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“Ein våg me ikkje ha visst um”?

Frankfurt 2019 as an expression of Norwegian foreign cultural policy



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This thesis is worth 60 study points.

Summary

Having been heralded as the most important foreign cultural policy effort in Norwegian history, this thesis investigates selected milestone events in the preparatory phase leading up to the country's guest of honour status at the 2019 Frankfurt Book Fair. In my analysis of the discourse produced at (and through) these events, I challenge the notion of uniqueness that is insinuated by the organizers' choice of Olav H. Hauge's poem *Det er den draumen* as the project's literary mascot. From a foreign cultural policy standpoint, I claim, there is little reason to believe that "Frankfurt 2019" is to "slip in to a harbour that we've never known"¹. Referencing a body of relevant policy documents and existing research as supporting evidence, I argue instead that the discourse around this particular undertaking is clearly influenced by, and to a large degree representative of, the three *knowledge/power regimes* that researcher Ola K. Berge identifies as dominant within the field.

¹ Following a translation by American poet Robert Bly.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Guest of honour at the Frankfurt book fair

Celebrating its 70th anniversary with a grand total of 285.024 visitors from 164 countries, more than 7.500 exhibitors, 4.000 events and 10.000 attending journalists during its most recent edition, the Frankfurt Book Fair continues to be the biggest and most important publishing trade fair in the world.² A gigantic business event as well as an arena for countless public debates and a multitude of cultural happenings, I can say from personal experience that it is all but impossible to take in everything that is presented in the enormous multi-story fair halls each October. However, as any experienced book fair visitor will tell you, there is one recurring highlight that is usually hard to miss:

Since 1988, each edition of the Frankfurt book fair sees a particular country or region of the world take on the privileged status of *guest of honour*, with its main manifestation being the *Guest of Honour Pavilion* that the organizers from the respective country design and outfit individually before filling it with various events and activities over the course of the fair. While this presentation is the culmination of the guest of honour project, it should be noted that it will usually extend beyond the book fair itself, for instance in the form of a row of targeted cultural activities spanning several cities and art forms.

Intensifying over the time leading up to the book fair, countries can hope to attain a number of effects from the attention that their guest of honour status generates: Aside from major impacts on the book industry in the form of an increase in the number of translations, sales of rights and so on, successful guest of honour projects have been suggested to bring about various positive reputational effects, resulting for instance in a boost in tourism, growing (cultural) export and higher international prestige.

Seen against this background, it should be no surprise that news of Norway being awarded guest of honour status at the 2019 Frankfurt book fair were generally met with enthusiasm and excitement in both the cultural and political sphere. Investigating the preparatory phase of this undertaking from the standpoint of foreign cultural policy, the details of this research project are described in the following.

² Figures are taken from Frankfurter Buchmesse (2019).

1.2 Research project

The Norwegian guest of honour project at the 2019 Frankfurt Book Fair is being organised by NORLA (short for “Norwegian Literature Abroad”), a non-commercial institution tasked with promoting the export of Norwegian literature that is financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Culture. In choosing a slogan for the project, the organisers settled on “The dream we carry”, more or less directly taken from the poem *Det er den draumen* by Norwegian poet Olav H. Hauge. Besides supplying this slogan, the full poem has also been performed by various artists at several NORLA-organised events and accompanies the project’s official trailer. It is reproduced here in the original Norwegian, alongside an English translation by Robert Bly:

Det er den draumen me ber på	<i>It's that dream that we carry with us</i>
at noko vedunderleg skal skje,	<i>that something wonderful will happen,</i>
at det må skje —	<i>that it has to happen,</i>
at tidi skal opna seg	<i>that time will open,</i>
at hjarta skal opna seg	<i>that the heart will open,</i>
at dører skal opna seg	<i>that doors will open,</i>
at berget skal opna seg	<i>that the mountains will open,</i>
at kjeldor skal springa —	<i>that wells will leap up,</i>
at draumen skal opna seg,	<i>that the dream will open,</i>
at me ei morgonstund skal glida	<i>that one morning we'll slip in</i>
inn på ein våg me ikkje har visst um.	<i>to a harbor that we've never known.</i>

As can be deduced from this thesis’ title, it is the final line that drew my interest and to a large degree influenced the final shape of this research project. Suggesting, I thought, a surprising, never-before-seen outcome and execution for the project, I began to wonder in how far this can hold true. While its scope easily makes “Frankfurt 2019” (as the guest of honour project is often referred to) one of, if not *the* biggest transnational cultural initiative that Norway has taken on, my working hypothesis was that it would still be heavily influenced by the same trends and tendencies that have characterized smaller-scale, yet similar activities in recent years. As my knowledge of these activities before getting started on the project was limited, I had to familiarize myself with recent research

on the subject before I could relate it to empirical material from the guest of honour project and thus verify my suspicion. I present the results of this process in this thesis.

1.3 Scope and approach

As the 2019 Frankfurt book fair itself will not materialise before after this thesis has been submitted, my research targets the project's preparatory phase and will focus on how the project and, by extension, the larger context of Norwegian foreign cultural activities are conceptualised, planned and presented. While I have personally attended several additional events tied to the guest of honour project, the focus lies on the rhetoric produced in conjunction with three important project milestones: Norway's bid book (the "application" for guest of honour status), the "input and planning conference" held in Oslo in April 2017 and the press conference at the 2018 Frankfurt book fair – all of which are described in more detail in the analysis chapter. A shared trait is that organizing body NORLA stands behind all these occasions, meaning that it is the project's organizers and supporters that get a chance to speak and thus stand at the centre of this investigation. The investigation of the empirical material itself is informed by a discourse analytical understanding and aims to critically relate the rhetoric that is employed in conjunction with the guest of honour project to a pre-existing foreign cultural policy discourse.

1.4 Outline

Following this brief introduction to the research project, the intention behind chapter 2 is to map out the conceptual and disciplinary context in which the Norwegian guest of honour project is embedded. After a general contextualisation referencing relevant large-scale processes of change, I use the concept of *soft power* as a starting point to present a set of important concepts relating to international activities and the role that culture plays in them. I then delimit the policy domain of foreign cultural policy on a conceptual level.

Since much of my reference framework is largely made up of recent research inspired by discourse analytical approaches, chapter 3 briefly reiterates on the foundations of discourse theory before presenting a more focused discourse analytical

approach to foreign cultural policy as it is pursued by researcher Ola Berge in his doctoral thesis (2017).

Chapter 4, then, constitutes the bulk of this reference framework, investigating a body of recent grey literature to present the main goals and organisational makeup of Norwegian foreign cultural activities before moving on to the aforementioned research.

Finally, the analysis in chapter 5 introduces what Berge refers to as the three dominant *knowledge/power regimes* of Norwegian foreign cultural policy and, using them as a structuring principle, relates the empirical material from the guest of honour project to the previously attained results.

2 Conceptual background

2.1 Chapter intentions and structure

This chapter aims to provide the conceptual context against which the Norwegian guest of honour project at the Frankfurt book fair is to be seen. As it is conceived of as an expression of “foreign cultural policy” or “foreign cultural activities”, the ultimate objective of this chapter lies in the conceptual demarcation of this particular policy domain as an area of research. In order to develop a sound idea of the wider conceptual context that this range of activities is embedded in, however, this is preceded by a general contextualization on the competitiveness of nations, an introduction to the central concept of *soft power* (including how it can be wielded) and an explanation of how culture is conceived of in this context.

Before getting into the details, however, a number of reservations should be addressed. Firstly, this thesis necessarily touches on a host of complex and interrelated concepts, which are each tied to a wealth of academic literature and scientific theory. It should be self-evident that an in-depth examination of the individual terms discussed here is beyond its scope. Equally, the boundaries of these at times closely neighbouring concepts are not sharply defined. Central terms are frequently used in conjunction with each other or even synonymously and the absence of a universally agreed-upon nomenclature is a frustration that is not easily overcome. A degree of overlap and occasional vagueness will, therefore, be hard to avoid. Accordingly, this chapter should not be understood as an attempt to provide clear-cut definitions or exhaustive summaries of all the aspects that are discussed here. Instead, it is to be conceived of as a brief but necessary introduction that contextualises later parts of the thesis and introduces central terms and concepts.

2.2 Contextualization

Before discussing the most important terms and concepts individually, it is advisable to briefly elucidate the general processes of change from which they have developed. Despite most of them being subsumed under the overall heading of *globalisation*, a subset of these globalisation processes is of special interest in a foreign cultural policy

context, as Berge convincingly demonstrates in a paper for the sixth Nordic Conference on Cultural Policy Research (2013).

A world that is characterized not only by the increased mobility of people, money and goods, but also by “ever denser flows of ideas, images, perceptions and messages, in which a wide range of people are taking part in ever greater numbers” (Ang, Isar, & Mar, 2015, p. 372) can, as Berge asserts, be described as ever shrinking, but also increasingly complex and unpredictable. Furthermore, as a result of the effects of globalisation such as “transnational political cooperation, [...] transnational trade agreements and an internationalised business community, increased mobility through increased migration and tourism and technological development” (Berge, 2013, p. 1), the practical significance of political and geographical borders has in many ways become less clear. This is what Berge, invoking Deleuze and Guattari, refers to as *detritorialization*.³ An elevated awareness of the processes outlined here has contributed to the firm establishment of *internationalisation* as a key concept and dominant notion in our time, effectively creating what can be called an “internationalisation discourse” (Berge, 2013, p. 1) in several policy domains. An important component of this discourse is a notion of global competitiveness between states (as well as other geographical entities) on a variety of fields. Confronted with this new reality, politicians and other agents have begun to better understand and be more preoccupied with the potential benefits of a favourable perception on the international stage and developed a growing desire to engage with foreign audiences. One consequence of this development is an increasing confluence of the interests of different political and societal groups, leading to an increased level of formal and informal integration between, amongst others, trade, foreign affairs and cultural departments (Berge, 2013, p. 1). In the following, we will take a closer look at key concepts and notions that have emerged from this context.

³ As others have observed, even the recent (re)emergence of strong nationalist currents in several parts of the world can be understood not only in terms of a counter-reaction to these processes of global integration, but also (quite ironically) as one of its manifestations.

2.3 Key concepts and terms

2.3.1 Soft Power

The notion of *soft power* can be said to be a central driving force behind many of the activities discussed in this thesis. While the general reasoning associated with the term can be argued to have become an increasingly popular feature of political thought for a considerable amount of time, the label itself was coined by American political scientist Joseph S. Nye in the late 1980s (Rivera, 2015, p. 7). In opposition to traditional “hard power” in the form of military and economic inducements or threats (often metaphorically referred to as “carrots or sticks”),

[s]oft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others [...] and tends to be associated with intangible assets such as an attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority. (Nye, 2004, p. 6)

Importantly, more than its “hard” equivalent, soft power relies on “the existence of willing interpreters and receivers” and tends to have a somewhat diffuse effect, “creating general influence rather than producing an easily observable specific action” (Nye, 2004, p. 15).

Not to be mistaken for a mere supplement of hard power, it is often emphasized how soft power, if employed and managed right, can help a country attain a degree of influence and recognition on the international stage beyond what its hard power assets would seem to warrant.⁴ Nye (2004, p. 11) sees a country’s soft power as resting primarily on three resources:

- its culture (in places where it is attractive to others)
- its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad)
- its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)

Given the focus of this thesis, the notion of culture as a soft power resource will be discussed in more detail in segment 2.4.

As Tim Rivera (2015, p. 7) remarks, similar to how Nye identifies three main sources of soft power, “there are three mechanisms through which a country can

⁴ Incidentally, Nye uses Norway (and its peace-keeping efforts) as an example of the successful realisation/implementation of this capacity (2004, pp. 141-142).

develop, deploy, or engage its soft power with other countries: public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and cultural relations”. In the following sections, these concepts are defined in turn.

2.3.2 Public Diplomacy

The conception of public diplomacy utilised in this thesis mainly draws on the work of British public diplomacy expert Mark Leonard, who is the former leader of foreign policy think tank Foreign Policy Centre and current director of the European Council on Foreign Relations. A strategy document penned on behalf of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2003 illustrates the main ideas and priorities behind public diplomacy nicely, defining it as activities meant “to understand, inform, influence and build relationships with foreign publics and civil society in order to create a positive environment for the fulfilment of [national] political and economic objectives” (Leonard & Small, 2003, p. 13).

Concrete public diplomacy activities can be grouped into three main dimensions, with each of these operating according to a different timescale and demanding different skills. They are summarised in Table 1:

Dimension (and time scale)	Definition	Activities, priorities and needed skills
<i>News Management</i> (Day-to-day, short term)	“Reacting to news events as they occur in a way that tallies with [...] strategic goals”	Explaining the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions, consideration of different audiences, “framing”, reactivity and flexibility.
<i>Strategic Communications</i> (medium-term)	“Proactively creating a news agenda through activities and events which are designed to reinforce core messages and influence perceptions”	Strategic cooperation between different actors, differentiation, magnification, imagination and repetition of messages – “cutting through the fog”, creating a clear narrative, developing an identity.
<i>Relationship Building</i> (long-term)	“Building long-term relationships with populations overseas to win recognition of [national] values and assets and to learn from theirs”	Scholarships, conferences, exchanges etc – develop relationships between peers, genuine exchange, conveying “warts and all” picture of the country, complexify thinking. Complex planning, often comes with high unit cost.

Table 1: Dimensions of Public Diplomacy. Based on Leonard, Stead, and Smewing (2002, pp. 11-20) and Nye (2004, p. 107).

Importantly, and in opposition to “traditional” diplomacy, public diplomacy “involves a much broader group of people on both sides, and a broader set of interests that go beyond those of the government of the day” (Leonard & Small, 2003, p. 16). It should thus not be understood as a purely governmental activity or responsibility, as both

business and civil society are attributed important roles in the process. Especially in the case of relationship building, public diplomacy is seen to “often best be done at one remove from the government” (Leonard, Stead, & Smewing, 2002, p. 11). This point is underlined by Nye (2004, p. 113), who asserts that “postmodern publics are generally sceptical of authority” and thus finds that “it often behoves governments to keep in the background and to work with private actors”.

2.3.3 Cultural Diplomacy (vs.) Cultural Relations

Rivera’s other listed concepts are soft power concepts that explicitly rely on culture in their implementation. One of these, *Cultural Diplomacy*, is used abundantly in the academic literature. However, despite the term’s popularity, “there is often a distinct lack of clarity in the way the notion is used, on exactly what its practice involves, on why it is important, or on how it works”. As “the semantic field of the term [...] has broadened considerably [,] it now applies to pretty much any practice that is related to purposeful cultural cooperation between nations or groups of nations” (Ang et al., 2015, pp. 365-366). In particular, there seems to be, as Tim Rivera observes, a strong conflation between the terms cultural diplomacy and cultural relations.

To remedy this, this thesis utilises a preliminary framework that is built on definitions and differentiations set forth by Rivera in *Distinguishing Cultural Relations from Cultural Diplomacy: The British Council's Relationship with Her Majesty's Government (2015)*. According to his classification, the differences in the means, objectives and motivations behind the two terms can all be traced to the role that the government plays in the process. While the audience at which diplomacy is targeted has been broadened considerably over the years (cf. 2.2 and 2.3.2), it remains “fundamentally an activity of government”, with the government, by way of funding, designing and/or delivering these activities, being the chief actor behind cultural diplomacy efforts. As such, “cultural diplomacy is influenced by the politics inherent in foreign policy. It is likewise accountable to relevant state institutions and can be instrumentalized to support policy objectives” (Rivera, 2015, pp. 7-10).

In differentiating *Cultural Relations*, then, Rivera relies on a definition set forth by Richard Arndt, reiterating the different role that governmental agents play in cultural diplomacy and cultural relations:

'Cultural relations' then [...] means literally the relations between national cultures, those aspects of intellect and education lodged in any society that tend to cross borders and connect with foreign institutions. Cultural relations grow naturally and organically, without government intervention [...] If that is correct, cultural diplomacy can only be said to take place when formal diplomats, serving national governments, try to shape and channel this natural flow to advance national interests. (Arndt, 2005)

On this interpretation cultural relations explicitly rely on the absence of government. While it is thinkable that governments offer financial support to cultural relations activities, they have to "remain free of political influence and independent of foreign policy objects" (Rivera, 2015, p. 11) if they are to be classified as such. Fostering trust, understanding and relationships between the citizens of different nations, any support for "the national interest" can only be an indirect by-product of these activities, not their chief objective. Particularly, Rivera underlines the importance of credibility and reciprocal honesty in these long-lasting processes, creating a level of authenticity and trust that is mutually exclusive with interest-driven governmental influence that, for structural and political reasons, has to operate on the basis of short- to medium-term goals.

2.3.4 Nation branding

Nation Branding is a subset of activities that is not taken up explicitly in Rivera's framework, but is of undeniable importance in discussions of *soft power* and national competitiveness. From the notion that a country's (perceived) national identity and image can be a valuable political and economic asset becoming more and more commonplace and the realisation that a thus fabricated image bears many similarities to a commercial brand comes the impetus to proactively manage this "brand" using tools and approaches that are comparable to those employed in private sector marketing. In the words of Melissa Aronczyk, these techniques are

seen as a way to help a nation articulate a more coherent and cohesive national identity, to animate the spirit of its citizens in the service of national priorities, and to maintain loyalty to the territory within its borders. In short, the goal of nation branding is to make the nation *matter* in a world where borders and boundaries appear increasingly obsolete. (Aronczyk, 2013, p. 3)

Nation branding efforts are not necessarily limited to activities targeting foreign audiences. With the aforementioned effects of *detritorialization* in mind, it is safe to say that "internal" images and their effects have become an equally important focus for national identity policies, with nation branding being seen as "a necessary corrective to the threatened erosion of national structures" (Aronczyk, 2013, p. 30).

Focusing instead on the external dimensions of nation branding, Keith Dinnie mentions trade, foreign investment and tourism, as well as international talent attraction as important objectives for nation branding activities. In reaching these objectives he attests that many countries “embrace both the past heritage and present living culture, so that outdated images do not obscure consumer perceptions from what may be vibrant modern societies” (Dinnie, 2015, p. 6), and identifies a conscious branding strategy as a prerequisite for success on the global stage. One particularly relevant mechanism that is often attempted to be utilized in – or created through – nation branding strategies, then, is the so called *country-of-origin effect*, or “the effect that a product’s or service’s origin has on consumer attitudes and behavior towards [it]” (Dinnie, 2015, p. 90). Importantly, as Dinnie explains, the direction of association between country-of-origin and product/service is not always clear: While it can be assumed that a label like “made in Germany” works because it evokes mental images of Germany as a reliable country that focuses on precision and quality, the particular qualities of a good or service may also confirm or enhance the image the consumer has of the country it stems from. In a talk at the *Kulturrikets tilstand* conference in October 2017, Ola Berge referred to this as the *reverse country-of-origin effect*.

2.4 The (soft) powers of culture

Having offered a brief insight into the conditions that nation states and other international actors face in a globalised world and having presented the concepts of soft power, public and cultural diplomacy, cultural relations and nation branding as possible approaches to success in such a world, I think it is time to start moving the investigation closer towards the primary object of interest by beginning to ask which role “culture” can (and is expected to) play in this context. As a lead-up to chapter 4, where I will explore concrete examples from a contemporary Norwegian background, the remainder of this chapter keeps a more general perspective that culminates in the definition of the policy domain of foreign cultural policy. First, however, an understanding of the use of the term “culture” should be established.

2.4.1 Culture broad and narrow

The various possible meanings and nuances of the word “culture”, famously referred to as “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” by Raymond Williams (1983, p. 87), have been explored countless times and with a degree of detail and sophistication far greater than can be given here.⁵ Nevertheless, it remains a necessary prerequisite for any discussion involving culture to at least briefly define which particular modes of meaning are evoked when using it. It suffices here to let our understanding of the term be guided by the distinction between culture in a narrow or aesthetic sense (first and foremost: the arts) and culture in a broad or anthropological sense of the word, defined by Bates and Plog (1990, p. 7) as

the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning.

This thesis focuses on activities that make use of or relate to culture in a narrow sense, such as political agents employing or referring to artistic expressions, or organisations making use of cultural activities in their work. To give a more concrete idea, in the Norwegian *culture law* (“Kulturloven”), such cultural enterprises are defined to entail:

- a) creating, producing, performing, mediating and distributing art and other cultural expressions
- b) safeguarding, maintaining and fostering understanding for cultural heritage
- c) taking part in cultural activity
- d) developing professional knowledge and competence regarding cultural matters.⁶

It should however be noted that the aforementioned broader conception of culture will at times also have to be considered. On the one hand, this is because “narrow” cultural expressions are often understood (or sometimes actively framed) as representations or conveyors of the “broad” cultural background they originate from, and on the other hand because concepts like cultural diplomacy and cultural relations necessarily rely on exchanges between “cultures” in the sense of the populations of countries with partially differing sets of values, customs et cetera.

⁵ For an example of this, cf. Scott Sørensen, Høystad, Bjurström, and Vike (2008).

⁶ My translation.

2.4.2 Expectations and use cases

An important way of conceptualising culture broad and narrow is to understand it as a maker, preserver and conveyor of national identity – a concept which in today’s world (cf. segment 2.2) is challenged in numerous ways. Culture, then, is often seen as “a way of demarking national identity in times when geographical and territorial borders dissolve” (Berge, 2017, p. 8). Crucially, it can be argued that this factor is as important from an internal (domestic) perspective as it is from an external (international) point of view. If, following Benedict Anderson’s terminology, nations are conceived of as “imagined communities”, it is apparent that these communities require shared practices, points of reference and so on to maintain a shared sense of meaning and communality. From a political standpoint then, it makes sense to develop and support schemes and strategies that encourage citizens to participate in activities that meet this criterium or to engage with the products of national cultural activities. Even though governments might find it challenging to develop a uniform strategy and embrace clear messages in times of multiculturalism and diverse publics, the aspect of national identity will still have to be addressed politically – as Dinnie (2015, p. 114) puts it, “national identity retains its deep emotional and spiritual power as a source of identity for many people.”

While this domestic perspective opens up for a host of interesting aspects and considerations⁷, it is only of secondary concern to this thesis, which is why it is not developed further here. Of more immediate interest is the question of how national identity, as an intentional or implied component of cultural expressions, is typically harnessed in international contexts.

Here, we can first point to the fact that national (cultural) identity has been identified as a major factor in determining a country’s attractiveness in today’s competitive world. It can thus be expected to supplement purely economic considerations when it comes to increasingly important aspects such as global talent attraction and foreign investment. It should therefore be of little surprise that the purposeful use of cultural expressions as (supposed) conveyors of national identity plays an important role in the previously introduced practice of nation branding (cf. 2.3.4).

⁷ We could, for example, talk about the expectations that are tied to culture as a major contributor to innovation and growth within a *creative industries* discourse.

Despite these considerations often pointing to activities that endeavour to work on a country's general attractiveness, we can also point out the increasing tendency to look at cultural products as economic factors and contributors to foreign trade in their own right. For instance, a growing focus on "Cultural Tourism" in tourism boards across the globe can be attributed to the assumption that cultural events and attractions draw new groups of tourists to a country (cf. 4.2). Furthermore, on the back of the digital revolution and globally integrated sales channels and distribution networks, the potential audience for "national" artists and producers has grown significantly, meaning that cultural products, rights et cetera can be "exported" to regions that would previously have been out of reach for the large majority of content producers. This mobility, of course, is not limited to physical or digital products alone, as cheap air travel and other amenities allow even just moderately successful artists and cultural professionals access to international stages and exhibition spaces, extended personal networks and so on.

Moving back to a wider perspective, we can look at culture as a tool in international relations. As we can recall from segment 2.3.1, a country's culture is, in Nye's understanding, one of its three main soft power resources. In a chapter dedicated to the topic, he gives a number of examples how it can be used to promote mutual understanding and serve the national interest at the same time. Focusing first on what one might call intercultural exchange, he uses organized academic and scientific exchanges to illustrate that even small-scale initiatives with a limited number of participants can have very real policy outcomes. Referring to a number of well-known examples, he points out that exchange students often end up as members of the political and social elites of their respective home countries. Returning with a more nuanced and generally more positive impression of the host country, that country's soft power is increased. Another example he uses are international performances of orchestras, ballet or theatre groups, which, provided that they are of a sufficiently high-quality, evoke respect and admiration that by virtue of their ability to produce such achievements can carry over to those groups' homelands and thus overcome potentially negative preconceptions or stereotypes. While he acknowledges that "[it] is easier to trace specific political effects of [such] high-cultural contacts than to demonstrate the political importance of popular culture" (2004, p. 46), it should be noted that Nye still attributes a great deal of soft power potential to popular cultural expressions. Challenging the

notion that an explicit informational intent is a prerequisite for political effects, he points out the impact that subliminal images and messages can have. For instance, what can be seen in a popular film or heard in the lyrics of an internationally successful song can make a desirable impression on foreign audiences and create economic or cultural attraction, be it for certain products or specific values and ways of living that are, through their transmission in popular culture, seen as representative of a specific country.

2.4.3 Challenges

Having so far presented “culture” and its manifold manifestations as a predominantly positive force that can be harnessed to produce various desirable effects on the international stage, I think we have to at least briefly acknowledge that the international transmission of different messages through cultural expressions, no matter their intention, is also dependent on reaching willing receivers to be successful. On the one hand, this consideration leads us to the aspect of a global attention economy, where standing out amongst an ever higher number of competitors becomes a significant challenge, and on the other side of the spectrum we also have to acknowledge that the transmission and, in particular, certain ways of “decoding” cultural messages can evoke extreme reactions. In a Scandinavian context, this is perhaps best exemplified by the *Jyllands-Posten* Muhammad cartoons (Berge, 2017, p. 294)), but the role of very specific forms of international cultural activities could also be discussed in connection with more recent events such as the massacre in Christchurch, New Zealand, where the white nationalist shooter reportedly referenced controversial Swedish youtuber *PewDiePie* and other popular cultural expressions while livestreaming the attack to the internet.

Another less extreme – and certainly more immediately relevant – potential issue that should be mentioned in this context is the question of instrumentality. While a state-owned cultural life with a strictly prescribed propagandistic function is, of course, a thing of the past in any modern nation state, the conscious and goal-oriented use of culture on the international stage can still be a delicate matter – especially if it is perceived as a threat to the fundamental freedom of the arts. A classic example of this could be if cultural expressions that (purposefully or not) shine a positive light on the nation they originate from were to systematically receive benefits that less agreeable or politically divergent expressions are excluded from. To safeguard themselves against any such

allegations, governments will often choose to have state-sponsored support schemes for the arts be administrated by politically independent bodies, following a public policy principle commonly referred to as an *arm's length principle*. Nevertheless, in practical terms and for practical reasons, this is rarely a clear-cut matter. The principle of the arts' independence thus usually presents itself as a question of degree, and will frequently be a cause for contention (Mangset, 2013).

2.5 Foreign cultural policy and foreign cultural activities

Having provided the wider conceptual background, I will concentrate on one particular subset of what could be called international soft power activities for the remainder of this thesis, namely foreign cultural policy or foreign cultural activities.

Both from a linguistic and from a practical standpoint, foreign cultural policy can, as Berge (2017, p. 31) asserts, be understood as an amalgam of different elements: foreign policy on the one hand and cultural policy on the other. Dealing with the latter first, as "cultural policy" is an amalgam of complex terms in its own right, we can start our consideration by briefly looking at this particular element's components and which relevant potential meanings are inscribed in them. In his discussion of the topic, Berge makes use of a model introduced by Sigrid Røyseng. In this model, she combines the division of *culture* into culture in a narrow and culture in a broad conception (cf. 2.4.1) with a similar division of the *policy* term:

In a narrow sense, we understand policy as a decision-making activity that takes place on formal public decision-making arenas. Politics in the broad sense, on the other hand, is understood as any relationship that has to do with power and authority.⁸ (Røyseng, 2014, p. 5)

According to Røyseng, then, this brings about four potential modalities of cultural policy as the combination of culture and policy. This is illustrated in Table 2:

⁸ My translation.

	Narrow policy concept	Broad policy concept
Narrow culture concept	(1) Policy making and implementation concerning the cultural field on formal public arenas	(2) All exercise of power and authority concerning the cultural field
Broad culture concept	(3) Policy making and implementation concerning culture in general in formal public arenas	(4) All exercise of power and authority that decides how culture in general is defined

Table 2: Røyseng's model of cultural policy concept. Translated by Berge (2017b, p. 23).

Another influential distinction, and one that Røyseng herself mentions in conjunction with modality 3, is that between *implicit* and *explicit* culture policy, first put forward by Jeremy Ahearne in 2004. The main point that Ahearne makes in relation to our consideration, is that also policies not explicitly/nominally labelled *cultural* policy by legislators can potentially be considered cultural policy – and thus warrant attention from cultural policy research – if and when “they work to prescribe or shape cultural attitudes and habits over given territories”. *Implicit* or *effective cultural policy* is in other words “any political strategy that looks to work on the culture of the territory over which it presides”. These political strategies can then be further distinguished into policies that bring with them unintended cultural side effects on the one hand, “and those deliberate courses of action intended to shape cultures but which are not expressly thematised as such” on the other. Another aspect of this consideration is that many influential cultural policies are not necessarily being put into action by those officially tasked with cultural policy, but (increasingly, one could argue) by non-governmental entities such as powerful private corporations (Ahearne, 2009, pp. 141-144).

Even before having taken into consideration the *foreign* component, we can thus see that “foreign cultural policy” *could* be taken to encompass an extremely broad range of activities and to be anything but a strictly delimited area of research. Crucially, though, this sentiment does not correspond with actual research practice. As we shall see in chapter 4, at least in a Norwegian context, research that explicitly refers to itself as foreign cultural policy research makes use of a rather narrow conception of culture that typically focuses explicitly on the arts, and will usually in one way or another deal with how political agents influence cross-border arts activities that are commonly carried out by independent non-state actors. Nevertheless, given the definitional broadness outlined before and the increasing conflation of (primarily) cultural, political and economic interests that will be a topic later, it is almost certainly no coincidence that even leading

Norwegian researchers seem to prefer the use of the somewhat broad term “norsk utenrikskulturell virksomhet” rather than the seemingly more clearly defined “norsk utenrikskulturpolitikk” when speaking or writing on the topic in their own language⁹. In official documents, government activities on this field are often referred to as “internasjonal kulturinnsats” (international cultural engagement). In a similar spirit of practicality, I will, employing a rough translation, mostly speak and conceive of the activities that stand at the centre of this thesis as examples of “Norwegian foreign cultural activities”.

⁹ For instance, during his presentation at the *Kulturrikets tilstand* conference held on 25 October 2017, Ola K. Berge introduced his doctoral thesis that explicitly refers to “Norwegian Foreign Policy” in its English title as dealing with “norsk utenrikskulturell virksomhet”. For further examples of this conflation see Hylland and Berge 2012 or Berge 2013.

3 Discourse and Discourse Analysis

3.1 Chapter intentions and structure

Given the fact that discourse theory and discourse analytical approaches are a major inspiration to both the analysis itself and large parts of the reference material dealt with in this thesis, it seems essential to establish a general understanding of this school of thought. As Louise Phillips and Marianne Winther Jørgensen state in their introductory book *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (2002), the words “discourse” and “discourse analysis” are frequently used in scientific texts and debates, despite their not being a clear-cut, universally agreed upon definition of the terms. A researcher that aims to make constructive use of these concepts will therefore have to begin by establishing a number of premises that define his or her understanding and practical application of the concept.

In this chapter, this task is approached in two steps. First, the philosophical background and key epistemological assumptions that most discourse analytical approaches share and that the analysis will be informed by are presented in chapter segment 3.2. The chapter examines the most important intellectual “building blocks” of discourse analysis, because a practical discourse analysis cannot be conducted in a meaningful way without subscribing to the underlying theoretical cornerstones. As Phillips and Winther Jørgensen put it, “[i]n discourse analysis, theory and method are intertwined and researchers must accept the basic philosophical premises in order to use discourse analysis as their method of empirical study” (Phillips & Winther Jørgensen, 2002, p. 4).

While most discourse analytical approaches share the philosophical “base assumptions” presented in chapter 3.2, the countless variations that have been developed over the years set themselves apart in various ways on both a philosophical and a practical level. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to account for these different approaches and their intellectual intricacies, so chapter 3.3 looks to present the specific focal points and ways of understanding discourse of merely one such approach. As demonstrated by Berge (2017), this approach is particularly suited for a critical investigation of the general context and empirical material related to foreign cultural activities. The aim of this chapter is to convey a good sense of how the empirical material

that is analysed in chapter 5 will be approached, what the implications of such an approach are, and which of its features are of particular interest.

3.2 Foundations

3.2.1 Definitions

As mentioned above, the term “discourse” does not have a single, undisputed definition, yet is used lavishly in both scientific and day to day contexts. Rather than accounting for its many possible meanings, this thesis follows Winther Jørgensen and Phillips’ definition. Accordingly, a discourse can be understood as “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)” (2002, p. 1). This definition is broad enough to encompass the various nuances that different discourse analytical approaches attach to the term’s meaning, while still managing to delimit itself from everyday use of the word, where it most frequently appears to uncritically be used as a mere synonym for “a discussion”.

What then is “discourse analysis”? While this will be expanded upon in later parts of this chapter, most approaches that make use of the concept of discourse are based on the assumption that the ways in which we talk about – and thus understand – the world (cf. the aforementioned definition) are structured according to various patterns, which differ from one social context to the next (Phillips & Winther Jørgensen, 2002, p. 1). Discourse analysis, then, is the scientific investigation of these patterns. Here it is worth noting that we are talking of not just one, “but a series of interdisciplinary approaches that can be used to explore many different social domains in many different types of studies.” Before moving on to describing one such approach that is informed by the specific requirements and context of this study in more detail in chapter 3.3, the following section expands on these rather broad definitions by exploring the main features of the most elemental intellectual building blocks of discourse theory as a philosophical framework for this thesis.

3.2.2 Intellectual building blocks

3.2.2.1 *Social constructionism*

As Phillips and Winther Jørgensen state, discourse analytical approaches are by and large based on a variety of theories about culture and society that can be summarised under the umbrella term social constructionism (2002, p. 4). Referring to Vivien Burr (1995), they list four key premises that this school of thought is informed by. In the following represents a brief overview of these premises and their intellectual implications.

First, social constructionist theory is characterized by a critical approach to taken-for-granted knowledge, meaning that it distances itself from any conceptions of “objective” or permanent truths about the nature of reality. Since our access to reality is contingent on the *categorisation* of what we can physically or mentally perceive, reality as it can be known to us is not to be confused with “reality itself”. Rather than an objectively given fact, it is a *product* of said categorisation (or *discourse*).

From this fundamental insight follows the aspect of historical and cultural specificity: Though perceived “reality” and the “truths” that follow from said perception might appear to be relatively stable or *fixed* to a given person or social group at a given point in time, they are revealed to be much more malleable concepts when we start to take into account temporal and cultural variations in how the world is understood and interpreted. As the name suggests, social constructionism sees “truths” and “knowledge” about reality as *constructions*, and identifies social interactions as the main driver behind the (temporary) fixation of these constructions. In Kenneth J. Gergen’s words, they are “products of historically situated interchanges among people” (Phillips & Winther Jørgensen, 2002, p. 5), making *discourse* a form of social action.

This link between knowledge and social processes opens for the possibility of *competing* interpretations of reality. Even within relatively homogenous social groups, there will always be a more or less open and more or less intense struggle between differing interpretations, where dominant notions are constantly being affirmed, modified or challenged by the particular views of individuals and groups. In other words, they are the subject of *discursive processes*.

From these considerations follows the crucial insight that there is a link between knowledge and social action. The social construction of a particular version of reality (i.e.

a particular discourse) acts as a guideline and opens for a particular set of social actions that are acceptable, while it simultaneously excludes a wide range of other possible social actions. In most scenarios, social actions that affirm the dominant discourse will be tolerated or supported by the dominant social group, while social actions that are not in line with the base assumptions and premises of this particular constructed version of reality will be met with resistance. Again, this points to a possible struggle between different discourses, and in this struggle lies the possibility of change over time.

In summary, the main assumptions of social constructionism are anti-essentialist in nature: Since the social world is socially (or discursively) constructed, “its character is not pre-given or determined by external conditions, [and] people do not possess a set of fixed and authentic characteristics or essences” (Phillips & Winther Jørgensen, 2002, p. 5). In addition, socially constructed aspects of the world such as knowledge, identities and social relations are (principally) contingent: while the particular cultural circumstances of a given time might make these features appear to be relatively stable and uncontested, they are never actually fixed in a literal sense. Instead, they are understood to be at a constant interplay with discursive practices and thus open to change.

3.2.2.2 *The role of language*

A second major intellectual building block of discourse analytical approaches is the structuralist and poststructuralist claim that “our access to reality is always through language” (Phillips & Winther Jørgensen, 2002, p. 8). What this means is that language (and our various ways of using it in thought, speech, writing and so forth) does not neutrally reflect an objective reality, but rather actively constructs and shapes our understanding of the specific *social* realities that were introduced in the previous segment. In Phillips’ and Winther Jørgensen’s words, it is to be understood as “a ‘machine’ that generates, and as a result constitutes, the social world” (Phillips & Winther Jørgensen, 2002, p. 9). In combination with the aforementioned premises of social constructionism, this again leads to the realization that different discourses open and close for particular courses of action and that these discourses themselves are maintained and/or transformed through discursive practices in a highly dynamic interplay.

Since this understanding of the “working principles” or dynamics of discourses is closely tied to structuralist and poststructuralist linguistic philosophy, the following elucidates some of the basic ideas and concepts that discourse analysis took on from these intellectual traditions.

As the name suggests, structuralist linguistics take as their starting point the assertion that language is a system which is structured according to certain patterns or structures. In relation to our interest in the interplay between language and the social dimension, one of the earliest and most influential contributions can be attributed to Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and his theory of signs (semiotics). De Saussure works from the notion that a sign consists of two sides, namely its form (signifiant) and its content (signifié) and draws attention to the fact that the relation between these two sides is completely arbitrary: “The meaning we attach to words is not inherent in them but a result of social conventions whereby we connect certain meanings with certain sounds” (Phillips & Winther Jørgensen, 2002, p. 10). What determines a specific sign’s meaning is, according to de Saussure, its *relation* to other signs: Only by having a notion of the ways in which one sign is different from another do we establish our understanding of that particular sign. In other words, signs cannot be defined positively, but only negatively. Language, then, can be seen as the structure that arises from this process of negative or relational definition. Here it should be mentioned that de Saussure separates between two levels of language: *Langue* as the unchangeable underlying structure of signs on the one hand, and *parole* as situated language use on the other. As Winther Jørgensen and Phillips have stated, the Saussurian tradition within linguistics tends to disregard the latter and holds *langue* as the level of language that should be the focus of scientific research (Phillips & Winther Jørgensen, 2002, p. 10). This is discussed further in the following section.

Inspired by de Saussure’s reflections around the arbitrary relationship between (verbal) signs and their content, as well as the internal relations between different signs, later structuralist and poststructuralist theory sees similar principles at work in the interplay between language and (perceived) reality (Phillips & Winther Jørgensen, 2002, p. 10). In the context of discourse theory, special attention should be given to the contributions of poststructuralist philosophy, which differs from classic structuralist thought in two important ways:

First, while it subscribes to structuralism's idea that the meaning of signs is derived not from their relations to reality but from their relative positions in a network of signs, "it reject's structuralism's view of language as a stable, unchangeable and totalising structure" (Phillips & Winther Jørgensen, 2002, p. 10). Instead of conceptualising signs as being fixed in a fishing-net-like structure, where each sign is understood to have a steady position that is defined by its relative distance to other signs, poststructuralist theorists like Ernesto Laclau believe that the signs from which other signs acquire their meaning "can change according to the context in which they are used" (Phillips & Winther Jørgensen, 2002, p. 11). On an analytical level, this understanding makes it easier to come to terms with the possibility of change: While structures do exist, they are not to be understood as consistent and stable. Instead, structures in language and – by extension – perceived reality are subject to discursive practices and can change from context to context or discourse to discourse.

Secondly, poststructuralists do not share the structuralist tradition's scepticism of *parole* as a research object. Quite on the contrary, they claim that it is through the use of concrete situated language that the underlying structure is formed.

It follows that "the maintenance and transformation of the patterns should [...] be explored through analysis of the specific contexts in which language is in action." (Phillips & Winther Jørgensen, 2002, p. 11).

3.3 The discursive approach to cultural policy

Chapter 3.2 served to give a general introduction to discourse theory and establish the base assumptions, intellectual background and conceptual interests that most discursive approaches share. If one does subscribe to the constructivist conception of reality described above and accepts it as a keystone to understanding social processes, one should have a sense of how such an approach offers a pathway to a critical investigation of the empirical material tied to this thesis, with several interesting aspects being set into focus. In particular, the discursive approach invites us to pay special attention to the interactive and dynamic dimension of the social process and emphasises the crucial role that language plays in how this process unfolds, firmly positioning it at the centre of our interest. As was mentioned under 3.1, however, the largely common features of different discursive approaches have been operationalized, modified and expanded upon

countless times and in numerous ways, depending on different studies' particular subjects and research questions. As such, it would be nonsensical to continue by trying to give a more complete account in the confinements of this thesis. Instead, it is time to hone in on an analytical model that can provide us with the tools to, as foreign cultural policy researcher Ola K. Berge puts it, "establish an analytically fruitful dialogue between the empirical material, cultural policy research and the principal perspectives of the grand theory" (Berge, 2017, p. 46), with the effectiveness of this approach having been demonstrated in Berge's doctoral thesis *Look to Norway™ : Current Norwegian foreign cultural policy*, in which the author first and foremost investigates foreign cultural activities of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The aim here is not to present Berge's analytical approach as the indisputable best among all possible alternatives. However, his empirical material is close in nature to that of this thesis, and his results from this and previous studies form a crucial source of reference¹⁰, so on this basis his selection constitutes a sound choice.

Using the aforementioned thesis as its main source and point of departure, the following segments will serve to reiterate and expand on the bits of the "grand theory" that are particularly relevant in this area of research and introduce the specific terms and concepts that Berge uses in his analysis of the field of Norwegian foreign cultural policy. These terms and concepts will be instrumental for our understanding of Berge's findings, which will be presented in chapters 4 and 5, and also serve as an important guideline for how to approach the empirical material. In an attempt to structure the terms and concepts that will be presented in the following, the section utilises what can be called the "central pillars" of Berge's understanding of discourse theory as sub-headlines.

3.3.1 Theoretical claims

In his understanding of the concept of discourse and its analytical application, Berge takes a lot of clues from discourse analytical approaches carried out in the field of international relations research. Following a classification suggested by Jennifer Milliken (1999, pp. 228-230), these approaches are assumed to be committed to a number of theoretical claims, which can be divided into three distinguishable bundles. In the following, These

¹⁰ After all, the amount of existing research pertaining specifically to Norwegian foreign cultural activities is rather limited.

bundles form subdivisions for the presentation of Berge's approach and introduce the main vocabulary and the specific concepts that are tied to them.

3.3.1.1 *Systems of signification*

First, discourses are understood as *systems of signification*, reiterating the social constructivist world view discussed before. What differentiates discourse analysts in the realm of international relations research from other social constructivists is, according to Milliken, their special focus on the *relational* character of the "signs" within the sign systems that they are investigating (cf. the segment on de Saussure in segment 3.2.2.2). More specifically, the approaches are described to be characterised by an understanding of discourses as being primarily structured along the lines of *binary oppositions* that, in the words of Milliken, "establish a relation of power such that one element in the binary is privileged" (Milliken, 1999, p. 229).

3.3.1.2 *Discourses are productive*

A second overarching tendency is to understand discourses as *productive*: They do not only provide the means to understand and describe aspects of the world (i.e. language), but are also determining possible ways to interact with and exist inside of it. In "[making] intelligible some ways of being in, and acting towards, the world, and of operationalizing a particular 'regime of truth' while excluding other possible modes of identity and action" (Milliken, 1999, p. 229), they produce subjects authorized to speak and to act. These subjects have at their disposal a set of likewise discursively produced *knowledgeable practices* in the form of seemingly legitimate interventions, disciplining techniques and so on, which ultimately serve to organise and control the social space (Milliken, 1999, p. 229). In the context of international practices it is, as Milliken emphasises, important to state that the productive potential of discourses includes the production of "publics (audiences) for authorized actors, and their common sense of the existence and qualities of different phenomena and of how public officials should act for them and in their name" (Milliken, 1999, p. 229). This of course is closely connected to the concept of *power*, whose effects are a major field of interest in discourse studies. In this context, Berge stresses the understanding of power as not only an oppressive force and underlines its vital role in the creation of various aspects of social meaning. Specifically, the notion that power is a basic prerequisite of knowledge is emphasised.

3.3.1.3 *The play of practice*

The final theoretical commitment that Milliken identifies is to what she calls *the play of practice*, or the notion that discourses are unstable. As such, even currently dominant discourses and the social identities, practices, knowledge et cetera that are produced by them require (re)articulation to uphold their privileged positions. From this stems a pronounced interest in these hegemonic efforts on the one hand, and alternative, excluded or silenced discourses on the other (Milliken, 1999, p. 230).

In this context, referring to John Storey, Berge makes the important point that the discourses representative of different social fields “intersect and interact with different and (often) competing conceptions for the rules of the field” (Berge, 2017, p. 68). Especially in the case of more or less closely related social fields, the lines of demarcation are in other words often neither very clear nor stable, and it is conceivable that dominant notions commonly associated with one particular field can (through discursive practices) find their way into related fields.

While such a transfer of notions can take place in many different forms and with varying degrees of intentionality behind them, Berge stresses the role that strategies of *negotiation* often play in this dynamic. Here it is important to note that the term negotiation is not restricted to mean exchanges between specific opposing agents. In discourse analytical terms, it also encompasses “proactive acts aimed at establishing a relative control or command over the agenda” (Berge, 2017, p. 70).

3.3.2 Focal points

On the basis of the considerations and theoretical commitments outlined in the previous segments, a number of analytical focal points can be derived.

3.3.2.1 *Subject positions*

In discourse studies, possible or (discursively produced) legitimate ways of being are often referred to as “subject positions” (Berge, 2017, p. 60). Similar to the perhaps more familiar concept of a certain social *role*, having successfully taken on (or having been ascribed) a particular subject position usually comes with a distinct set of more or less explicit privileges as well as regulations in terms of how one is allowed (and/or: expected) to act and reason. To put it in Berge’s words, a subject position thus “both enables

and constrains” (Berge, 2017, p. 60). In his reflections around this aspect, he expands on two features of subject positions that are particularly important to our understanding of how they should be conceptualised:

First, he says, “subject positions are all about integration”, making the point that taking on a particular subject position is often not a black-or-white matter, but rather a question of commitment or degree, which can vary from situation to situation or, more precisely, from discourse to discourse. The most important analytical takeaway from this is that the degree of commitment to a particular subject position is very much dependent on the degree to which one is affected by or taking part in a discourse that is conducive to said subject position. Consequently, “being ‘in’ a discourse sets the stage for quite specific ways of conduct or behavior”. As Berge himself points out, this way of linking the discourse that an individual is subject to to said individual’s conduct is of course highly related/similar to Bourdieu’s thinking about the dynamics behind incorporated practices in the form of *habitus* (Berge, 2017, p. 61).

Secondly, then, subject positions are thought of as being *negotiable*, or subject to what Milliken (cf. segment 3.3.1.3) referred to as *the play of practice*. While deviation from the expectations that are associated with a particular subject position usually comes at a price, such as confusion amongst peers or the loss of some of the benefits derived from it, it can also be thought to interfere with the discursive (re)production of the respective subject position in a dynamic process. An important related aspect is the assumption that “individuals and institutions are believed to dynamically hold a number of positions simultaneously, despite some of them being potentially inconsistent or contradictory” (Berge, 2017, pp. 60-61).

3.3.2.2 *Narration*

In the context of (foreign) cultural policy, Berge identifies the strategy of *narration* as a particularly relevant and widespread act of negotiation: Using “specific self-images or stories”, social positions, ideas and practices are validated and legitimized through “the production of specific cultural narratives” (Berge, 2017, p. 69). In his view, one important reason for this strategy’s ample use in politics and other social domains – perhaps most prominently in the discursive production of a national identity – lies in its ability to reach audiences on an emotional level. In this context, an interesting aspect to narration as a

discursive strategy is related to what Milliken (1999, p. 236) in reference to David Campbell titles “privileged storytellers”, meaning certain individuals or entities that the discourse grants a special degree of narrative authority.

3.3.2.3 *Knowledge/power regimes*

The conception of *power* that Berge, along with many discourse analytical approaches, employs is predominantly based on the thinking of French philosopher Michel Foucault. Rather than merely as an *oppressive* force that certain individuals or interest groups possess, Foucault understands power as “a productive network which runs through the whole social body”. It is *productive* in the sense that it shapes different aspects of the social world, such as discourse and subjectivities. This notion emphasizes the *double nature* of power: it is responsible “*both* for creating our social world *and* for the particular ways in which [...] [it] can be talked about, ruling out alternative ways of being and talking. [It] is thus both a productive and a constraining force”. Perhaps most importantly, this closely links power to our conception of *knowledge* and *truth*: according to Foucault, knowledge and power are antecedent conditions of one another, and since “truth” follows from knowledge, it is *produced* by systems of power (Phillips & Winther Jørgensen, 2002, p. 14). Following up on this, Berge chooses to speak of “power-knowledge regimes” (p. 70) or “knowledge/power regimes” (p.293) when referring to particular configurations of established views, interests and ideologies that have the capacity to influence or regulate a domain of social life (such as, in this case, foreign cultural policy). As we shall see, he uses this concept to make a number of central claims about the field that we are interested in. It is then also these knowledge/power regimes that serve as a structuring principle for the analysis of the empirical material from the guest of honour project.

3.4 Outlook

Having dealt with the epistemological groundwork of discourse theory in chapter 3.2 and Berge’s particular approach in chapter 3.3, a strong idea arises regarding the assumptions a discourse analysis in the field of (foreign) cultural policy takes as its point of departure, and which general focus areas it will have to consider. These understandings will prove

instrumental to the investigations in the following chapter and, equally important, the analysis in chapter 5.

4 Contemporary Norwegian Foreign Cultural Activities

4.1 Chapter intentions and structure

Having discussed foreign cultural activities and related key concepts on a more abstract level in chapter 2, this thesis turns to how these activities manifest themselves in a contemporary Norwegian context. This investigation will form the main reference for the analysis in chapter 5, and is structured as follows:

Segment 4.2 investigates a selection of relevant grey literature to identify the most prominent official aims and strategies of Norwegian foreign cultural efforts on a political level, while segment 4.3 will give a brief outline of its institutional make up and main instruments. Segment 4.4, then, is by far the most extensive segment and is looking to provide a comprehensive insight into what Per Mangset (1997a, p. 88) refers to as the “cognitive aspects” of the field: With the fundamental understandings established in chapter 2 present, the sections investigate several recent research projects with the intent of identifying the defining discursive features of the field of Norwegian foreign cultural policy in recent years. After introducing the main conclusions of Mangset’s seminal study on the field (1997b) and especially the prototypical models that are derived from it in 4.4.1, we turn to a number of more contemporary contributions by Ola Berge to conceptualize important features of the status quo in segments 4.4.2 and 4.4.3. Here, a clear analytical focus lies on the relationship and dynamics between state actors and the art field, predominantly represented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the professional arts advisory organisations respectively. Building on this, segment 4.4.4 deals with the practical implementation of Norwegian foreign cultural policy, presenting the main conclusions from Berge’s observation of Norwegian cultural diplomats’ field work (2017), before a brief outlook of the analysis in segment 4.5.

4.2 Official goals and strategies

In the following segments, a body of grey literature¹¹ is used to identify the primary official goals and strategies behind Norwegian foreign cultural activities and describe its practical organisation and instruments. As Berge (2017, p. 118) points out,

these documents, with their more or less clear political signals aimed at politicians, bureaucrats, the field of practitioners and the public at large, constitute an important position within the discourse, not least as a reflection of the current dominant rhetoric.

However, two important reservations should be addressed:

Firstly, the official rhetoric that is prevalent in a given policy field should not necessarily be assumed to be one hundred percent congruent with its practical implementation. For instance, not all manifestations of foreign cultural policy and activities are under official political control, and even where they are, subordinate functionaries and bureaucrats will often, at least to a degree, follow their own inclinations rather than official policy positions. Consequently, it cannot be stressed enough that the following investigation, much like this thesis as a whole, does not claim to describe the circumstances *as they are*, but rather attempts to look at how important positions within the field are constructed by different influential agents within the political segment of Norwegian foreign cultural activities.

Secondly, despite having made an effort to choose different and newer grey literature than that used by Berge (2017), not all relevant documents have received a proper update under the “new”¹² conservative administration. The reason why this material can still be assumed to hold some relevance in relation to the current situation lies in the oft-observed relative stability of both cultural and foreign policy in Norway. In Berge’s words,

The continuous consensus within cultural and foreign policy has resulted in a tendency in which general policies are being reproduced within several consecutive white papers [...] even if specific modes of implementation [...] have changed or developed. (Berge, 2017, p. 123)

Another noteworthy way to conceptualize the development of Norwegian cultural policy over time is to speak of a *sedimentary* process or an evolution “through the gradual

¹¹ Primarily white papers, budget propositions and different strategy documents from the past five years. Where several issues of the same class of document exist, the focus lies on the most recent one at the time of writing. An exception is Innovation Norway’s Dream Commitment (“Drømmeløften”) report, where the most recent issue (2017) does not add relevant new aspects to this particular investigation.

¹² Referring to the two legislature terms of Erna Solberg, starting in 2013.

addition of new layers to the established arrangements, rather than through changes in the makeup of the sector” (Henningsen, 2015, p. 28). In the meantime, these sentiments should not be taken to mean that interesting changes or contrasts do not exist, and of course they will be pointed out where they become apparent. With that being said, we can move to the documents themselves.

The first paragraph from chapter nine of the newest cultural white paper, dedicated to the “international opportunities” for and through culture, nicely illustrates some of central points that are frequently brought up in discussions of and around Norwegian foreign cultural activities in a compressed matter:

Norway’s participation in international art- and cultural life is growing. Increasingly cultural expressions have international references, rely on international co-operation or are published internationally. Co-operation across international borders helps to make cultural life more lively and vibrant, strengthens the quality and competence of cultural life and gives access to bigger and more numerous markets. This allows for increased value creation in Norwegian cultural and creative industries. Cooperation promotes global diversity in cultural expression and has an influence on the conditions for free cultural expression. (Kulturdepartementet, 2018, p. 65)¹³

To briefly categorise, we can say that this paragraph references the changed circumstances of cultural production, takes up the assumed mutual benefits of cultural exchange and evokes a considerable economic potential, while also not failing to mention the advancement of liberal values such as diversity and freedom of speech. The following looks at how these dimensions of foreign cultural activities are described in this chapter of the white paper and other recent documents.

Unsurprisingly, virtually any contemporary policy document will begin by acknowledging the major global trends of recent years, such as globalisation and the rapid technological advancements (Utenriksdepartementet, 2014, p. 3). More specifically, the most important change that is taken up in a foreign cultural policy context is the increasing insignificance of physical borders in both the production and consumption of cultural goods that follows from these developments (Kulturdepartementet, 2018, p. 66). Here, the white paper gives expression to both challenges and opportunities tied to this development: On the one hand, Norwegian cultural goods and expressions are perceived to be under increasing pressure in an international attention economy (where specifically the dominant position of the major technology companies is mentioned), while at the same time the overall international

¹³ My translation.

interest and demand for Norwegian and other Nordic cultural products is said to be growing (p. 66). The white paper ties the economic potential associated with this development primarily to two factors:

Firstly, an increased international interest hints at the possibility of finding new markets and suggests an untapped potential for cultural export¹⁴, which is said to contribute to value added and help make new markets and audiences aware of Norwegian artists and cultural entrepreneurs (p. 66). Besides from it being necessary to “[bring] revenues back into the Norwegian cultural life and arts production” (p. 41), hopes of direct financial gains for the economy as a whole are not explicitly mentioned.

Secondly, major expectations are linked to an increased focus on culture in the tourism industry. In recent years, this notion has been pushed heavily by Innovation Norway¹⁵, who have identified *cultural or creative tourism* as one of six major “areas of opportunity” for the Norwegian economy of the future within the framework of their Dream Commitment (“Drømmeløftet”) initiative (Innovasjon Norge, 2016, p. 3). Not only do tourists with an appetite for cultural experiences spend significantly more money than the average international visitor, it is argued, they can also contribute to healthier audience numbers for cultural productions (Innovasjon Norge, 2016, p. 42) and help spread out the influx of foreign guests more evenly over the country and over the whole year (Samarbeidsråd for kultur og reiseliv (2017-2019), 2018, p. 11). With the objective of finding ways to achieve these effects, a cross-sector council was appointed by the Norwegian government in 2017. In their first proposal report, the council members suggest a number of measures, most of which aim at a more integrated and strategic co-operation between the tourism industry and cultural entrepreneurs, as well as between private and public actors.

While it seems inexpedient to deal with each of these measures and strategies in detail, we can move this general overview along by pointing out an especially prominent notion within the council’s suggestions, namely the importance of a strong, clear and unified *nation brand*, that culture is expected to help build and maintain (Samarbeidsråd

¹⁴ As is mentioned in the white paper several times (pp. 61, 66), Norway is lagging behind its Scandinavian neighboring countries in this regard.

¹⁵ Innovation Norway is a state-owned national development bank and “the Norwegian Government’s most important instrument for innovation and development of Norwegian enterprises and industry”. Cf. www.innovasjon norge.no/en/start-page/our-mission.

for kultur og reiseliv (2017-2019), 2018, p. 16). Much of the reasoning behind this notion can be found in the 2016 Dream Commitment report, where the segment on nation branding begins with the assessment that Norway, as a comparatively small and unknown nation, is in need of positive external associations that differentiate it from other countries if it is to be able to attract tourists, foreign investment and international talent. A strong national brand, it is argued, can also be profitably incorporated into commercial actors own marketing strategy, which ultimately stimulates export. The impetus, then, is to “position and make visible Norway’s competitive advantage as a modern nation of knowledge [by] telling the world who we are”. Furthermore, it is claimed that an awareness of this favourable perception can also serve to build up a sense of identity and pride in the individual, giving Norwegians some “much needed confidence in the rough competition [that is going on] in an increasingly globalized world (Innovasjon Norge, 2016, p. 52).

How culture specifically factors into these considerations is taken up in the cultural white paper, where the overarching notion is that internationally successful cultural goods and expressions can generate interest and mediate new and positive perceptions of the country, while local cultural manifestations are seen as welcome opportunities to satisfy an increasing demand for “experiences” among international visitors. Together, they are expected to “put Norway on the map and draw tourists to the country”. This, of course, directly underlines the conception that “culture is a crucial element in Norway’s international reputation” (Kulturdepartementet, 2018, pp. 66-67).

Apart from such predominantly economic considerations, the white paper also expresses the intention to use a thus bolstered international interest and reputation to “generate curiosity and spread knowledge of the Nordic model of society and values such as democracy, equality and sustainability”, with another discernible rhetoric focus being the promotion of freedom of speech and cross-cultural understanding. The clearly stated goal is for “Norway as a small country [to be] an important voice in the world”. Against this background, it thus becomes rather apparent that the aspect of showing “who we are” – i.e. identity politics – is intimately and purposefully linked to the strategic use of culture in nation branding efforts (Kulturdepartementet, 2018, pp. 66-68).

Finally, the white paper also deals with expectations of what one could call cultural exchange, pointing out what the Norwegian cultural life itself is seen to be

gaining from intensified exposure to external impulses. For instance, it is claimed that international cultural co-operation and co-productions raise the level of expertise, serve as a source of inspiration and confidence and give access to important networks. For these reasons, it is said, “it may [...] be necessary to improve the conditions for international actors in Norway” (Kulturdepartementet, 2018, p. 66). In the other documents referenced here, this aspect is not elaborated on.

Before moving on, I would like to point out an interesting contrast that becomes apparent when comparing this newest cultural white paper to the most recent white paper focused *exclusively* on foreign cultural activities (Utenriksdepartementet, 2013), which was penned under the social democratic Stoltenberg II government. Whereas the latter is very insistent on the intrinsic value of culture and the fundamental importance of culture’s independence through the arm’s length principle (pp. 5-11), these aspects are largely omitted in the newer paper’s chapter on international cultural activities. While the fundamental value and independence of cultural life is, of course, addressed and verbally embraced in other parts of the paper, it seems noteworthy that instrumental considerations often follow on the heels of such notions:

The aim to create artistic and cultural expressions of the uppermost quality has to form the basis of cultural policy. Culture’s power as a tool for social improvement is a side effect of this primary aim. But the fact that artistic and cultural expressions have power in and of themselves, does not provide satisfactory answers to the question of how society should prioritise cultural activities over its other activities. The answer to this is instead to be found in cultural work as the basis for democratic development, social community and economic value creation. (Kulturdepartementet, 2018, p. 8)¹⁶

This instrumental mindset is perhaps even more apparent in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ latest budget proposition. While the introduction mentions that the 2019 guest of honour project at the Frankfurt book fair is to be used in its function as an arena that “shines an important spotlight on Europe as a humanist project [and where] cultural rights, freedom of speech and democracy are central issues” (Utenriksdepartementet, 2018, p. 14), the comment on budget post 70 (culture and information purposes) merely states that “the cultural and creative industry can contribute to growth, employment and value added, [as well as] innovation in other industries” (p. 60), omitting non-economic objectives entirely.

¹⁶ My translation.

4.3 Organisation and instruments

Having thus outlined the general focus areas and primary concerns of official Norwegian foreign cultural activities as they are presented in recent official documents, a quick look should be taken at the organisational apparatus that is tied to these efforts. Apart from the many individual cultural organisations, artists and cultural workers that regularly engage in international activity, the field consists of a number of important institutions that should be mentioned here. The overarching political responsibility is shared between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with individual responsibilities being formulated in a cultural white paper from 2003:

The responsibility for international co-operation in the cultural arena is shared between the Department for Culture and Religion and the Department of Foreign Affairs. The Department for Culture and Religion has the overriding responsibility for Norwegian and multilateral cultural co-operation, in addition to the dissemination of foreign culture to Norway. The Department of Foreign Affairs has the overriding responsibility for the presentation of and information about Norwegian culture in foreign countries, and for the mutual co-operation between Norway and countries to the South. The Department of Foreign Affairs presides over a global network of circa 150 embassies and consulates and is central to practical cultural communication and information work. (Kultur- og kirke departementet, 2003, p. 111)¹⁷

However, as Hylland and Berge (2012, p. 17) have pointed out, these objectives will often be combined in the considerations and practical work that the ministries carry out, which might be why the newest cultural white paper in large parts sticks to stipulating that “both the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs work to strengthen the international opportunities of the [Norwegian] cultural life”¹⁸ and only goes into a little more detail when describing the multilateral co-operations that the Ministry of Culture is involved in, such as the Nordic Council of Ministers and the European Council as well as the cultural programs of the European Union and UNESCO (Kulturdepartementet, 2018, p. 65).

As far as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is concerned, one of the most important features of its foreign cultural efforts¹⁹ is the cooperation with the seven arts advisory organisations that represent different branches of the arts: *Music Norway* (music), *Danse- og teatersentrum* (performing Arts), *Norwegian Crafts* (contemporary crafts),

¹⁷ My translation.

¹⁸ My translation.

¹⁹ Arguably in general, but definitely in the context of this thesis.

OCA (visual arts), *Design og arkitektur Norge* (design and architecture), *NORLA* (literature) and *Norsk filminstitutt* (film).²⁰ Apart from these organisations frequently fulfilling different advisory functions, it is the support schemes for Norwegian artists' international activities that lie at the heart of this cooperation. While the funds for these schemes are provided by the ministry, their administration is delegated to the arts advisory organisations, following an arm's length principle. In segments 4.4.2 and 4.4.3, we will get to take a closer look at how this particular form of cooperation came into being and how it relates to the overall discourse within the field. In addition to these support schemes, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs finances an extensive program of visits for international journalists and experts on cultural matters (Utenriksdepartementet, 2013, p. 23) and also keeps a smaller budget post for the support of initiatives on an *ad hoc* basis (Berge, 2017, p. 138), (Utenriksdepartementet, 2018, p. 59). Finally, the cultural work carried out by the various embassies and other foreign service missions constitutes an important part of the Ministry's commitment to foreign cultural activities, with the main objectives being the stimulation of demand for professional co-operative projects with international partners and the support of such initiatives within different organisations (Utenriksdepartementet, 2013, p. 16). As we shall see in segment 4.4.4, this part of the MFA's cultural involvement is interesting, i.a. because it often, by necessity, balances on the threshold between support for the arts field and instrumentality, as well as between the arm's length principle and direct involvement.

The final institution the recent white paper (Kulturdepartementet, 2018, p. 65) mentions as a relevant contributor is Arts Council Norway (*Kulturrådet*), which acts as the administrator of the Norwegian Cultural Fund (*Norsk kulturfond*) and other grant schemes²¹.

4.4 Relevant research

In addition to what has been presented so far, the most important basis of comparison for the analysis consists of a body of more or less recent research on the field. As the different reports and research projects at times directly built on each other, they are dealt with in a chronological order in the following.

²⁰ stikk.no/reisestotte, accessed 1 March 2019.

²¹ kulturradet.no/english/vis/-/arts-council-norway-main, accessed 2 March 2019.

4.4.1 Mangset's "Cultural divisions" (1997): Ideologies and communication networks

From 1994 to 1996, on behalf of the Norwegian Ministry of Culture, researcher Per Mangset conducted a study on the Norwegian state's instruments in the domain of what we can, referring to the observations made in chapter 2, call foreign cultural policy or foreign cultural activities. The result of this study is a report with the title "Kulturskiller i kultursamarbeid – Om norsk kultursamarbeid med utlandet", published in 1997 (Mangset, 1997b). While this 350-page report offers a detailed investigation of e.g. foreign cultural activities within the individual disciplines of the arts at the time, an article that Mangset published in the *International Journal of Cultural Policy* the same year conveniently summarises his main conclusions. As aforementioned, despite its age, the overarching issues that are identified in this report and the conceptual models that Mangset developed on their basis are frequently referenced in similar research projects to this day, which is why it seems expedient to reiterate on them here.

Perhaps most importantly, Mangset perceives the field as "a real battlefield [...] of conflicting values, ideologies and interests". Specifically, he refers to frequent tensions between the two main responsible ministries, between the ministries and cultural organisations (including their representatives) as well as between different segments of Norwegian cultural life. In an attempt to draw "a socio-cultural map" of this "battlefield", Mangset proceeds to "describe the most important ideologies, cultural networks, sub-systems and strategies within this field of policy" (Mangset, 1997a, p. 87). In the following, we will look at these aspects in a little more detail.

According to Mangset, most of the persistent issues the field is faced with relate to one or several of three categories (Mangset, 1997a, p. 89):

- The balance between different policy objectives (cultural policy, foreign trade policy and foreign policy objectives respectively)
- Questions of control and delegation (cf. the arm's length principle)
- Discussions around cultural competence, specifically on who is deemed qualified to make decisions pertaining to cultural matters.

Conflicts around these issues are, according to Mangset, frequently carried out

- Between distinct social fields (e.g. the bureaucratic and the artistic field)
- Between a particular field's sub-fields (Mangset uses cultural policy and foreign policy as examples), (as well as between)

- “Social actors at different steps in the hierarchy within the same field” (e. g. up-and-coming vs. firmly established artists) (Mangset, 1997a, p. 91).

On the basis of these dimensions, Mangset identifies a total of three “different, internally rather consistent, clusters of values, objectives and ideas” (Mangset, 1997a, p. 91), which he chooses to speak of as *ideologies*. Having been labelled “The Egalitarian-Corporative”, “The Elitist” and “The Instrumental Ideology” by Mangset, their main characteristics are briefly summarised in the following.

First off, the main characteristic displayed by representatives of “The Egalitarian-Corporative Ideology” is their insistence on the importance of a broad and diverse portfolio of artistic expressions within the field of foreign cultural activities. Distancing themselves from hierarchical and standardized conceptions of quality, many of the informants Mangset puts in this category also favour presenting what they deem a “distinctive Norwegian character” in cultural expressions, and emphasise reaching out to a broader public, rather than focusing efforts on a cultural elite. Mangset chooses to title this ideology “corporative”²² because of its representatives’ favourable view of the professional artists’ organisations and their wish for even stronger ties between these organisations and the state. According to Mangset, this ideology is (or rather: was at the time) particularly prevalent amongst – unsurprisingly – the professional artists’ organisations themselves, the regional art centres, “the typical Nordic state institutions for geographical democratisation of theatre, visual art and music”, the governmental institutions of culture, as well as among local and regional cultural executives (Mangset, 1997a, pp. 92-93).

Contrarily, “The Elitist Ideology” is characterized by a strong anti-corporative mindset among its representatives. As they conceive of the “queue” or “cultural democracy mentality” (Mangset’s words) that is associated with more egalitarian approaches as detrimental to the dissemination of genuine artistic quality, they tend to advocate the promotion and use of a strictly limited number of “champion” artists in international arts or cultural activities, meaning those whose excellence has been recognised internationally and/or who are thought to meet an international elite

²² In his own definition, the word is used “to refer to a political system in which the state and the professional organisations (unions, etc.) co-operate closely, especially at the top/central level” (Mangset, 1997a, p. 106).

standard of quality. According to this view, state resources should not be squandered on the international ambitions and possibilities of mediocre artists. A popular attitude among the higher-ranked employees of the country's major art institutions as well as other elite-level cultural entrepreneurs and critics (Mangset, 1997a, p. 92), it seems only logical that representatives of this ideology would prefer to see critical decisions be left to distinguished specialists with refined taste and an extensive international network.

Finally, "The Instrumental Ideology" highlights the potential "non-cultural" objectives associated with international cultural activities, such as economic growth and the development of a favourable external perception. Often drawing criticism and disdain from actors that are positioned closer to the core of cultural production, this ideology is primarily found among representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, other diplomats and of course business executives (Mangset, 1997a, p. 92).

As Mangset continues to explain, each of these three prevalent ideologies is tied to one of three "distinct communication systems for the production, distribution and consumption of cultural expressions, particularly artistic expressions" or "communication networks". As one would expect, these networks differ in their senders, recipients and distribution channels but also, more specifically, in their "specific evaluation criteria, judges of quality, strategies of promotion, and arenas of distribution" (Mangset, 1997a, p. 96).

To follow the order used above, Mangset associates the Egalitarian-Corporative Ideology with what he calls "The Extended-Enthusiast Network".²³ Inspired by the egalitarian approach to cultural policy discussed above, this communication network advocates the inclusion of initiatives "outside the institutionalised channels of promotion of culture abroad" and perceives of "the creative socio-cultural encounter" (Mangset, 1997a, p. 99), i.e. a peaceful and original meeting between different cultures, as the optimal communicative situation. Accordingly, the prevalent strategies and practical approaches originating from this network frequently rely on seminars and workshops as their tools of choice to facilitate professional co-operation. Furthermore, Mangset associates this network with a certain scepticism of official/institutionalized distribution channels and highlights their preference for the dissemination of cultural expressions

²³ As he himself acknowledges, the introduction of a separate terminology for these networks is, first and foremost, a case of "intellectual mystification" (Mangset, 1997a, p. 96).

through local enthusiasts or opinion leaders, such as expatriate Norwegian academics or dedicated hobbyists. Another important trait is the network's preoccupation with a wider, value-driven approach to cultural co-operation. Beyond "just the provision of high-quality artistic experiences to the traditional concert or gallery visitor", Mangset (1997a, p. 99) says, agents of this network are more interested in long-lasting and reciprocal forms of cultural exchange.

As one might expect, "The Impresario-Curator Network", consisting in large parts of representatives of "The Elitist Ideology" that are intimately tied to a highly stratified international artistic system, is characterised by distinctly different priorities and makes use of other strategies. A well-established concept (or subject position, in discursive terms) within this network is that of the "gatekeeper(s)", meaning a person or a specific group of people who, owing to their elevated status within the hierarchically organized arts world, are accepted as "judges of taste" and can exert a high degree of influence on an artist's career. For instance, admittance to certain arenas (prestigious museums, stages, publications and others) can be an enormous boon to an artist's international recognition, while rejection may result in invisibility. Strategies of success in this particular communication network are, according to Mangset, first and foremost dependent on an „informal social competence" that enables actors within the network to establish productive relationships with the aforementioned gatekeepers. An important prerequisite, then, is to be present (and, of course, to get noticed) at central happenings or social gatherings, where important connections are made and favourable words from trusted key figures can go a long way towards solidifying or developing one's own position. In this way, the "impresario-curator network" exemplifies and actively makes use of the principles behind "the social construction of artistic success" (ibid., p. 98). Focusing in large parts on a "commercial" or "market oriented" logic, and conceiving of the "bourgeois connoisseur" as the primary addressee of their dissemination efforts, this network's preferred strategy for introducing new or lesser known artists to the international stage is commonly referred to as the "locomotive" or "flagship strategy"(ibid., p. 98); by actively associating up-and-coming artists (the metaphorical "wagons") with a well-known and artistically and/or commercially established public figure (the "locomotive"), one hopes to profit from promotional synergy effects and expand the newer artists' audience (Mangset, 1997a, pp. 97-98).

Concluding this overview, “The Foreign-Diplomatic Network” can be said to exemplify the workings of the instrumental ideology. Characteristic of this network is its focus on “official promotion schemes” or “big manifestations” (Mangset, 1997a, p. 100), i.e. concerted large-scale efforts in which cultural expressions are used as tools, but whose overarching objectives are often assumed to be of a more prosaic provenance. Mangset identifies the primary strategy of this network as one of continuity and concentration, where artists of high quality and international fame are prioritized, and efforts will often and repeatedly target what are assumed to be important focus regions for Norwegian interests abroad. Interestingly, Mangset mentions several of his sources expressing the sentiment that this is not necessarily the preferred distribution channel for their respective cultural expressions, and that artists who rely on it may even be looked down upon in certain circles.

4.4.2 “Katedral, Paviljong og Børs” (2012): The delegated support schemes

Having introduced Mangset’s highly-influential conceptualisation of the field, priority should be given to more recent developments and contemporary research on the field. First, however, a practical change that took place between the publication of Mangset’s report and the start of the other research projects that are relevant to this thesis has to be taken up. Even though historical organisational details and changes in and of themselves are not of primary interest, the *delegated support schemes* that are administered by the arts advisory organisations are the main object of the second report that will be dealt with here. An expression of the decentralisation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ cultural efforts in the new millennium, their introduction serves as a point of departure for a number of important overarching reflections on the entire field of foreign cultural activities. For this reason, it seems expedient to briefly explain this development on a practical/organisational level, before dealing with its more implicit aspects and consequences in subsequent parts of this chapter.

As Berge (2013, pp. 5-6) explains, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ approach to cultural activities before this change can be described as independent and centralised, and was a major reason for the frequent tensions in the field that Mangset picked up on. Specifically, representatives from the arts field felt that many bureaucrats lacked the professional expertise necessary to make well-founded decisions on cultural matters,

while others were criticising the absence of artistic independence from political influence according to the arm's length principle. On the basis of these concerns, several trial initiatives were launched, placing the responsibility for the administration of a considerable share of the ministry's budget for culture with the arts advisory organisations. Over time, this mode of co-operation has become firmly established and is now practiced with a total of seven specialized organisations (cf. segment 4.3). Put together by these organisations, external selection committees of art professionals decide about the allocation of funds, mostly in the form of travel grants, amongst eligible applicants. An important aspect to note here is that these support schemes are demand-based, meaning that support seekers are required to provide proof of a pre-existing invitation or formalized agreements with foreign organisers.

The first relevant research project to look at, then, is Ole Marius Hylland and Ola K. Berge's report "Katedral, paviljong og børs" (2012). Penned on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it serves as an evaluation of the aforementioned support schemes and summarises the findings of the two *Telemarksforskning* researchers' investigation into the opinions of different relevant groups. Keeping in line with a discursive approach, the primary intention in dealing with this particular report lies less in finding out what it has to say about the practical workings or the effectiveness of these support schemes, but rather in the discursive dimensions that are revealed in Berge's and Hylland's interviews, dealing with questions such as what the central sentiments that different groups express in relation to the support schemes and Norwegian foreign cultural efforts in general are, and how these are conceptualized by the researchers. As will become apparent, this report also constitutes the basis on which Berge himself (2013) draws to illustrate noteworthy developments in recent years.

In practical terms, Hylland and Berge organize their informants into four groups:

- grant beneficiaries
- representatives of the arts advisory (administrator) organisations
- representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- other representatives from the arts and cultural industry, which will not be dealt with here.

Speaking of the grant beneficiaries first, Hylland and Berge's informants point out access to new and important networks, artistic and professional inspiration and the opportunity to meet new audiences as the major benefits associated with their international

activities. The financial support is, according to many, a major helping factor or even a prerequisite for these activities and their success. Consequently, the material points out a widespread satisfaction with the grant schemes in general (though some unsurprisingly would wish for more substantial subsidies) and the level of trust in the selection committees' legitimacy and competence is high on average (Hylland & Berge, 2012, pp. 48-51).

Moving on to interviews with representatives from the arts advisory organisations as the delegated administrators of the funds, the informants do, despite minor differences between the individual organisations' experiences, once again paint a picture of an overall rather harmonic field. The general perception is that there is a real need and demand for support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the entire field finds itself in the process of a continuous and intensifying internationalisation, where the awareness of and the interaction with external (international) impulses are becoming more and more important. At the same time, many informants point to what they perceive as an increasingly strong Norwegian presence on the international stage, which is also more and more seen as a natural extension of the comparatively small domestic market. In this vein, the fact that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is involved in cultural matters is seldom seen as a source of concern. (Hylland & Berge, 2012, pp. 57-63)

While a possible dilemma exists in the relation of cultural policy objectives, artistic freedom and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' devotion to promotional efforts and their desired reputational effects, there is little evidence to suggest that this leads to major conflicts in practice. Instead, the dominant notion seems to be that the criteria that the arts advisory organisations apply in their decisions (quality, degree of cultural exchange, recognition value) also form the basis for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' instruments. As long as they are principally free in their decisions, they do, in other words, generally not perceive the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' objectives as an unacceptable interference with their own priorities. The by and large positive conception of the Ministry's cultural efforts is also reinforced by the important role that the advisory organisations have seen diplomatic posts and embassies play in the advancement of their international ambitions. Based on these considerations, many informants would actually like to see the ministry take on *more* responsibility in cultural matters (in addition to providing larger funds), and especially that these responsibilities get formalized in the form of laws, fixed budget

posts et cetera to a higher degree than they have been (Hylland & Berge, 2012, pp. 58-59).

In their interviews with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, comprising both employees of the central in Oslo and various Norwegian embassies, Hylland and Berge's interest lies once again primarily with the delegated support schemes, but also extends to other foreign cultural activities, such as those initiated by the embassies (Hylland & Berge, 2012, p. 67). For our considerations, we can first focus on the different rationalities that the researchers identify: Why does the state of Norway (through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) actively engage in the international ambitions and activities of artists and cultural workers? According to Hylland and Berge, arguments presented by the informants can be grouped into two main categories: Those tied to the conditions and objectives of foreign policy on the one hand, and those tied to cultural policy considerations on the other. In addition, informants mention a number of economic considerations.²⁴ In the following, we will look at the informants' perspectives on these dimensions in turn.

Starting out with what one can call the foreign policy rationality, a first important argument is that the responsibility for safeguarding the interests of all Norwegian citizens abroad naturally also extends to the activities and interests of Norwegian artists. Additionally, culture is generally seen as a matter of public concern and a public good and should therefore – given the tendency towards internationalisation discussed before – receive the support on the international stage that it needs to thrive. Other major elements of this rationality can be linked to representational considerations: According to this logic, foreign cultural activities help develop the country's image as a cultural nation and serve as an important contact surface between Norway and the rest of the world. The general notion is that a positive impression of a country's cultural representations will contribute to a positive image of the country as a whole – which, ultimately, both the Norwegian economy and the general population will be able to profit from (Hylland & Berge, 2012, p. 68).

Arguments that can be said to be more deeply rooted in a cultural policy rationality often focus on the boons that foreign cultural activities can have for the arts

²⁴ It is also these three dimensions of foreign cultural activities objectives that are alluded to in the report's title "Katedral, paviljong og børs", roughly translating to "Cathedral, pavilion and market".

and artists themselves. In particular, it is stressed how important the act of “getting out” is for Norwegian artists: In an international context, it is argued, they get to benefit from a confrontation with different standards and criteria of quality, find inspiration and gain access to important supranational networks (Hylland & Berge, 2012, p. 68).

Finally, an economic rationality is, according to Hylland and Berge, not as easily discernible, and where it does appear, it is “more or less implicit[ally]” linked to the first two. At least among the informants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and at the time of the survey, it does thus not appear to be a strong focus (ibid., p. 72).

When it comes to the distribution of responsibilities within the field, there are several levels that can be taken into account:

- the general/higher political responsibility
- the financial responsibility, especially as it plays out between public and private actors
- responsibilities tied to the practical administration of politically agreed-upon measures and initiatives (ibid., p. 82)

For our purposes, it seems appropriate to focus on the two first aspects. When it comes to the overarching political responsibility, the central question is which ministries should be implicated and in which ways. As Hylland and Berge point out, individual answers to this question can serve as an indication of the respective informant’s understanding of, amongst others, the legitimacy of culture, and which principles and objectives are associated with foreign cultural activities. Here, many informants express the sentiment that responsibilities should be distributed across several ministries, first and foremost the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as they indeed are (cf. segment 4.3). A noteworthy aspect to this is that many advocate a more holistic or integrated approach and would also like to see the Ministry of Trade and Industry take on more responsibility, allowing artists to profit from a broader spectrum of specialized expertise. On the other hand, those who would like to see the majority of political responsibility lie with the Ministry of Culture often express this sentiment in conjunction with a notion of “culture for culture’s sake” and wish for cultural life to be more clearly insulated from instrumental intentions. At the same time, they are concerned that a lesser emphasis on instrumental motives might also result in an overall reduction of funding for foreign cultural activities (Hylland & Berge, 2012, pp. 83-85).

The question of private and public responsibility, is, of course, primarily tied to the distribution of financial responsibilities concerning the funding of international activity. While views differ on how exactly this distribution should look like, Hylland and Berge can attest to a broad consensus that the responsibility should indeed be shared. In other words, practically all of the informants agree that private actors²⁵ need to contribute, but also point out that most activities cannot be successful without public support schemes, which are seen as especially crucial in the beginning phases of artists' international endeavours. More concretely, many informants emphasize that, on a practical level, the distribution of responsibilities should result from a purposive assessment of the tasks at hand, meaning that, e. g., commercial actors are trusted to be more competent in regards to activities that are directly linked to export (Hylland & Berge, 2012, p. 86).

4.4.3 “Norsk utenrikskulturell virksomhet i endring” (2013): Conceptualisation of changes

In a paper for the sixth Nordic conference for cultural policy research (2013), Ola Berge himself draws on the two reports that were dealt with here to conceptualize relevant recent developments within the field of Norwegian foreign cultural activities.²⁶

One of the main differences that Berge identifies is the noticeable absence of major conflicts between actors in the field in 2012 as compared to the situation in 1997. In particular, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was (generally speaking) sceptical of the arts advisory organisations in 1997, perceiving them as being heavily under the influence of an egalitarian mindset and therefore constituting a potential threat to Norway's image as a cultural nation, the objectives and values of these actors seem to have become more uniform over time, leaning towards a more professional and elitist conception of the field than has been the case before. This change should, according to Berge, be seen as a result of the elitist art field's increased status and influence on the arts advisory organisations on the one hand, and an adaption of a public diplomacy inspired strategy on the other, allowing cultural policy and foreign policy objectives to

²⁵ such as the artists themselves, their management, agents, production companies, publishers, record labels and so on, cf. Hylland and Berge (2012, p. 86).

²⁶ For a discussion of the empirical and methodological challenges associated with this comparison, see Berge (2013, p. 2).

converge. Specifically, Berge argues, this general tendency towards professionalization and a higher focus on artistic quality in conjunction with the de-centralization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' cultural efforts ultimately proved to serve the ministry's interests: Having established an arm's length distance on a formalized level, instrumental objectives were seemingly toned down. At the same time, due to the art field itself having become more instrumental, these goals and the corresponding mindset can be argued to have solidified their position in the discourse. As he says, this should also be understood as a consequence of the field intensifying its ties to a global and liberalized market (Berge, 2013, pp. 4-10).

An important consequence of this development is, according to Berge, the establishment of a different conception of diversity within the field. While Mangset had identified a *broad* conception of diversity as a defining feature of the *Egalitarian Ideology* and the *Extended-Enthusiast Network*, where it was linked to a large number of categories such as gender, ethnicity, geographic provenance, amateur-professional and so on, the results from Hylland and Berge's newer report suggest that the conception of diversity has become considerably more narrow²⁷, with diversity efforts being almost exclusively focused on presenting a variety of new and old artistic genres and sub-genres (Berge, 2013, p. 8). As Berge continues to explain, this is also to be seen in conjunction with the emergence of the "championship mindset" as a dominant way of thinking: While informants from the older report were arguing against conceiving of foreign cultural activities as essentially a perpetual international competition with largely common criteria and would rather see specifically Norwegian features and perspectives be emphasized (Mangset, 1997b, p. 57), many contemporary activities, such as the demand-based support schemes, adhere much more to the former conception than to the latter (Berge, 2013, p. 9). The conceptual side of this change in approaches is nicely illustrated in a statement from *Danse- og teatersentrum (Performing Arts Hub Norway)*, which Berge first quoted in one of his earlier reports:

One does not "send out" any longer, but commits to a reality that is demand driven and network based and which operates on many levels simultaneously. From the artists to their contacts, festival to company, festival to festival, institution to institution, project to project, seminar to seminar, production to production and so on. (Berge, 2009, p. 11)²⁸

²⁷ Using the conceptual pair "smal/bred" in his Norwegian writing, Berge refers to this as diversity in a vertical/horizontal sense in "Look to Norway" (Berge, 2017, p. 301).

²⁸ My translation.

An interesting paradox to be mentioned in this context is what Berge calls “the advent of popular culture in the international art scene”: Traditionally seen as antithetical to artistic quality and conceptually linked to egalitarian values and a broad conception of diversity, popular artistic expressions have become more commonplace in foreign cultural activities. The key to understanding this apparent contradiction lies, according to Berge, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ emphasis on their activities having a broad impact, following the public diplomacy rationality that reaching large international audiences is paramount to achieving substantial results. As he points out, however, it is still only what is assumed to be “the best”²⁹ within popular culture that is commonly used – in this way, on an ideological level, previously mutually exclusive considerations are combined (Berge, 2013, pp. 9-10).

4.4.4 Practical implementation: “Look to Norway”

In this part of the investigation, a number of interesting points that Berge (2017) raises about the practical implementation of foreign cultural policy are taken up, specifically on how it is carried out by diplomats and local employees in the major foreign service missions. Having been witness to the day-to-day cultural work of these agents in different Norwegian foreign missions (primarily the one in New York), he is able to connect the specifics of these agents’ work mode to the larger context of central aspects that have been touched upon above.

According to Berge, the main objective of applied cultural diplomacy is “to relate as directly as possible to the three rationalities of foreign cultural policy [cf.4.4.2] [and] promote Norwegian art and artists in terms of both international cooperation and competition”, with most practical efforts revolving around the productive mediation between different groups and individuals. From this follows the necessity of staying close to bureaucrats, organizers and artists alike, making cultural diplomacy a “24/7” job with an imperative to be constantly connected and open to „comprehensive socializing” at relevant events, which will often take place outside regular working hours. Attending such events is seen as a way to stay professionally updated and, even more importantly, “to establish, maintain and expand relevant networks”. This is an integral enabling

²⁹ The notion of being “the best” in a popular culture context is, I would assume, often synonymous with being the most commercially successful.

feature of the general strategy, which hinges on the cultural diplomats acting as *mediators* who help to connect different parties within their network and thus bring about and maintain productive relationships, professional co-operations et cetera (Berge, 2017, pp. 248-249).

An important aspect that should be discussed in this context is, as Berge continues to explain, “a striking consciousness among the MFA’s staff to leave art and artist priorities and selections to authorities outside of the MFA”, which finds its expression in informants repeatedly stressing that a) a local interest presupposes their activities and b) they support local actors more so than they do Norwegians specifically. Additionally, especially local employees are reported to emphasize the ambition “to be an active and competent member of an art scene [rather than] actively promot[ing] any particular (Norwegian official) agenda” Berge connects this insistence on the demand-based and *hands-off* nature of activities to a particular conception of professionalism, with a major notion being that professionalism entails listening to “the ones that know what they are talking about” (Berge, 2017, p. 260), such as cultural institutions or the advisor organisations, rather than relying on one’s own preferences. Instead, the professional imperative is to support the ambitions of these actors through the particular expertise and resources that oneself brings to the table – in the case of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this would be the ability to help connect relevant players and build strategic networks. As Berge asserts, this approach can in many ways also be understood as a clear rejection of what has been labelled *diplomatic art* (cf. 4.4.1) and an endorsement of the art field’s own conception of quality (Berge, 2017, pp. 251-260)..

Importantly, while the rhetoric is clear, it would be wrong to deduct that applied cultural diplomacy always adheres strictly to the arm’s length principle. To underline this point, Berge raises three aspects:

First, in questions of cultural matters and activities, certain foreign service missions have to be assumed to operate under their own “autonomous agenda” (Berge, 2017, p. 265) purely by virtue of their distance to a contemporary Norwegian cultural discourse. This distance can be manifested in spatial terms or simply be attributed to a lack of competence and missing funds or personal resources that could be expended on cultural matters.

Secondly, and more relevant to our considerations, Berge argues that informants from the bigger, more important missions, in their insistence on adhering to the arm's length principle, downplay their influence on the practical shape of activities. After all, often being the first to introduce local partners to selected Norwegian artists and the like, the external demand that they refer to may in actuality be "a demand that in many cases is created by the local diplomacy itself" (Berge, 2017, p. 268).

Finally, and highly related to the previous aspect, Berge conceptualizes the cultural diplomacy work mode in discursive terms, arguing that many diplomats have taken on a particular subject position which he chooses to label "the cultural entrepreneur". Here, he stresses the entrepreneur's ability to see opportunities in suboptimal situations, the capacity to innovate and his or her pragmatic approach to making use of different and sometimes competing discourses. The emergence of this position as a viable role for agents within foreign cultural activities, he says, stems from the fact that the field of Norwegian international cultural and arts relations represents an *entrepreneurial context*, defined as an unsatisfactory equilibrium, "in which things are not working particularly well, though no one seems to be able to break out". In particular, he refers to Norway's "underdog position" in terms of international cultural prominence compared to its Scandinavian neighbours Sweden (music), Denmark (film) and Finland (design): "It was a situation in need of entrepreneurial action in the form of creative partnerships between diplomacy and cultural industry in joint cultural diplomacy". According to Berge, the agent of this entrepreneurial action then profits from "the entrepreneurial role open[ing] up a range of legitimate and useful possibilities to diplomats, artists and cultural workers alike". Specifically, it allows to "balance[e] instrumental aims with artist autonomy, creating and maintaining (often heterogeneous) influential networks, operating the balance between promotion and the facilitation of projects, art and artists, negotiating local and domestic expectations and needs, etc". Another important element of this position is an increasing openness "to a broader range of agents than merely traditionally trained Foreign Service staff". This is, for instance, connected to a willingness to intentionally incorporate Norwegian artists into "the diplomatic loop", having them serve as a type of unofficial ambassadors of general Norwegian interests on a regular basis (Berge, 2017, pp. 274-285).

Without going into too much further detail, we can say that Berge sees these aspects as expressions of a new, dynamic and pragmatic cultural diplomacy, that through its networking capacities has “become an indispensable asset to its art world partners”, which, of course is further support for the notion of a “convergence” of values and interests discussed in segment 4.4.3. In short, compared to the situation described by Mangset in 1997, a “professional and pragmatic cooperation has replaced much of the tension that reigned in the field [and] the diplomacy and art field have gone from conflict and mistrust to a fruitful, symbiotic partnership” (Berge, 2017, p. 290).

4.5 Outlook

This chapter could have been concluded with what can be understood as the culmination of Berge’s research, where many of the perspectives that were brought to light in the preceding segments are integrated into one concentrated framework. As the three dominant knowledge/power regimes (cf. part 3.3.2.3) that he identifies as characteristic of the Norwegian foreign cultural policy discourse also serve as the main structuring principle for the analysis of empirical material from the guest of honour project, however, they are presented in the following chapter.

5 Analysis: The Norwegian Guest of Honour Project

5.1 Procedure

With the preparations leading up to the 2019 Frankfurt book fair going on over several years and compromising dozens of potentially relevant events, each of which bring with them a host of new statements, press coverage et cetera, it should be clear that any attempt to analyse the totality of the public discourse around the guest of honour project within the confinements of this thesis would be predestined to run into major issues tied to the sheer amount of material that would have to be dealt with. With the intention of striking an adequate balance between breadth (i.e. the number of texts and aspects that are dealt with) and depth (i.e. the amount of attention expended on each of them), the analysis is limited in three ways:

Firstly, it focuses on a limited number of texts that are tied to and/or gathered at selected events from different stages in the development of the project. These events and the empirical material tied to them are described in more detail in segment 5.2.

Secondly, it relies primarily on the conclusions of Berge's study (2017) to guide my choice of individual aspects that are investigated. In presenting the *knowledge/power regimes* that he identifies as characterizing features of the Norwegian foreign cultural policy discourse, we are not only provided with an integrating perspective on many of the aspects dealt with in chapter 4, but also a basis for comparison from which we can investigate how central aspects tied to the individual knowledge/power regimes are negotiated in the empirical material.

Lastly, it should be noted that the analysis is confined to the *Norwegian* perspective, meaning that it only takes into account statements and other texts produced by Norwegians or individuals directly involved in the planning and execution of the project on the Norwegian side.

Structurally, the chapter works its way from one knowledge/power regime to the next. Identifying their main features as they are described by Berge first, it draws on the results of chapter 4 to support their validity. The final section analyses how these knowledge/power regimes relate to the discourse around the guest of honour project: Using the empirical material described in segment 5.2, the discussion moves to how central aspects tied to the individual knowledge/power regimes are negotiated and asses

in how far these regimes are representative of the discourse around the guest of honour project.

5.2 Empirical Material

In the selection of empirical material, the aim is to include a variety of perspectives from different stages in the project's preparatory phase, investigating what could be called *snapshots* of the discourse at crucial points in its development. Furthermore, there is a focus on texts that hold a comparatively high degree of authority or *definitional power* in the discourse. While this is ultimately a subjective assessment, there are two main contributing factors that should clearly play a role in determining which material best fits this criterium:

To begin with, the question of *who* speaks through these texts is of considerable importance. For instance, the organisers and spokespeople of the project naturally play an important role in how it is perceived and executed, while the statements of high-ranking politicians and other dignitaries have the ability to give it credibility and weight in the public perception – or, of course, to challenge such notions if they would so choose.

Secondly, the *arena* in which texts are produced is not only determining the size and composition of the audience they reach, but also highly constitutive of their *symbolic value*. An intentionally ceremonial setting, for instance, clearly adds to this dimension.

Based on these considerations and the limitations mentioned in the previous segment, these are the texts that will be taken into account in the analysis (listed in chronological order):

5.2.1 The bid book

The first text is the bid book penned by organising body NORLA (2016), which serves as the official application of then candidate for guest of honour status Norway to the Frankfurt book fair. Over the course of about thirty pages, it provides an overview of the project's official objectives and highlights the themes and topics that are to be given priority in the presentation. In addition to more formal information such as a first draft of the project's budget and organisational structure, it also presents the supposed

qualities of the Norwegian literary system, as well as a selection of acclaimed Norwegian writers.

5.2.2 Planning and input conference

Held on 26 April 2017 at *Sentralen* in Oslo, more than 250 participants gathered at the planning and input conference (“innspillskonferanse”) arranged by NORLA. Featuring a variety of contributions by representatives from the cultural and literary field, the most relevant items on the agenda for our considerations were:

- Director of NORLA Margit Walsø and project manager Halldór Guðmundsson greeting the audience and introducing the project
- State secretary Laila Bokhari’s opening speech
- A speech by Crown Princess of Norway Mette-Marit
- A panel on aspects like Norway’s envisaged goals, narrative and profile, with particularly relevant contributions by Halldór Guðmundsson, publisher Anne Gaithaug and Cathrine Pia Lund, director of Innovation Norway’s “Brand Norway” division.

Along with the rest of the conference, these contributions were recorded and transcribed by the author of this thesis.

5.2.3 Press conference and handover ceremony

The third and final important “milestone” (NORLA, 2016, p. 29) that will be included in my discussion is the 2018 Frankfurt book fair, i.e. the edition preceding Norway’s presentation as guest of honour in 2019. Held in October 2018, two events stand out:

- The official press conference for the “new” guest of honour on 11 October, featuring contributions by Norwegian minister of culture Trine Skei Grande and representatives of NORLA
- The “handover ceremony” on 14 October, during which the official “guest roll” was symbolically passed on to Margit Walsø and Halldór Guðmundsson by Medea Metreveli, representative of 2018’s guest of honour country Georgia.

I attended, recorded and transcribed the press conference personally, but the handover ceremony was transcribed from a recording of the official book fair live stream.

5.3 Three dominant knowledge/power regimes

As mentioned in chapter 4, Berge's analysis of the field of contemporary Norwegian foreign cultural policy cumulated in the identification of three dominant knowledge/power regimes that, following his argumentation, characterise the discourse in a concentrated fashion. Despite the fact that such an act necessarily involves a degree of abstraction and simplification, it is these processes of modelling complex empirical realities that makes research on such fields understandable and usable. As long as the research relates to a similar empirical background, such a classification allows us to take the results derived from one set of empirical material and use them to guide the investigation of another set of data. This tenet guides what follows. While the knowledge/power regimes are dealt with sequentially for the sake of readability and clarity, it will become apparent that they should be understood as highly interwoven, which means that certain aspects that are discussed in conjunction with one particular knowledge/power regime could also have been subsumed under another.

5.3.1 Internationalisation

The first dominant knowledge/power regime is "internationalization in itself, i.e. as an all-embracing concept or framework of rational behavior" (Berge, 2017, p. 293). In a great number of contexts, *not* relating to international perspectives and ambitions in rhetoric and practice is not a viable approach and can be said to effectively have become unthinkable for politicians, artists and art organisers alike. Among the main contributing factors³⁰ to the firm establishment of this "regime" are the low status that is ascribed to any actions or expressions that might attempt to circumvent this international perspective and the increasingly strong ties between local and global agents and spheres.

Taking into consideration what has been written in chapter 4, evidence of this conception's dominant status in the broader discourse is abundant. For instance, basically all trends that are referred to as relevant in official policy documents are framed in an international perspective. The intensifying ties to a global market for cultural goods and expressions are firmly established as an irreversible and undisputed fact that all actors on the wider cultural field need to take into consideration, with the predominant

³⁰ By nature, cause and effect are difficult to separate in these matters.

message from the “official” side being that opportunities of various kind outweigh the challenges that are associated with this development, for instance in the form of increased hopes tied to the international trade of cultural goods. As we have seen from Hylland and Berge’s report (2012), this enthusiasm is generally shared by artists and cultural workers and kindles their international ambitions as well as their desire for external input. It should have become clear that with this comes a pronounced need for specific international competence, and that herein lies one major reason for an increased openness to cross-sector collaboration, for example in the form of public and private co-operations, and an increased amalgamation of different discourses (culture, economy, foreign policy et cetera) in general. As we have seen in the contextualising segments on soft power activities (chapter 2), these tendencies of course are by no means limited to a foreign cultural policy context, and notions about the existence of a global competition or the importance of a favourable perception on the international stage are omnipresent as components of a widespread internationalisation knowledge/power regime on a large number of fields.

How then is this expressed and negotiated in the empirical material? Starting with the bid book, the international character of the project is emphasised from the very beginning, with the second of four main objectives for the project being to “[c]reate new international interest in Norwegian literature and provide penetration for many Norwegian authors internationally within a long-term perspective” (NORLA, 2016, p. 6). In this context, the book fair and, by extension, the German market is seen as a “gateway to the world” or a “first stop” (NORLA, 2016, pp. 6, 18) on the way to reaching a global audience – a notion that is mirrored verbatim by state secretary Laila Bokhari in her opening speech at the planning and input conference: “Germany has always been the most important foreign country for Norwegian literature. A gateway to the world”³¹. Statements like these, I would argue, reveal an interesting simultaneity: On the one hand, the privileged position and important role of host country Germany is emphasised, while the implicit undertone is that a *single* country, irrespective of its individual status, cannot be enough – the ultimate goals, it seems, has to be “the world”.

³¹ Original quote in Norwegian, my translation.

That this global ambition is closely connected to economic considerations is underlined at various points, for instance when the Norwegian government's support is said to be tied to "a clear objective of investment in cultural export", which "is to be elevated to a higher level and [...] to be maintained above the current level also in 2020 and afterwards" (NORLA, 2016, pp. 6, 23). It is further specified that "an investment in a cultural collaboration with Germany provides opportunities in the political sphere and for trade and industry" (p. 27). This cross-sectoral approach, of course, has been identified as a typical element of an internationalisation discourse. That the ambitions and expectations tied to the guest of honour project clearly go beyond what could be classified as classical cultural policy objectives (cf. 4.4.2) is also underlined in minister of culture Trine Skei Grande's speech at the press conference at the 2018 Frankfurt book fair, where she makes clear that the project is to be seen against the background of a number of international trends such as an increasing polarisation of publics and "illiberal forces that fight over being the loudest to tout statements that lead to an intensifying xenophobia and intolerance"³², with the guest of honour status being presented as a platform ("talerstol") for Norway to speak out against these tendencies. Unsurprisingly, she also does not forget to acknowledge the book fair's function as "the world's largest market place for books"³³, just as project manager Halldór Guðmundsson introduced the book fair as "the most important market place for translations and licenses", supporting its significance by referencing the number of nations and "journalists from all over the world"³⁴ that are present. Looking back at the body of grey literature investigated in segment 4.2, we can attest a clear similarity between the multi-faceted goals for foreign cultural activities stipulated there and the book fair specific intentions expressed here.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Cathrine Pia Lund in her function as director of the "Brand Norway" division at Innovation Norway is even more explicit in her contribution to the input and planning conference. Expressing a desire for an increase in exports, foreign investment and talent attraction, she emphasises the role that she wishes for the guest of honour project to play in the nation branding process that is presented as a prerequisite for a positive development in these domains. Highly relevant to our

³² Original quote in Norwegian, my translation.

³³ Original quote in Norwegian, my translation.

³⁴ Original quote in Norwegian, my translation.

considerations, she underscores that Norway lacks behind other countries (such as, in her example, the United Kingdom) in this regard and is to catch up in the international perspective, whereby she firmly establishes a conception of the countries of the world as rivals in a global competition that it is crucial to (successfully) participate in.

Related to this, another interesting aspect is that “the global” is not only presented as the ultimate point of reference for the project’s ambitions, but also frequently appears to be the most relevant scale that past and current achievements are measured by. For instance, in its presentation of the Norwegian literary system’s features, the bid book makes every effort to emphasise aspects like the “world class dissemination of literature” or the digitalisation efforts that are claimed to be “unique in a global context” (NORLA, 2016, pp. 7, 24), while the minister of culture in the aforementioned speech presents the Norwegian people as “perhaps the most avid readers in the world”³⁵ and emphasises that, in relative terms, no other language might have as many full-time writers. Speaking of these writers, the same holds true for how Norwegian authors are presented. Instead of referring to domestic accomplishments, it is virtually always international accomplishments that are mentioned as proof of their success. Accordingly, then, the criteria that are applied almost exclusively refer to an international context. For instance, the number of languages that books are translated to are a common measure, and where sales figures are mentioned it is always the number of copies that were sold worldwide that is quoted. Similarly, whether talking about specific genres like children’s literature or *Nordic Noir* (“an internationally known trademark”(NORLA, 2016, p. 18)) or Norwegian literature as a whole, their recent “flourishing” (NORLA, 2016, p. 15) is directly linked to their positive reception on a global scale. For instance, state secretary Laila Bokhari supports her claim of Norwegian literature being in such a period of flourishing (“blomstringstid”) with Jo Nesbø’s success “from Seattle to Singapore” and the fact that Karl Ove Knausgård’s most recent publications are reviewed in major international newspaper such as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (perhaps a nod to the organising city) and the *New York Times*. This tendency is further underlined in various other instances, i.a. by the authors of the bid book referring to the *New York Times*’ bestseller list (NORLA, 2016, p. 13) and the fact

³⁵ Original quote in Norwegian, my translation.

that they choose to leave it to an American critic writing in *The New Yorker* to testify to the merits of Knausgård's *My Struggle* series (NORLA, 2016, p. 17), or Norwegian publisher Anne Gaathaug (at the input and planning conference) reiterating on the appearance of various Norwegian books on the German and Italian bestseller lists and, strongly emphasised, the inclusion of Åsne Seierstad's Breivik biography *One of Us* in the *New York Times*' "10 Best Books of 2015" list. All these examples support the impression that in this discourse, *true* success is necessarily characterised by its international (and, of course, commercial) dimension.

The emphasis of the international dimension of Norwegian literature also extends to the characterisation of its subject matter. For example, it seems hardly incidental that in the bid book, global "explorers and adventurers" like Nansen, Amundsen and Heyerdahl are used to introduce Norwegian non-fiction literature, only to then be linked to contemporary "adventurous authors" (p. 13) like Åsne Seierstad and Erika Fatland, who both have drawn on experiences made travelling the world in their literary careers. Interestingly, this particular kind of subject matter is mentioned *before* giving an overview of recent works that have nature as their main point of reference – perhaps the prototypical mental image a general public associates with Norway (cf. 5.3.3). The impression that the bid books endeavours to establish a strong connection between Norway and the rest of the world as part of the country's cultural tradition is further strengthened when famous writers and artists from the "golden age in Norwegian literature"³⁶ such as Ibsen, Munch and Hamsun are mentioned, emphasising that the art they brought "out into the world" was "of an international standard", but also that they "viewed themselves as participants in a global culture" (p. 8). Consequently, an explicit intention is for the project to "draw lines of connection from our classical legacy to contemporary literature" (p. 8), exemplified in the bid book by following up on Henrik Ibsen as "the father of the modern drama" with contemporary playwright Jon Fosse. This way of connecting past and present is particularly noteworthy because it implies a cultural consistency that could be critically questioned, but also because it illustrates the wish to combine notions of a strong tradition with those of a cosmopolitan outlook as a defining feature of Norwegian authors and, by extension, Norway in general.

³⁶ i.e. the end of the 19th century.

Another interesting way of drawing a connection between the literary tradition and an international orientation is to be found in Crown Princess of Norway Mette-Marit's speech at the input and planning conference. Emphasising the role that literature has played in the nation building process and, according to her, continues to play in matters of individual and national identity, she claims that literature "reminds us of our place in the world", and "contributes to building us up – as individuals, as members of society, as Norwegians, as Europeans and, last but not least, as citizens of the world."³⁷ Literature's function and mandate is, in other words, presented as strongly tied to a national frame of reference, but is also claimed to be able to transcend this scale in the construction and mediation of identity. Evidently, this aspect will also be relevant in conjunction with the "cultural nation" knowledge/power regime.

5.3.2 Professionalism and quality

Intimately tied to many of the aspects touched upon above, Berge (2017, p. 294) identifies the circumstance that "[t]o maintain professionalism and quality of a high international standard is seen a central prerequisite of Norwegian foreign cultural thinking" as a second dominant knowledge/power regime. Fuelled by the ambition to develop and maintain relevance in an international context, he argues, it is seen as imperative to adhere to a strict standard of artistic excellence and professionalism. Supporting this, the latest cultural white paper, for instance, stipulates quality as the first priority and very basis of cultural policy, from which all other functions are to follow (cf. quote in segment 4.2, Kulturdepartementet (2018, p. 8)). As Berge explained in his paper "Norsk utenrikskulturell virksomhet i endring" (cf. segment 4.4.3), as well as in conjunction with his reflections on the practical implementation of Norwegian foreign cultural policy that we have looked at in 4.4.4, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' adaption of the particular, elitist conception of quality that has been championed by the most influential arts field agents (including, ultimately, the advisory organisations) was a major enabler for the pragmatic and largely tensionless co-operation that we see today: For instance, as the general notion is that good image policy is highly intertwined with (artistic) quality (cf. 4.4.2 / Hylland and Berge (2012, p. 68)), this helped consolidate

³⁷ Original quote in Norwegian, my translation.

artistic (cultural policy) with instrumental (foreign policy) aims. In short, a focus on quality is seen as a prerequisite for foreign cultural activities to make an impact in other domains and achieve their desired effects (Berge, 2017, p. 294), and simultaneously legitimises the involvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other “not strictly art field” agents. The clearest indication of this sentiment’s validity in regards to the guest of honour project lies in the fact that discussions around potential conflicts of interest between different parties, or even just hints at such issues, are hard to come by.

As we have seen in the previous segment, the empirical material suggests that within the discourse around the guest of honour project, notions of (literary) quality are closely tied to international standards and points of reference. When it comes to the provenance of this quality, however, every effort is made to tie it to the specific national literary system as its “foundation”³⁸. In the bid book, for instance, it is explicitly claimed that

The high quality and diversity of contemporary Norwegian literature in all genres arises out of the country’s literary system of standard agreements and the strong public support of literature; and has roots in the country’s diversity of language and expression. (NORLA, 2016, p. 3)

While the aspect of diversity will be discussed presently, let us first take a closer look at how this system is portrayed. “[W]ell-organized” and “well-developed” (NORLA, 2016, pp. 4, 11), one aspect that is frequently mentioned are the considerable contributions and involvement of the public sector, e.g. in the form of various effective state purchasing and remuneration schemes and an adherence to fixed book prices (pp. 10-11). On an international scale, it is claimed that “[t]he export of literature from Norway is undergoing strong development as a consequence of a solid increase in authors, a long term investment in literature and culture on the part of the government, and a professional book industry” (p. 18). Similar aspects are highlighted by Margit Walsø at the 2018 press conference, stating that “it is our dream to show how this system bears fruit”. Related to this and perhaps more relevant to our considerations, it is striking how much emphasis is put on depicting the interactions between various parts of the overall system as highly collaborative and largely harmonic. For instance, it is stressed how various interest groups “promote their own interests, but with a close interaction

³⁸ Original quote by Laila Bokhari at the input and planning conference: “Det norske litterære systemet [...] danner fundamentet som gjør det mulig for litteraturen å blomstre”.

through agreements regulating the relations between them and regulating the market” (NORLA, 2016, p. 10). At various points, it is underlined that this collaborative approach is also one of the main driving forces behind the guest of honour project, and an important feature of its organisation. In one of the very first sentences uttered at the input and planning conference, Margit Walsø stresses that “it is a prerequisite that many take part in this effort”³⁹, and also state secretary Laila Bokhari and Crown Princess Mette-Marit make every effort to frame the project as a joint effort that is carried by “a united book industry and other cultural players”⁴⁰. It is also explicitly open to collaborations with other industries and businesses: “We will invite stakeholders from trade and industry, such as from the travel industry, food export, resource management and others with activities in Germany to take part in a broad collaboration” (NORLA, 2016, p. 30) – an approach which e.g. Cathrine Pia Lund of Innovation Norway praised the organizers for in her contribution to the input and planning conference.⁴¹ All this suggests that the various parties involved do indeed cooperate in a largely tensionless and intentionally synergistic relationship – or at least endeavour to give off that impression. Non-cultural objectives are presented as a welcome and obvious component of the project, with potentially problematic aspects of such a conflation not being publicly considered.

Moving on, a closer look at the empirical material reveals the organisers’ clear preference for speaking of “networking” activities when referring to such collaborative efforts. For instance, it is stated that “NORLA is [...] developing a cross-sectoral cultural network to create synergies and contribute to strengthening the export of the creative industries in Norway” and “will build on and develop its large network in the German and international book industry and translators in the work leading up to 2019” (NORLA, 2016, pp. 3, 19), while Halldór Guðmundsson (at the input and planning conference) underlines NORLA’s capacity as a network builder in describing how the organisation can

³⁹ Original quote in Norwegian, my translation.

⁴⁰ Original quote in Norwegian by Mette-Marit, my translation.

⁴¹ Here, I am primarily referring to this exact quote from Cathrine Pia Lund’s speech (in Norwegian): “Og da har jeg lyst til å berømme Margit og NORLA for å invitere så bredt så tidlig. Sikre at håven er kjempevid i starten sånn at alle innspill kommer med. Det synes jeg dere gjør veldig flott og vi er kjempeglad for å få lov å være med så tidlig i prosessen. Hvordan bruker vi selve bokmessen, hvordan inviterer vi allerede nå næringslivet bredt til å bruke denne happeningen til å skaffe seg nye kunder også og bruke de forfatterne og den litteraturen og den kunsten og kulturen vi har som en spydspiss for å åpne opp enda bredere og hva gjør vi i høstefasen? Det har blitt tatt vel opp tidligere i dag.”

help other parties profit from the project. Even though the connection is not made explicit in the empirical material, this particular portrayal is rather obviously connected to the organisers' wish of embodying a particular conception of professionalism, which again is easily connected to the one described by Berge.

Based on my observations, I am confident in claiming that another component of this conception of professionalism becomes apparent in the organisers' insistence on adhering to *long-term* approaches – be it in statements on their day-to-day operations („NORLA works in a targeted and long-term manner to fulfil the foundation's mandate”(NORLA, 2016, p. 18)), or the guest of honour project in particular:

We want to emphasize that Norwegian cultural export is to be elevated to a higher level and this is to be maintained above the current level also in 2020 and afterwards. This means that our goal is increased resources for a higher level of activity for Norwegian literature abroad in extension of the Guest of Honour project. (NORLA, 2016, p. 23)

This conception is also embraced by representatives of the book industry, such as publisher Anne Gaathaug, who at the input and planning conference underlines the importance of longevity by claiming that “the real work starts after 2019.”⁴²

As was mentioned in segment 4.4.3, Berge (2013) identified the establishment of a particular conception of diversity within the field as an effect of the developments he described, with efforts to present diversity in regards to categories such as gender, ethnicity or degree of professionalism being toned down in favour of an increased breadth in terms of different genres. In investigating how this can be related to the empirical material, a first observation is that diversity and breadth in and of themselves are frequently presented as outstanding features of Norwegian literature. In the bid book, for example, it is claimed that “the willingness to experiment and a breadth of expression and themes are defining features of Norwegian [literature]”, “Norwegian literature is characterized by a great diversity and strong voices within all genres” and that “today Norwegian non-fiction is first and foremost characterized by breadth and variation in terms of genres and theme” (NORLA, 2016, pp. 7, 13, 14), with more examples easily found. Here however it should be noted that, despite this clear emphasis on the breadth of genres and topics that are represented within successful Norwegian literature, other expressions of diversity also are highlighted. This is perhaps primarily

⁴² Original quote in Norwegian, my translation.

true for linguistic diversity, which is presented as a traditional feature of Norwegian culture, which, it is claimed, “gives status to dialects [and] provides for an ongoing renewal of the awareness of language in authors and readers, and [...] is now undergoing further development in a multicultural Norway” (NORLA, 2016, p. 7). This tendency to tie linguistic to cultural diversity, and to present this diversity as a valuable asset, is also underlined when Halldór Guðmundsson at the 2018 press conference states that he wants the public “[n]ot only to hear about literature in Norwegian, but also to hear about literature in the Sami languages” and expresses the intention to “take part in new cultural dialogues”, hinting at an overall slightly broader conception of diversity than the one Berge was referring to.

Another aspect that should be mentioned in this context concerns the organisers’ intention to “use the occasion to spotlight many new names for a new generation of German readers” (NORLA, 2016, p. 7). While this statement of course also hints at an unsurprising wish to address a diverse audience, the focus on first-time or emerging authors is of more immediate interest to our considerations. Under the title *New voices* (“Nye stemmer”), a program aimed at presenting and developing so far relatively unknown and predominantly younger Norwegian writers was launched.⁴³ As Margit Walsø says at the 2018 press conference, the Norwegian guest of honour program “will build on the international success of a whole line of authors. From this we wish to strengthen Norwegian literature’s foothold in Germany and open up for new voices in the German book market”. The connection is also made explicit in the bid book:

It is important to call attention to the literary production of individual authors who have already been introduced in other languages, in order to provide them with even greater penetration. NORLA also consciously utilizes them to publicize other and new authors, in other words, to use the success stories to best advantage. We have seen that such flagships open doors for new authors. At the same time, NORLA always keeps an eye out for new voices. Recruitment from the breadth of Norwegian literature is important with an eye to spotlighting new talents of interest for publication in other languages. There is therefore a particular connection between an investment in both successful authors and literary breadth. (NORLA, 2016, p. 20)

While this too could be seen as evidence of a broader diversity concept, it can also be understood as being primarily focused around the “flagship” approach, described in 4.4.1 as a typical strategy originating from an elitist ideology.

⁴³ <https://norla.no/nb/nye-stemmer>

5.3.3 A cultural nation

As “his” third and final knowledge/power regime, then, Berge (2017, p. 294) identifies the common practice “to think of (and hence to promote) Norway as a cultural nation”, of which we can find ample evidence in the cultural white paper (Kulturdepartementet, 2018, pp. 42-44), as well as, on a very concrete level, in this notion’s purported significance in relation to cultural tourism and the *nation brand* (cf. segment 4.2). As he says, this can also be understood as an alternative to the traditional practice of identifying and positioning Norway predominantly in reference to its spectacular nature. Furthermore, Berge claims, this implies the believe “that a global cultural conversation exists[;] a conversation in which it is crucially important for any nation with the ambition to be seen as developed to take part” (2017, p. 294). Indeed, notions about the crucial role that culture is purported to play when it comes to the advancement of liberal values, democracy et cetera are not hard to come by, with the explicit ambition often being for Norway to, despite its modest size and geopolitical significance, be a considerable voice in these matters.

In the empirical material from the guest of honour project, we are confronted with the concept of the “cultural nation” so to say from the very beginning, with the bid book formulating the ambition to “establish a strong awareness in Germany and internationally of Norway as a modern-day cultural nation” as one of four main objectives (NORLA, 2016, p. 3). That this designation generally seems to hold a high status in the discourse is also made apparent when Margit Walsø uses it as an accolade for 2018’s guest of honour country Georgia, immediately after having formally taken over the symbolic “guest scroll” at the handover ceremony: “It’s been a great inspiration to see the whole Georgian presentation this week [...]. And to see how you have presented yourself as a modern cultural nation [...], I think it’s really, really great what you have done.” An important observation is that both instances speak of a *modern* cultural nation. Here, the initial focus is on how different actors endeavour to establish the notion of Norway as a cultural nation in the first place, before taking a closer look at what exactly this distinction is taken to entail and trying to develop a clearer picture of the connections that are more or less explicitly drawn between a country having obtained this status and its assumed capabilities on the international stage.

The first clearly distinguishable discursive tactic in the construction of Norway as a cultural nation lies in the way that matters of cultural heritage are made use of. Besides the already mentioned efforts to underline the role that literature and culture are suggested to have played in the nation building process (cf. the segment on internationalisation), easily readable as deliberate attempts to evoke a conception of Norway as a nation “built on culture”, important figures in the country’s literary history are used to naturalise Norway’s place among other (arguably more traditionally seen as such) cultural nations – for instance when Crown Princess Mette-Marit at the input and planning conference rhetorically asks: “What would England have been without Shakespeare, Germany without Goethe, and what would Norway have been without Ibsen?”. Similar attempts can be found in the bid book, where the reader’s knowledge of distinguished Norwegian artists’ biographical connections to such countries (and particularly Germany), are used to imply the existence of a “shared culture history” (NORLA, 2016, p. 27). By emphasizing these historical aspects, of course, a clear connection to present circumstances is already more or less explicitly suggested. Nevertheless, the organisers and supporters of the project seem eager to also back up the country’s claim to the title of a cultural nation with arguments that are more firmly rooted in its current condition, such as the recent successes of Norwegian writers, the well-developed literary system with firm public support and a focus on recruitment and innovation, as well as the presentation of Norway as “a nation of readers” (NORLA, 2016, pp. 12, 21), all of which have been touched upon above.

What then makes Norway a (supposedly) *modern* cultural nation and how is this communicated? Two main factors/aspects, I would argue, are used to emphasise the aspect of modernity and, to a degree, to set the country apart:

First off, while it is acknowledged that “[a]ll nations are striving to become greener and to reorganize society to accommodate digitalization and alternative energy forms”, the bid book claims that “viewed in comparison with the European countries [...] , Norway is in a position of particularly dramatic readjustment”, primarily because of its reliance on natural resources. Against this background, then, efforts are made to underline the country’s outstanding ability to innovate and overcome these challenges, for instance by stressing that “Norway is in the forefront with respect to digitalization of services and ways of acquiring knowledge and information” (NORLA, 2016, pp. 4, 24).

Secondly, there is a clear tendency to present a diverse society as an asset that Norway is willing and able to make use of, rather than framing this circumstance as a potential problem. This is perhaps most clearly expressed by cultural minister Trine Skei Grande at the 2018 press conference: “an ideal society knows that it’s strong not in spite of its differences, but because of them”.

Following the reasoning that emerges in the empirical material, these circumstances foster a high degree of creativity that enters into a dynamic relationship with the country’s cultural production: the “rich variety and breadth [...] influences and finds expression in the cultural and social life of Norway today” (NORLA, 2016, p. 7). This “formula”, then, forms an important part of the message that is to be expressed through the guest of honour project:

Today’s large-scale resettlements are changing the world we live in, creating new insights and orientations. The modern multicultural Norway provides the basis for the road we will travel. We want to show that creativity can contribute to changing the world. (NORLA, 2016, p. 4)

That this approach can and should also be understood as an attempt to position such a “Norwegian way” as an alternative to less progressively-oriented political concepts (which, as is known, have been gaining in popularity during the preparatory phase of the guest of honour project), becomes evident when recalling the previously mentioned statements by Trine Skei Grande concerning the rise of “illiberal forces” or when Laila Bokhari at the input and planning conference claims that art and literature are “a counterforce to authoritarian and populist tendencies”⁴⁴.

Further evidence that this particular self-conception entails a clear sense of mission and entitlement can be found when looking at how the book fair itself is conceptualised – being “one of the most important symbols and ambassadors for democratic values”⁴⁵ and an “arena to defend and spread free speech”⁴⁶ makes it “a unique occasion to make visible what characterizes our society and our values [...] which

⁴⁴ Original quote in Norwegian: “Kunsten og litteraturen lar seg ikke lett stoppe av grenser eller murer. [...] De bygger ned frykt for de andre og de er en motkraft mot autoritære og populistiske tendenser.”

⁴⁵ Original quote in Norwegian by state secretary Laila Bokhari at the input and planning conference: “Bokmessen i Frankfurt er en markeds plass hvor bøker og rettigheter kjøpes og selges, men [...] også en av de viktigste symbolene og representant for de demokratiske verdiene: ytringsfrihet og skapefrihet.”

⁴⁶ Original quote in Norwegian by Crown Princess Mette-Marit at the input and planning conference: “Og det er ingen tvil om at ytringsfriheten står under press. Og dette gir bokmessen i Frankfurt en helt sentral rolle som arena for å forsvare og spre det frie ord - både i form av fiksjon og fakta.”

are also reflected in literature and other cultural expressions.”⁴⁷ Here, of course, we see once again how heavily a commitment to the concept of “free speech” is emphasised, with further examples spanning the entirety of the empirical material all the way up to the hand-over ceremony.⁴⁸ Together, I would argue, the aspects mentioned here are quite illustrative of how the evoked notion of a modern-day cultural nation is implicitly tied to the authority to speak out on overarching ideological or political issues on the international stage – or, as Berge perhaps would put it, to take part in “a global cultural conversation” Berge (2017, p. 294).

A slightly less clearly pronounced, yet still interesting aspect that Berge’s observations invite us to investigate is the way nature is dealt with within the confines of the guest of honour project and how this relates to the ambition to position Norway as a cultural nation (cf. the beginning of this segment). Here, we can see evidence in the empirical material that a strong tendency to associate Norway with nature is seen as potentially problematic, for example when Cathrine Pia Lund of Innovation Norway in her talk at the input and planning conference uses an “association map” to illustrate her ambition to have literature and the book fair act as a “spearhead” that can help bring about a less narrow outward perception of the country and spread the story of “the modern Norway”⁴⁹ – on the map, the words “fjord” and “northern lights” were the most prominent terms along with “oil”, “fish” and “expensive”. As Halldór Guðmundsson acknowledges at the same event however, referencing his past experience as leader of the Icelandic guest of honour project in 2011, clichés and preconceptions are hard to avoid⁵⁰, and in the case of Norway, this will inevitably include tendencies to emphasise nature. In his words, then, these clichés should be used to develop „the new, the critical,

⁴⁷ Original quote in Norwegian by state secretary Laila Bokhari at the input and planning conference: “Det er da også en tid hvor vi vil ha en unik mulighet til å synliggjøre hva som kjennetegner vårt samfunn og våre verdier. Hva Norge er, og hva vi står for, gjenspeiles også i litteratur og andre kunst- og kulturuttrykk.”

⁴⁸ Original quote in German: “Wir werden die Autoren mitnehmen, nicht über Literatur sprechen, sondern sich selber vorstellen lassen. Mit Büchern und mit wichtigen Themen, und mit der Verpflichtung zur Meinungsfreiheit, die Jürgen [Boos, President and CEO of Frankfurt Book Fair; note from the author] auch erwähnt hat.”

⁴⁹ Original quote in Norwegian: “[...] for det er jo ikke det vi vil bli oppfattet som. Så da må vi jo bruke denne anledningen til å utarbeide fortellingen om Norge. Den vi sammen skal fortelle, det moderne Norge.”

⁵⁰ His example being that, despite an explicit internal directive not to reference the false preconception of Icelanders believing in elves, one of the most popular books on the German market around that time, titled “Wo Elfen noch helfen” ended up doing exactly that.

the creative”.⁵¹ While no concrete examples of how this could be done are given, similarly worded intentions are also to be found in the bid book, which states that “We want to profile Norway as a modern nation with a future orientation in a stimulating and creative relation with nature” and “We want to create a composite impression of Norway as a universe where modernity, nature, the environment and human beings challenge each other in mutual interaction” (NORLA, 2016, pp. 9, 25).

On the one hand, one could say, nature thus appears to be acknowledged and positioned as an inevitable component of the general presentation, which becomes apparent when the bid book references its “renaissance in Norwegian film, literature, visual art and journalism, something which finds expression in a wave of books about nature and life in the great outdoors” (NORLA, 2016, p. 14) or when one takes a closer look at the project’s visual design language (though this aspect is not to be dealt with further in the confinements of this thesis). However, and this seems important in relation to the aspects touched upon above, the empirical material that we have dealt with simultaneously suggests a distinct wish to transcend the positioning of nature as a strong element in its own right, finding expression in the tendency to conceptually embed it in the larger context of a purported system of creative and productive interplay between nature and culture. As an alternative to conceiving of nature as culture’s antithesis, one could argue that this particular way of positioning nature conveniently allows the project’s organizers to discursively strengthen the conception of Norway as a modern cultural nation.

5.4 On the results

Taken together, these results demonstrate that the particular ways in which the Norwegian guest of honour project at the 2019 Frankfurt book fair is conceptualised, planned and presented by its organisers and main supporters are, as was initially insinuated, by and large firmly rooted in an existing foreign cultural policy discourse, whose remarkable strength is confirmed by this result. For each of the three knowledge/power regimes identified as constitutive of this discourse by Berge, ample

⁵¹ Original quote in Norwegian: “Men vi skal også vise det nye, det kritiske, det kreative. Og hvordan kan vi benytte de klisjeene som finnes til å utvikle dette?”

evidence was found to support their individual validity. Nevertheless, it seems advisable to briefly point out some of the subtle ways in which their concrete manifestation in the empirical material might differ from or add to Berge's general description.

For the first knowledge/power regime (internationalisation), whose strength is perhaps most striking, it should be noted that this strength can clearly not just be attributed to the by its very nature international practical character of the project. Instead, the analysis showed that the elevated status of "the international" permeates practically all facets of how it is conceived of, how it is communicated and how it is related to other activities.

That professionalism is a desirable feature of the project's and its organisers' public image can be no surprise. More interesting, then, is the question *how* this feature is communicated and what its components are taken to be. Here, the analysis was able to demonstrate that there is a clear rhetorical focus on the aspects of networking, cross-sector cooperation and long-term approaches as crucial components of professionalism.

Finally, the analysis confirmed the importance of the *cultural nation* notion, but also exposed how this notion receives a noteworthy "modern" modification and investigated the interesting attempts to reconcile this with the conception of Norway as a nation defined by its nature.

All of these aspects, then, seem deserving of further, more focused investigations.

6 Conclusion

Besides having confirmed the initial suspicion about the project's general character and having managed to expose and discuss interesting individual traits of the Norwegian guest of honour project at the Frankfurt book fair, this thesis offers a comparatively comprehensive overview of contemporary research and thinking about the field of Norwegian foreign cultural activities.

To solidify the understanding of this field's background, its conceptional origins were retraced to a larger *soft power* context, before exploring its concrete manifestations through both original investigations and existing research. The recapitulation of fundamental discourse theory as well as a closer look at Berge's discursive approach proved beneficial to the comprehension of this research and helped set the tone and focal points for the analysis. In particular, Berge's knowledge/power regimes provided a suitable and much needed structuring principle that, although constituting an unavoidable limitation of scope, made it possible to revisit many previously touched upon aspects in a concentrated manner and to fruitfully relate them to the empirical material that was gathered.

Despite this relatively broad approach having been a conscious choice, guided by the wish to most effectively expand my own knowledge of the subject, it ought to be acknowledged that a more focused, narrower investigation could have proven to be beneficial in terms of productively contributing to a scientific context. A number of pointers as to which individual aspects are particularly deserving of such an investigation have been given in the analysis chapter.

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