponds to Vestheims theory about the *overlapping zone*.

#### 4.5.3 MAKE DECISIONS BASED ON AESTHETIC VALUES

Frenander (2010) defines the principle arm’s length distance as the idea that politicians should not interfere with which writers, artists, directors etc. that should get public



economic support. Those decisions should be made based on only aesthetic values and that is best handled by those culturally and aesthetically educated.

Important to remember in all these definitions is that culture, art and cultural politics are not the same. Core in cultural politics can be something else than the content of art and culture.

#### 4.5.4 THE METAPHOR ARM'S LENGTH

There are also researchers that problematizes the arm's length principle from other angles. Raymond Williams (1979) questions the suitability of the metaphor with reference to the fact that the brain always steers the arm however long or short it is, so maybe the metaphor disguises the fact that the government controls the cultural field through a council. Ruth-Blandina M. Quinn (1997) takes this thought further when she stresses, in opposition to most other research and what is generally accepted, that Great Britain has in reality never practiced arm's length principle but is "... proximate to this arts council" (Vestheim 2005). Quinn stresses that the principle arm's length in British cultural politics has been used both by the government and the arts council as they liked, sometimes for protection and sometimes to avoid responsibility. There is always a relationship between the government and the arts council and that relationship is floating which make the principle arm's length adaptable and relative.

Another aspect to the metaphor arm's length is given by the cultural politics in France and the relationship between the state and the regions. The state de-concentrates the influence over the cultural politics by placing government representatives in the regions. This could be compared to the Swedish *Kultursamverkansmodellen*, where influence and national resources are decentralized to the regions, which is the opposite situation (Vestheim 2005).



## 5 METHOD

### 5.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

This study is about how the principle arm's length distance is made sense of, described, interpreted and used, in art and cultural politics in Sweden today. It is a study about words and concepts but also about use and interpretation in practice. One purpose is to discover if there is a gap between what is said and what is done, what is said in one case and in another, if the principle is used relatively depending on the context, or not.

The field have been studied before, mostly from an organisational, steering and financial perspective. I am putting the expression itself in focus, "arm's length distance", and how it is made sense of in descriptions, actions, choices and possible compromises by those using it.

### 5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

As written in the introduction the discussion about the principle arm's length distance has been growing in Sweden last years. This has been helpful in my research since there is a high number of articles and debates in public as well as social media and a lot of people being eager to discuss the subject. I have had many discussion and have read a lot of material which is not directly part of this study but has contributed to my understanding of the subject.

This study is descriptive. The most relevant method for data collection I found, according to the research question, was qualitative interviews. By categorizing both the interviewees and their answers I will describe arm's length distance and connected aspects. With support from the theories my aim is to explain and interpret the data. The process is inductive, on basis of the data analysis I hope to be able to find observations and generable trends.

The study is qualitative with interviews as the primary source of data and literature, articles and other sources as complementary data and as adding a setting to the primary data.

### 5.3 DATA COLLECTION

#### 5.3.1 PRIMARY DATA

There are four different groups of agents acting in the overlapping zone according to Vestheim. These four agents are the same as the categories interviewed in this thesis, which hopefully will make it easy for the reader and the analysis to connect the theory with the



findings. I have made semi-structured interviews with 10 people. My main selection criteria were that they should have knowledge and experience from the field of cultural politics and art. This was important to get as much substance in the findings as possible. I also wanted as many different types of art as possible being covered from their total experience as well as different perspectives and positions. This was important mostly to discuss arm's length principle from many angles but also to avoid any art's type specific context to dominate but instead give the research a broader perspective and possible use. It was also important to have a mixed group.

They have given input from different starting points and they have also problematized their own positions (Bryman & Bell 2015 p. 213-224).

Out of the interviewees 3 were artists, 3 professionals, 2 politicians, 1 official and 1 researcher. Half of them have experience from professional work within more than one of these categories. The group have a mixed experience from working in Sweden on regional, municipal and national level and the majority have experience from international cooperation or working outside Sweden.

Together they show a broad spectrum of views and angles on the principle arm's length distance. The group comprises both theoretical but above all concrete examples.

The period for the interviews stretched from March 13 to April 27 2018 and the average time was 46 minutes (maximum 1 h 24 min, minimum 29 minutes). 9 I met live and 1 I interviewed over the phone. The interviews were recorded. All but one persons I had met before. I chose the number of 10 because it would give me the opportunity to have a mix in experiences and views. It was also a realistic number considering the size of this study, even though there are a lot more people I would have liked to interview. My aim was to get a spread of views to present to my readers, not to get a representation of *all* possible views or a quantification of possible views. (See chapter 9 appendix for an example of the questions discussed.)

During my literature research I have had a snowball effect, starting with a few articles which led me further into the field. Quite soon it was obvious which researchers are dominant in the field and which articles are seminal. I have complemented these with others to add different angles.

Interviewing and literature research have been interspersed over time and together supported my exploring of the use of the principle arm's length distance. My sampling





strategy has been convenience sampling, my samples are selected because of their availability to me as a researcher (Bryman & Bell 2015 p. 200-202).

### 5.3.2 SECONDARY DATA

My choices of secondary data are made to complement my primary data, made to support, to question or to be used as a background data, primarily in the setting chapter. During the interviews many documents and sources were mentioned and some of them are included in the study. A lot of secondary data, like articles, have been leading me forward in my research but are not part of the final study.

### 5.4 DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

All interviews were made by me. They were recorded and I was taking notes. The questions I had prepared worked as a start and support, the interviewed were talking freely. This was a conscious choice since my experience is that people usually talk about what they find most important and this would strengthen my material compared to holding on to a strict list of questions made only by my pre-understanding. This also developed the questions along the way and added more concepts and aspects to the material.

After the 10 interviews were done I listened through them and transcribed the major, relevant parts. Then I categorized the material thematically according to what they had been talking about together with my original questions. The answers are anonymised.

The main theme is What *is* arm's length distance, how is it used, between whom is it valid and what challenges are connected with it. The data also contains a discussion around instrumentality and possible changes over time in use of arm's length distance.

All these themes presented in the findings chapter have a connection to the aspects and concepts in the theory and settings chapters. I have made my best so that you as a reader easily can follow and recognize the headlines. When analysing the data I am interested in the similarities and differences between the groups interviewed (artists, politicians, professionals and officials), where they connect and where they differ in interpretation and practical use of the principle arm's length distance.



## 5.5 LIMITATIONS AND QUALITY OF RESEARCH

Theories, earlier research and writings in the field have been used. I chose Vestheims two theories because they are both useful to describe the phenomena each one by themselves but even better complementing each other. This is why I also put them together in a Combined Model; Instrumentality in the overlapping zone.

Public documents decided by the politicians used for steering of art and culture, like Cultural plans, Cultural strategies, Cultural budgets and Commissions (uppdrag), have been a complement.

It is both a strength and weakness in my thesis that I study the field I work in. My experience is a strength and a basis for this research. Without it I would not have put the questions and the material together like this. But my inside-position is also a weakness. When it comes to describing phenomena and praxis used within the cultural field but not well known outside it I risk to be too short and not clear enough. Another risk is that I would confirm my own prejudice about different categories interviewed and different set of opinions connected to a certain position. Myself, I belong to Vestheims agents category three, the professionals. My everyday work gives me certain perspectives. This could influence me when interviewing and processing the material. Though, the findings described in the next chapter shows the opposite, the nuances and problematization among the interviewees put any prejudice in shame.

Bryman and Bell (2015) supports this discussion in their description of some of the general critique of qualitative research. The risk of being too subjective will always be there as long as the researcher does the selection of what is important and significant. The risk of getting too close to the people studied is also there. The challenges of generalization from a small sample to a bigger setting Bryman and Bell solves with the reasoning “...the findings of qualitative research are to generalize to theory rather than to populations” (p 414 Bryman & Bell 2015).

My big engagement in the subject has given me a real challenge not putting my own opinion in this thesis but relying on my data, theory and method. Another weakness I have identified with my inside-position is that this thesis has had a tendency being too extensive bringing in a lot of interesting examples and opinions and not focusing enough on the core question. I also have had a hard time understanding the academical language and tradition. I have strived for keeping my own experiences out of the thesis, after choosing the frames.



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Having several readers giving feedback and myself going through the material systematically to remove my own experience were other methods that improved the result. By being aware and handling these weaknesses I hope I have produced some clear and interesting reading.

Much material from the interviews is based on regional or local experiences although the principle arm's length distance once was articulated for the state level. This is touched upon in the thesis but not problematized deeply. I made this limitation to better give the reader an overall view on how the expression is used and choose not to be too detailed.

Important to note is also that the political parties in Sweden differ in opinions about political involvement and arm's length distance but this thesis do not cover those differences.



## 6 FINDINGS

### 6.1 ARM'S LENGTH DISTANCE

Arm's length distance in the interviews has been described as a principle, as kind of a culture, a custom, a process, a foundation, "not a law", an interaction, a relationship, a developed trust, a practice and a structure. All interviewed agree on that it is not a definite concept but a relative. And all agree that the original meaning contains that politicians creates conditions and possibilities for the art but not directly steer the content. Beyond that the use and sayings starts do differ.

There are no absolute distinctions in the answers that separates the different agents/groups of professions interviewed from each other. Therefore the findings will here be presented thematically.

#### 6.1.1 HOW ARM'S LENGTH DISTANCE WORKS

Most interviewed agree that the politicians should put up frames and terms, like target group, wish for availability or preferred international collaborators for example. One artist though experience that already these frames and terms make the arm's length distance disappear, making the art steered and thereby not free. Another artist on the contrary calls the principle beautiful because "it shows an awareness that all public support to art means a steering, because it is, and that is the first thing you have to accept."

Politicians and officials in the group tend to be more satisfied with the present situation than artists and professionals in the study. One manager of a cultural institution says "Arm's length principle should be named something else because it almost doesn't exist anymore", as a consequence on the experienced growing amount of control, directives and commissions.

In Västra Götaland the model for cultural politics, together with *Kultursamverkansmodellen* as earlier described, builds on the functions client (beställare) and performer (utförare). This model is set up to separate power (see 4.5.1 Vestheims definition), one part makes the decision on *what* to be obtained and another part makes the decisions on *how* it should be done.

The politicians interviewed talk about their responsibilities towards the voters while the professionals and artists express their responsibilities to the audience. This refers to the



same group of people but looked at from different angles. The voters contains the audience which means they will have a passive acceptance of the politics.

The answers differ a lot on the question if the commissions (updrag) used in for example Västra Götalandsregionen is possible to combine with the principle arm's length distance. One official calls the commissions a way to make the steering transparent and therefor democratic and aligned with the principle arm's length distance. The same official expresses that not interfering in the choice of what plays will be performed at a theatre is *not* enough to say that arm's length principle is practiced. Politicians could steer also in silence, a passive way of not prolonging an economic support for example can affect the repertoire as much. Others, artists and professionals, agree that it is reasonable connecting terms to the funding but experience the amount of terms as an obstacle to their work.

#### 6.1.2 WHAT INSTRUMENTALITY IS

In the interviews culture is described as one among many factors that affects personal wellbeing. And it is discussed if that makes it instrumental, how these values and benefits could be measured, what is instrumental and what is not. If a piece of art gives a life-changing experience to someone, would that be possible to measure in terms of GDP? one of the politicians asks. And if culture is said to develop the society as well as the individual, is that being instrumental? the same one continues. There are as many questions put by the interviewees as answers given.

One thing that stands clear in the data is the expressed need and wish to separate artistic goals from goals for the cultural politics.

The interviewees problematize instrumentality in many ways. They agree that art and culture can have positive effects on many areas in society but that is should preferably not be planned to reach those effects . A possible summary of the data could be that art have a value of its own *and* at the same time is useful to other areas in society, i. e. instrumental. One of the interviewees means that art for art's sake has never existed.

The deeper the interviews goes the more difficult it is to draw a sharp distinction between when there is arm's length distance and when there is not.

Here the findings clearly connect to Vestheims theory above that all cultural politics is instrumental.



### 6.1.3 CHALLENGES TO ARM'S LENGTH DISTANCE

The data expresses challenges using the principle. On a theoretical level there can be agreement but in practice the principle arm's length is challenged in Sweden and not always easy to handle, according to the interviewees.

There are two main categories when it comes to challenges formulated by the interviewees. The first is the subject, the topic approached by the artistic work. The second is the terms of production connected to equality, diversity and representation.

Regarding topics it is described that there is a challenge when it comes to illustrating and showing things that are disliked or even horrible. One politician takes the example terrorism and puts the following questions; "if an artist wants to discuss terrorism how is that to be done? Should certain subjects or objects be avoided because the audience or someone else experience discomfort in front of it?" All the interviewed agree on that if politicians would choose the topics to be expressed then arm's length principle can not be said to be valid.

The second challenge expressed in the data is about artistic institutions having a responsibility contributing to an including society, and times when politicians do not agree that the way a certain institution is handling this is good enough. "Democracy is overriding the arm's length principle" one politician says when discussing how to act if there is for example a lack of equality noticed in the work of the institutions. And at the same time speaking against quotas.

Going further into the consequences of using the principle it gets harder to draw the lines in the data. Public funding is connected to terms, like including a human rights perspective, reaching a certain target group like children in the countryside or having a certain percent female conductors. The politicians interviewed are problematizing this the most, discussing the dilemma between on one hand wanting to give total artistic freedom to the artists and on the other hand wanting to work for equality and inclusion in society. The politicians emphasize that broader participation is very important, that art and cultural institutions should reach wider representation of the citizens than today. And this ambition, in their own discussion, is as important as the principle arm's length distance, maybe even more important. "The concept is not that easy to define. Is there an answer we can share together or is it so that it is the concept that is important to the discussion we want to have, the interaction between different positions, the discussion itself that is the most important"





one of the politicians says. This quote we will get back to in the analysis as it clearly describes the activities going on in the “overlapping zone”.

When it, for example, comes to general directions for an institution the interviewees discuss that maybe there should not be arm’s length distance, only when it comes to repertoire, direct choice of content. On the other side, as one of the artists put it “If the politicians want the artists to join and develop our society, contribute creating a new society, then they should not steer it as detailed as today” meaning that if all goals are already set the true potential of art and artistic research is not used. This thought is supported also by interviewed from the other categories, that art is to compare with research, that you need basic research without deciding exactly what you are looking for to be able to reach new insights. (To be compared with the discussion on basic versus applied research.)

A third example of challenge expressed in the data is who that is to decide when it comes to public art, art that is placed in our common areas. A statue on a square is taken as an example, who is to decide if it is outdated and should be moved or if it is an important part of our history and a great piece of art. When observers have totally opposite experiences, where lies the responsibility to decide removing or keeping it, with the politicians, the citizens directly or the officials? Several are discussing during the interviews what kind of art there would be if the aim is to never upset anyone. “... if we can not take the difficult discussion (svåra samtal) and do not dare to enter a debate, then we talk *about* each other instead of *with* each other” one expresses. “If you approach this subject by claiming your standing point is the right one, your view about the truth is the right one, then you have difficulties calling yourself a democrat” one of the politicians says and then continues to discuss what could be called a fourth challenge; how to handle when an artist has a strong and clear ideology or belief and want to use art strengthening what he/she thinks is best for the society.

Some (especially artists) in the material points out that no one is forced to apply for very conditioned money. Having criteria connected to public support do not create a dictatorship. One of the artists lifts that not only art but the civil society as a whole in Sweden is so dependent on public support that it can not be called free. This is a fifth challenge, most agree on public finance as good and necessary to a vivid artistic and cultural life but maybe relied on too much, which it makes it vulnerable.



#### 6.1.4 CHANGES OVER TIME REGARDING USE OF ARM'S LENGTH DISTANCE

One change over time mentioned a lot in the data is that the expression "arm's length distance" is used and heard more and more often. Some connects it in time as a consequence to the governmental investigation about culture (*Kulturutredningen*) 2009, where the principle is mentioned. Some think it is due to the implementation of *Kultursamverkansmodellerna*, distance and autonomy is something to look after as power and decision-making was moved from national to regional level. A third explanation to the experienced increased in use is changes in the political climate in Sweden.

Another change over time much highlighted is the growing bureaucracy, the reporting and measuring (see 4.3.2). "In the 80s the distance was substantially longer than it is now" an institutional manager tells referring to the distance as in "arm's length distance" between politics and art, and continues "a remarkable change has taken place". Many witness about a heavy growth in directive and things to measure and to report. The focus now is experienced being merely on finance and quantitative goals than on artistic values. Many points out a lack of questions regarding art itself in cultural politics in Sweden and in the following up on it.

This is not unique for the cultural sector but affects it a lot. The interviewed talk much about public management in general and New Public Management specifically and express views like "we are measuring ourselves to death in society" and that public management and bureaucracy is like an auto-playing piano impossible to stop.

One artist experience the change that free artistic work with a starting point of your own choice in your own artistry, is not that easy to get supported economically. The approach is increasingly to see what type of projects get support and how you as an artist can adapt to that. It is harder to walk your own path compared to 20 years back. If that is because of political changes, control from officials or a more narrow-minded cultural field itself is not easy to tell this artists reasons, maybe all three.

One interviewed reminds us, when it comes to changes over time, that there have always been paradigms in cultural politics and that culture for cultures sake never existed. Only the paradigms have shifted.

Another change over time exemplified in the data is the type of art that upsets the contemporary and is represented in cases of intervention. Where nudity and sex was upsetting earlier, examples from today in Sweden are more often about politics or religion.



#### 6.1.5 INTERVENTION / HOW THE PRINCIPLE IS FOLLOWED IN SWEDEN TODAY

Asked to answer the question with a simple yes or no most of the interviewees say yes, we follow the principle arm's length distance in Sweden today. A few say no. There is no trend in how they answer according to what group of agents/category of profession they belong to, there are artists as well as politicians answering as well yes as no.

There is a discussion on steering in the open or in the hidden in the data. Some view open steering as a better alternative to hidden, indirect steering and stresses that the only democratic way is to work with commissions, frames and goals in transparency. Some demands less steering whatsoever. Some of the artists that answer yes, structurally the principle is followed, means that the cultural field is too unsuspecting and trusts too much in the structure creating possibilities for free artistic work when it, according to their opinion, does not. They continue saying that when money is available to a certain type of project you could say that artists and professionals follow the directives by free will when they apply for that money. But it takes much more to secure artistic freedom than this, loyalty to the current values in fashion and to the cultural political system is underestimated. Many lifts that it is also of course a question about being able to support oneself, if you can not find a way to produce the art you want you start to produce the art you can finance.

Some professionals say that the politicians go around the art itself, avoid the core but instead put so many restrictions around it so in reality art is very much steered but in a hidden and not transparent way. One calls the principle arm's length distance a nice construction making us believe that art financed by the public would be more free than commercial art and continues saying that this is a big misunderstanding in the cultural field and that in fact public financing does not guarantee neither more freedom nor quality or diversity in the field.

According to the interviewees the demands, directives, steering on goals, officials interfering and money directed to projects in fashion is bigger threats to artistic freedom than direct intervention from politicians since the interventions are relatively few. For the moment, several add.

#### 6.1.6 EXPERTISE AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE CULTURAL FIELD

Interviewed from all categories agree that the biggest knowledge about art is not with the politicians that takes the decisions but within the other categories of agents. This creates a



system of inter-dependence, the politicians have the power to make decisions and priorities but someone else has the knowledge.

The politicians interviewed also tell that they experience difficulties defending art and culture towards other political areas, like public welfare, both when it comes to economic priorities and also towards the voters. Important to note here is that the political parties differ in opinions about political involvement (but this is not covered in this thesis).

Is it allowed to politicians to express their preferences or personal taste when it comes to art? Here the opinions differ in the interviews. One artist expresses a longing for politicians entering artistic discussions, like calling a piece of art substandard for example. The politicians are more cautious in their answers, citizens may of course express their opinion but politicians should not do it in public if they are also responsible for deciding on funding, otherwise they risk to influence and steer where they should not. (See also 4.4.1.)

#### 6.1.7 WHAT AN IDEAL SITUATION COULD BE LIKE

The politicians and officials say they want trust and to trust, let the artists and institutions decide themselves what is *their* specific quality. Then those with mandate to distribute resources can make their priorities. The artists and professionals answer quite alike, they want trust from the politicians and resources to produce high quality art. They have nothing against being evaluated but would prefer being that *after* performed work. “I would like to go back to a situation where the artistic questions carry a greater weight than today, I think they drown in everything else” one manager of a cultural institution says.

Several lifts grant and decisions made by a jury as good ways to distribute funds for art. The members of the jury and their independence are also discussed. Grants is mentioned by several, both politicians, officials and artists, as a good way to practice the principle arm’s length distance. (Here it is in order to mention that project- or short term financing today is often based on juries or likewise. What is also meant in the discussion is longer term financing of for example institutions.) “Citizen salary” (medborgarlön) is also discussed in the perspective of what kind of art and culture that maybe could stimulate.

Another interesting discussion when it comes to ideal situation is about what *types* of art that get public support, if new expressions are added or if the criteria are conservative.

The data shows that most agree that an ideal situation should be grounded in the principle arm’s length distance as much as possible.



## 7 ANALYSIS

A definition of “arm’s length distance” on a shallow level seems easy to agree on. But immediately as the discussion on example begins the definitions start to differ. In this analysis four areas describe the main dilemmas found during this research in trying to answer the question *How is “arm’s length distance” used in art and cultural politics in Sweden today?*

### 7.1 MONEY STEERS

#### 7.1.1 DEPENDENCY

Politicians steer with the funding, intentionally and maybe also unintentionally. This is both logic and necessary according to Vestheims theories. But the same applies when it comes to following and implementation, the power of money creates a risk of voluntary or involuntary adaption. The cultural and artistic field in Sweden could be seen as conformable. By a long tradition and economic reason the field adapt to where the resources are. This is in the material discussed as a negative consequence to a relatively big economic support to art and culture. No-one in the findings questions the idea that tax-money should support art but they problematize it.

Political steering leads to paradoxes when it comes to art and artistic freedom. An analyse of the material according to Vestheims theories gives that the artists and institutions (and by extension the citizens/audience) could benefit by acknowledging the dependency in the relationship. By lifting the discussion on different instrumentalities and putting it in the overlapping zone as in the Combined Model both the inter-dependency between the agents is shown clearly but also that the instrumental incentive is strong. The benefit would be a more clear and distinct discussion. It would be easier to discuss what kind of steering is reasonable when making the different roles and ambitions more clear.

Vestheims theory that all cultural politics is instrumental puts a light on this expressed dilemma and also offers a solution. By separating artistic goals from cultural political goals the clash between art’s intrinsic value and the instrumentality of cultural politics is not an obstacle in the hidden but two separate dimensions to handle (see 6.1.2). Viewing also aesthetic values as an instrumentality, according to the theory, could bridge linguistic and conceptual confusion. By putting all types of arguments in a cultural political discussion in the same scale/model like Vestheim does the arguments can be discussed and prioritized in



a more understandable way. And bringing his two theories together is like putting an order and structure to the discussions in the overlapping zone.

### 7.1.2 INSTITUTIONS, ARTS COUNCIL AND THE INDEPENDENT CULTURAL LIFE

There is a clear difference expressed in expectations on the institutions compared to other, not publicly owned, groups of artists or individuals. The institutions should have more demands to fulfil from the public owner, like reaching a certain target group for example. This is generally accepted but the terminology sometimes confuses the discussion. “Free” is a word with positive connotations and when discussing “artistic freedom” or “free/independent cultural life” the position of the individual and the individual piece of art is sometimes mixed with the description of the cultural political structure. It could benefit by being separated more clearly as the means to meet the request of arm’s length distance also differ between individuals and institutions. The expression arm’s length distance is part of the cultural politics in Sweden today. The meaning and practical consequences of that politics is handled and discussed in the overlapping zone. By using Vestheims theory that all cultural politics is instrumental and placing it with its discussion on *what* instrumentality in the zone the two theories are linked and make us a useful model for describing this experienced difference in expectations.

There is always a relationship between the government and the arts council. That relationship is a bit floating which make the principle arm’s length adaptable and relative. The definition arises in the interactions, the cases, the choices made, in the overlapping zone. In the material many dilemmas are shown. For example, on one hand it is the officials that has the knowledge and the politicians that makes the decisions. This also demands a big deal of trust, as further discussed below, and investment in that relationship. The officials stay over time and the politicians are exchanged every election (see 6.1.6, on expertise and knowledge). Vestheim discusses this (see 4.5.1) when describing the balance of power arm’s length distance is supposed to achieve.

### 7.1.3 SELF-CENSORSHIP

How much self-censorship is going on among artists and artistic institutions to get economical support? Or to get the right status and credit within the cultural field? These questions were discussed a lot during the interviews but it was not easy to find anything



written on the topic. In the interviews public support to art and arts importance to the democratic society is lifted. This leads to a reflection on self-censorship when it comes to the instrumental aspect of art. All involved in this study, both artists and politicians, lifts the intrinsic value of art but at the same time easily talk about the good social effects of art. (This is similar to the discussion above on dependency.) Admitting art sometimes being used as an instrument to achieve something in another aspect of life or another political area could make it easier questioning when it should not be used this way. Vestheims separation of ideal types of instrumentality explains some of the contradictions expressed in the material. Cultural politics can have different instrumentality as a goal depending on the occasion or context, sometimes aesthetic and other times social or politically mobilizing (democratic) instrumentality.

Another observation made from the findings is that steering in details, threats about having your economic support pulled back if stretching the limits to much together with a questioning of public support to art whatsoever ads to the dilemma of self-censorship. Together these factors can lead to self-censorship, maybe unconscious, you adapt step by step to be able to continue your artistic work at all. This dilemma is not directly covered by Vestheims theories. A possible connection could be that one step of the self-censorship is trying to explain and motivate your art according to instrumentalities that is not really your focus but someone else's. As an artist you might enter the overlapping zone, "looking for" logics from other agents and adapt your argumentation to these.

These three aspects of the first dilemma could be analysed with support by Vestheims theory on instrumentality in cultural politics and the four ideal types. It shows that believing you act according to one ideal but at the same time you act according to another one, is both common and normal. The findings tell that artists want to be free and politicians want to support freedom of expression. When reality do not match these ideals you handle this pragmatically and keep on believing acting on freedom when also adding other goals/instrumentalities. This goes for the other agents/categories in the interviews as well. By using different types of instrumentality in different contexts what could look like paradoxes, "intrinsic value" and "instrumentality", is handled. This is happening between agents in the overlapping zone but the process could maybe be transformed and valid as a description for a process going on also inside an individual, not only between.





## 7.2 PARADIGM & NORMS

There are always paradigms in cultural politics and always trends in art. Criticism and questioning of norms are very central concepts in Sweden now, both acclaimed and questioned according to the material in this study. Equality and diversity are important both to politicians and artists, as well as other professionals and officials. Even to that extent that leaving the principle arm's length to reach it can be accepted (see for example 6.1.3). The social and politically mobilizing, democratic, instrumentalities are given greater weight than the aesthetic one. This is identified as the second dilemma in this analysis. Looking at this through Vestheims theories and the combined model it can be said that this dilemma is handled daily in the overlapping zone. Arguments and instrumentalities are weighed and put up against each other. The paradigm and norms that most agents can agree on will dominate.

In what direction would the cultural field have gone without pressure from cultural politics? It is not easy to tell, the political agenda is often the agenda in society as a whole and the discussion about for example equality and norms is taking place in all fields and political areas. In the interviews it is said that the criteria from the cultural politics match what is wanted by the institutions and artists themselves when it comes to for example equality and diversity. But it also stands clear in the material that the normative discussion about norms (connected to that about cultural appropriation which is not covered in this study) could be an obstacle to artists being openly, or by self-censoring, hindered in expressing what they want. This is examples of direct and indirect steering, weather acceptable or not.

## 7.3 TRUST

The third dilemma identified in the interviews is trust. Who is to steer the development of art and the artistic institutions? The politicians want to give trust and freedom to the artists and the artistic institutions. They also want to show the voters how their politics is followed up and what the results are. With the Combined Model of Vestheims theories we can analyse exactly this. Trust is built up, or could be torn down, in the overlapping zone. Arm's length distance is in the findings described as "a process" and arm's length distance builds on trust and confidence. The agents rely on each other. As described above (6.1.3) the discussion and the interaction itself could bear more meaning than the expression arm's length distance itself. Trust is a process, not possible to decide on.



According to the material it seems to be necessary hosting two main, and partly contradictory, ideas at the same time being able to say that the principle arm's length distance is used in Sweden today. One is that artistic freedom is desirable and the other is that steering on goals and new public management is working in the cultural field. In the material in this study contradictions are shown. Art might not necessarily be best developed by new public management and there is a risk also highlighted above that the good intentions of the cultural politics could be lost by the way it is performed in practice. This could be described as a conflict of interests in the overlapping zone. The agents have their priorities on different areas.

Artistic freedom is not produced by one person, it is an interaction between several parties. It is created in the artistic process but also in the steering systems of cultural politics.

It is said in the material that arm's length distance is something not only build on structure but must be lived and practiced, built on trust by involved getting to know each other. The principle is getting into documents like cultural plans and that put demands and positive pressure on people thinking about the meaning of the principle. That creates awareness and engagement which makes the principle live.

#### 7.4 DOES ARM'S LENGTH PRINCIPLE WORK IN SWEDEN TODAY

This is the forth dilemma, does the arm's length principle rule the cultural politics in Sweden today or not. Based on this research, on a structural level yes, the principle arm's length distance rules the cultural politics in Sweden today. But no, that does not lead to as much freedom for the arts as put in the meaning of the principle. The principle is said in the findings to be threatened by the high ambitions of the cultural politics, which may seem contradictory. Analysing this using Vestheims theory on instrumentality it is not contradictory but more logic. All politics want something, is instrumental, and new public management is the way public activity is planned and measured. Culture and art are wanted to achieve high standards on many areas and are followed up, controlled and measured like other fields managed by the public, like health care. These high ambitions combined with tighter budgets and demands on higher efficiency does not match the processes of producing art nor the character of art. According to the material in this study this is bigger threats to art than direct political intervention in Sweden today. Then arm's length distance as the guiding principle for the cultural politics in Sweden also could be said to be



threatened, as its purpose is to support art and culture. This might create less freedom for the arts but not necessarily.

The material shows there is local interpretations of the principle and also variations on regional level and differences compared to the national level. One strong trend is going away from arm's length distance (Patron according to Chartrand and McCaughey's theory) to management (Architect according to Chartrand and McCaughey's theory). Vestheims theory shows that this development is logical in a cultural political perspective of instrumentality.

The processes and dilemmas described in the material fits well into the Combined Model, Instrumentality in the overlapping zone. The four different types of instrumentality identified by Vestheim connects with the different perspectives expressed by the agents/interviewees. It is important to note that the interviewees host several perspectives and switch during the interviews. If accepted that all cultural politics is instrumental, since politics steers the funding it is possible to make the analysis that funding steers the possibilities for producing art.



## 8 CONCLUSION

### 8.1 CONTRIBUTIONS/KEY FINDINGS

#### 8.1.1 HANDLING PARADOXES

The major finding of this study is that “arm’s length distance” have no precise definition when it comes to the practical use of it in art and cultural politics in Sweden today.

This study also shows compromises between ideals and practices among all groups of agents studied , politicians, artists, officials and professionals.

The empirical data gathered in this study questions if following the principle arm’s length distance on a structural level is enough to say it is valid.

The demands and forms of public management is said to maybe risk the artistic development and quality and is said not being aligned with the needs of producing art.

Direct interference from politicians in artistic questions is rare but experienced and expressed as growing, according to this study.

The instrumentality and norms expressed in regulations from the politics connected to public funding, like wish for equality and inclusion, are shared in the cultural field as in most parts of society as a whole. The steering is not always seen as steering and not questioned as much as it might have been if there were less consensus regarding those values.

The material distinguishes on two different types of steering when describing the arm’s length principle; steering where the funding should go and steering the content. Concluding this study it is not always possible to make that clear distinction. To the contrary, while steering the direction of the funding the content seem also to be steered, a type of indirect steering.

The conclusion from this study shows that talking about the steering more openly between all parties involved could be an alternative if the ambitions about the autonomy and trust expressed in the principle arm’s length distance is not fulfilled.

Art does not need to be instrumental just because cultural politics is. The material shows that the discussion (in the overlapping zone or elsewhere) could benefit from making this separation clear.

#### 8.1.2 SHORTER ARMS

The study shows that the tendency is going towards less autonomy for the cultural field, shorter arms.



Most parties, all categories interviewed, express this is against their intention. Why is it happening then? One reason, according to the data, seems to be the nature of public management. Further research on the challenges for public management coworking with art production would be interesting.

Another major finding is that most express they want more autonomy for the arts than there is now. Even those in power in this system of public funding to arts, politicians, express they want to give freedom to the artists and to the cultural institutions. What is it then that makes them compromise? One contributing factor identified in this study is that arm's length distance is not the only paradigm in cultural politics, and sometimes there is a collision between different ideal in politics.

The data express that the demands, directives, steering on goals, officials interfering and money directed to projects in fashion all together is a bigger threat to artistic freedom and autonomy than direct intervention from politicians since the interventions are relatively few.

Most in the material agree on that in an ideal situation cultural politics should be grounded in the principle arm's length distance as much as possible.

## 8.2 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study contribute to the academic research and cultural politics praxis by showing that the central concept "arm's length distance" has no definite meaning when it comes to the use of it.

Demonstrating how Vestheims two theories about activities in the overlapping zone and the instrumentality of all cultural politics are complementing and working together the theories are strengthened and the possible areas of use is growing.

From a managerial perspective, this thesis can provide the cultural field with a set of concepts and tools that could facilitate the dialog between all actors in the cultural, as well as cultural political, field. It could be more clearly expressed and discussed what *is* seen as suitable ways of steering art and artistic institutions, since this study shows a clear ambition from both politicians and officials to support artistic freedom.



### 8.3 FURTHER RESEARCH

Other concepts that would be interesting to investigate further is Freedom of Expression and Artistic quality.

A topic even less researched is how the type of an organization influences the art itself (mentioned by Hanke). This would be very useful research, to investigate in what way for example New Public Management affects the type of art being produced in publicly owned cultural institutions.

One fact mentioned by many in the interviews is that the new law for museums in Sweden contains the principle arm's length is for the first time written down in a law. Not being just a principle or praxis. This will be very interesting to follow in future research.



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## 10 APPENDIX

### 10.1 EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS IN THE INTERVIEWS

How do you define the arm's length principle between politics and art?

When have you experienced the principle being challenged?

What consequences does that give to you? (To the art? To the politics? To the citizens?)

What is artistic freedom? Artistic quality? Art?

How is the principle followed today in Sweden? (In your region, your municipality.)

What would the ideal system of steering be like?







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