

Assigning Cultural Values

Programme for Cultural Research 2008 – 2012

Work programme

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Research Programme on Assigning Cultural Values

1. Summary

The Research Programme on Assigning Cultural Values (KULVER) is the Research Council of Norway's programme for cultural research for the period 2008 to 2012. The programme seeks to promote basic research of high scientific merit that sheds light on issues related to the assignment of cultural values – how cultural expressions and phenomena are assigned value and how these are transformed and challenged through dynamic processes. The programme will focus special attention on aesthetisation/aesthetic practices. Within this framework, the programme board seeks research projects in the following areas:

- Artistic fields
- Everyday life
- Forms of knowledge
- Cultural heritage and the politics of memory
- Construction of identities
- Interaction between artistic fields and other fields of practice

2. Objectives

The programme's overall objective is to enhance and further develop cultural research through basic studies on the theme of assigning cultural values with focus on aesthetisation/aesthetic practices. The programme seeks to generate knowledge about how cultural phenomena are assigned value and how cultural value is changed, displaced, transferred and acquired. This will be achieved by:

- promoting basic research of high scientific merit, development of the research field, and scientific self-reflection;
- enhancing humanities-oriented cultural research;
- fostering internationalisation and multi- and interdisciplinary cooperation;
- encouraging the use of international perspectives;
- enhancing the social relevance of cultural research;
- promoting increased publication and dissemination of research findings.

3. Background

3.1 Previous programmes for cultural research

Cultural research has been a major area of activity for the Research Council of Norway and its predecessor the Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities (NAVF) since 1986. The KULT programmes I and II on dissemination of culture and traditions ran up to 1997, after which the Programme for Cultural Studies took over. This was concluded in 2002, and in 2007 its successor, the Programme for Cultural Research (KULFO), will conclude. The programmes have had annual budgets of NOK 12-16 million, funded primarily through

general allocations from the Ministry of Education and Research and about NOK 2 million annually from the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs.

Over time the emphasis of the KULT programmes on what constitutes Norwegian-ness shifted more toward the contemporary cultural situation, with focus on complexity, change and cultural analysis in general. Active, experimentally innovative dissemination activity has been a priority, especially in the earlier programmes.

The programmes on cultural research have been the only Research Council programmes to be targeted directly toward the humanities. This special focus on the humanities is in itself an important reason to continue this type of initiative.

3.2 Experiences

The programmes on cultural research have been important for Norwegian cultural researchers in that the programmes have offered opportunities to conduct research on new topics and in new areas. The programmes have also helped to generate new ways of organising humanities research – through larger and, in some cases, interdisciplinary projects involving several researchers. There is also reason to believe that the programmes have played a role in linking cultural research to social processes and issues, and in so doing have shown that the humanities can make a vital contribution to the public debate.

The KULFO programme, which will be concluded in 2007, has encouraged the use of cultural analytical perspectives and has not prioritised specific areas of research objects. Focus has been placed on the cultural implications of activities, practices, regimes of knowledge and public policy, and the programme has maintained a very broad project portfolio in terms of themes and areas of interest. Some may view this as a weakness since the projects have little in common, implying that the whole gives less value than the sum of its parts. But it may also be seen as a strength since it illustrates the wide range of topics that cultural research can investigate and provide insight into. The question may be raised, however, as to whether the KULFO programme has been able to adequately achieve the objective of challenging the humanities. Central humanities subjects and research communities, whether in philosophy, religious science or aesthetic subjects (except for literature), were under-represented in the programme's pool of applicants or were not successful in the competition for funding. In the latter case, the projects often isolated their research objects too much in relation to their cultural and social contexts. In other words, in the view of the programme board, many project proposals contained too little *cultural* research, understood as research that in addition to studying humans and human activities or impacts, contextualises the research object so that it extends beyond itself to its various surroundings.

The programmes for cultural research are funded primarily through general allocations to humanities research. This fact, along with the experience gained from the more recent programmes, indicates that a new programme must strive to identify and refine perspectives and areas of research that will appeal more to humanistic cultural research and core subjects in the humanities. Linguistic, philosophical, historical and aesthetic subjects have a vital and necessary role to play when research seeks to expand and critically challenge society's and individuals' self-understanding. The new Programme on Assigning Cultural Values (KULVER) will nonetheless make room for and be open to interdisciplinary and social science approaches.

3.3 New programme for cultural research: Process and preparatory efforts

In spring 2006 the Research Council invited academic and research communities in the humanities and social sciences, as well as key users of cultural research, to offer input on the approach of a new cultural research programme with regard to profile, content, possible areas of research, etc. About 50 comments were submitted, which provided a solid foundation for determining the content and priorities of the programme. In late-autumn the same year, the administration appointed a reference group which assisted in the efforts to formulate a programme outline.¹ This outline has been included in the programme board's mandate and has established a clear direction for future efforts with the work programme. All external input and other information about the process have been published on the KULFO programme's website.

3.4 Research and knowledge needs

Much of the input points out the need to enhance research on the role of art and cultural life in society, including the aesthetisation of everyday life. Other input emphasises the media and communication, and still other comments focus on cultural heritage and the politics of memory. Cultural policy is mentioned as well.

Closely tied to the need to enhance research on art and culture in a broad sense is the need for knowledge about aesthetic practices in everyday life, the media, politics and religion. The designed and the rhetorical in relation to society and the individual seem to be taking on greater importance. The design and shaping of the public sphere is the subject of much discussion, as is the focus on the body and fashion.

In today's society, the individual's construction of identity appears to be a more complicated project than in the past. Self-staging has become an important aspect of individual identity construction for many people. The same is true for the articulation of various collective identities through the politics of memory as well as the construction of cultural heritage. It will therefore be crucial that research focusing on aesthetic practices addresses factors such as power, social attachment, gender, ethnicity, religion and politics, to name just a few possible points of contact.

Much of the input on the new cultural research programme coincides with recommendations for research relevant to cultural policy which are presented in the Research Council's report *Kunnskapsbehov i kultursektoren* ("The Need for Knowledge in the Cultural Sector") (2003). These recommendations have received very little follow up from the ministries and research establishment. Both local and central cultural authorities, organisations and practitioners require more research-based knowledge. Although a new programme for cultural research neither can nor should meet all the needs for knowledge mentioned in the report, the programme will seek to generate new, relevant insight, for example, in the areas of "aesthetic practices in movement" and "institutions within the cultural field".

¹ The reference group was comprised of Ellen Aslaksen, Arts Council Norway; Kjersti Bale, University of Oslo; Thomas Dahl, SINTEF; Narve Fulsås, University of Tromsø; Oddrun Sæter, Oslo University College; and Magne Velure, Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs.

4. Perspectives and priorities for new research activity

4.1 Assigning cultural values

The programme board has identified the theme of assigning cultural values as the primary focus of the programme. This theme puts emphasis on that which is process-oriented, historically changeable, complex and controversial in all forms of cultural phenomena, their reciprocal relationships and their connection to social, economic and political power. The programme board therefore seeks research that investigates cultural phenomena in relation to the exchanges, negotiations and interactions they are a part of, rather than viewing them in isolation.

The fact that cultural phenomena are assigned value implies that a hierarchisation occurs within various symbol systems, discourses and practices, which entails passing judgment on quality, taste and values. The concept of assigning value points in the direction of changes and displacements with regard to such processes. It also points toward issues related to power and control. How is cultural value established, reproduced, challenged, displaced, acquired, redefined, transformed or dissolved? Questions such as these emphasise how, for example, more or less flexible cultural canons must be viewed in light of the exchanges continually occurring between what is referred to as high and low culture (i.e. art and more prestigious practices versus pastime activities and entertainment and recreational culture), between local and global culture, and between older and newer culture. Processes involving the cultural elements which are identified as cultural heritage and which are made the object of identity-constructing politics of memory provide examples of how canonisation produces specific social consequences. The focus on exchange, negotiation and interaction underscores how such variation, in addition to being viewed as dynamic processes, must be seen as relational – as relationships between various cultural or sub-cultural practices as well as within the individual cultural practice. The controversial aspect of assigning cultural values is viewed as an expression of the differences, which may be as telling as they are paradoxical.

4.1.1 Variation in time and space

The theme of assigning cultural values is always controversial, whether at the local or global level, at a given point in time or over the course of time. From a contemporary perspective, for example, it should be mentioned that cultural meetings and cultural conflicts, as well as issues involving cultural integration, play a vital role when cultural values are assigned. The programme board would like to see the theme of assigning cultural values viewed in connection with cultural heterogeneity and mutual integration processes: How cultural expressions and patterns are created, received, saved, established, represented and distributed are key factors in the process of assigning cultural values. The media and technology therefore play a central role in these processes.

The cultural field, both in a broad and narrow sense, has always been a point of contact where linguistic, historic, local and global, ethnic, political, religious and gender-related variations have come together, been processed and emerged. Consequently, the study of cultural diversity involves cultural variation over time. The programme board seeks projects that aim to make a specific humanities-oriented contribution to the issues outlined above. The historical perspective may be viewed as a fundamental dimension of humanities research. Priority will therefore be given to research that either takes its point of departure in historical research questions that are angled in relation to contemporary, socially relevant issues, or the opposite, that are based on contemporary, socially relevant research questions angled in relation to a historical background. The programme board would like to see the inherent

temporality and historicity of phenomena be used as an integral perspective of research, which also should be able to identify themes and pose questions regarding our own understandings of historicity and historicisation.

Focus on how the assignment of cultural value varies over time and space involves being open to the possibility that within an apparently unified construction of culture there may be heterogeneous and disparate understandings of time and space. The programme board would therefore like to see the projects focus on the following dimensions of time and/or space:

- Culture is changed and transferred over *time*. The cultural expressions and patterns that are transferred, acquired and changed through historical processes may take the form of, for example, translation, negotiation, learning, the construction of identities and subjects, exhibition, distribution, or mediation and remediation.
- Culture is created and communicated in *space*. These spaces may be more or less formalised, institutionalised or metaphorical with, for example, stricter or looser requirements for formalised expertise. They may vary from various artistic arenas to archives, libraries and museums, and educational systems, and from political and religious institutions to everyday life and creative industries.

4.2 Aesthetisation

Within the primary theme of assigning cultural values, the programme will place special focus on the thematic area of aesthetisation (used here synonymously with aesthetic practices). This is not to be understood in a narrow sense as research on aesthetic objects and understandings of categories, but as research on those processes in which aesthetic value is created, recognised or challenged. It may also involve art and the reception of art, as well as objects and situations of a more everyday nature. It also involves aesthetic practice and the significance of experience for the construction of identities.

Style, rhetoric and staging have gained prominence in modern society. Design has emerged as an aspect of aesthetic practices that involves more than art. In keeping with this, form does not distinguish art from other culture, but rather is a means of organising representations. The form becomes an integral aspect of the transfer and mediation of cultural expressions and statements. But the concept may have different meanings and be understood in different ways depending on the area of research object being investigated. Consequently, aesthetic practices within various forms of knowledge are also an important field of research. And the design aspect will characterise, for example, creative industries in a broad sense just as much as it characterises art in a narrow sense.

In a more process-oriented approach, cultural phenomena will not be viewed as static dimensions, but as factors involved in negotiations and exchanges. By focusing on processes in which aesthetisation is prominent, the experience-based, relational and perceptual aspects of assigning cultural values will come into focus. In this way, the concept of aesthetisation may go beyond the distinction between product or object on the one hand, and action or event on the other. This is emphasised further in derivative concepts such as aesthetisation and de-aesthetisation processes.

4.3 Priority research areas

Within the primary overall theme and the thematic approach outlined above, the programme board has identified the following six priority research areas, which may be studied in combination or alone:

- Artistic fields
- Everyday life
- Forms of knowledge
- Cultural heritage and politics of memory
- Construction of identities
- Interaction between artistic fields and other fields of practice

5. General priorities

Relevant cultural research of high scientific merit should meet certain general requirements with regard to content and choice of perspective. The input from the academic and research communities points out the need to give higher priority to internationalisation/globalisation, multi- and interdisciplinarity, and dissemination and publication activity. The reason priority will be given to research projects that meet these requirements is that research with a national or unidisciplinary perspective sets boundaries and limits possibilities, both in terms of asking relevant questions and obtaining sound answers. For instance, popular culture, self-staging and the relationship between art and new media are not specifically Norwegian areas of research, and it would be beneficial to study these areas from perspectives and angles derived from many different subject areas.

5.1 Scientific self-reflection

The programme board will give priority to socially current and relevant cultural research that has the capacity to influence the formation of public opinion. Equally important, though, is the development of the research field itself. The programme board would like to see projects that shed light on key cultural phenomena and processes while simultaneously challenging and debating central concepts and assumptions on which the humanities subjects as a discipline are based. How are the boundaries and relationship between, for example, text and context, a work and its environment, science and culture, knowledge and critique, understanding and ethics formed, reproduced, portrayed, challenged and possibly destabilised? Such relationships may be illuminated through studies on the assignment of cultural values. How knowledge is organised, managed and applied will be a question both of what is assigned value and how this process occurs, for example, with regard to gender. Discussions such as these, along with studies of how theoretical concepts have been operationalised within the various subject areas and thus have served to shape the discipline, will promote scientific self-reflection and development of the discipline.

5.2 Multi- and interdisciplinarity

Similar to the previous programmes for cultural research, the new programme will be oriented toward basic research. In particular, the programme seeks to challenge subject areas and research communities in the humanities. The programme encourages projects that move beyond the traditional means used within the discipline to define the research field.

Combining approaches from several different subject areas is often the best means of investigating relevant research questions. The individual research project must determine the degree of multi- and interdisciplinarity, as well which subject areas and perspectives will guide the studies, based on the research question and the area of research object.

5.3 Internationalisation

Previous programmes have centred their activity on Norway and the national. Many research communities would now like to see a more international approach to cultural research. The new programme will have a clearer international profile in terms of the research perspective as well as the research field. When assessing grant proposals, the programme board will look favourably on projects that incorporate binding international research collaboration. The programme board also seeks to facilitate the development of international networks and contacts.

5.4 Dissemination and publication activity

Responsibility for dissemination to relevant users and the general public and for scientific publication (research-oriented dissemination) lies with the researchers. At the same time, one of the programme's tasks is to ensure that the researchers have sufficient time and resources to carry out this part of the research process in an effective manner. Previously the programmes for cultural research have allocated relatively extensive resources to various dissemination measures, under the auspices of the programmes or the research projects, and this should be continued. There is a great need for more research-based knowledge about the questions and issues addressed by cultural research, and there is an increasingly greater need to enhance dissemination activity. Scientific publication is also important for enhancing the scientific merit of research and developing concepts, theories and methodologies.

At an early stage the projects should carefully consider which users may have special use for the insight that will be generated by the project. The programme board encourages applicants to formulate ambitious yet realistic plans for dissemination that also draw on resources outside the research and academic arenas, for example, by including new learning theory, digital media and other forms of dissemination.

5.5 Institutional cooperation

Cooperation between institutions in Norway is encouraged. The programme's focus on aesthetic and cultural practices should provide good opportunities for increased research collaboration between art academies and/or museums on the one hand, and universities, university colleges and independent research institutes on the other. The input from the art academies and museums, among others, signals a great need to raise the level of research expertise, and expanded cooperation with more established research institutions may help to promote this. By the same token, it is not the research programme's responsibility to take on the formidable task of shoring up research and raising the level of expertise at the art academies and museums.

5.6 Project organisation

The programme will mostly provide funding to projects of some size, in which several researchers, preferably from different subject areas and institutions, address common research questions or areas of research objects in well-integrated projects with clearly defined research leadership. As a general rule, such projects should also include a researcher recruitment element, primarily in the form of doctoral research fellowships. The programme board would like to see more projects with women project managers and will look favourably on project proposals in which both genders are represented in the research group. Individual projects will not be prioritised for funding, although personal post-doctoral research fellowships may be funded in some cases. Large-scale umbrella projects with only a common framework will not be eligible for funding.

6. Performance indicators and success criteria

In addition to the programme's overall objective of promoting research of high scientific merit within the six priority research areas, and thereby strengthening humanities-oriented cultural research, the programme board has established the following performance indicators:

1. Support sound research communities through the allocation of research funding to well-integrated collaborative projects that incorporate clearly defined research management, a primarily multi- and interdisciplinary approach, and recruitment positions.
2. Encourage research communities in the humanities to become actively involved in cultural research.
3. Promote international research collaboration. The projects must prepare and implement plans for international research collaboration. As far as possible, all projects should have international partners, participate in international networks, and arrange stays at research institutions abroad during the project period.
4. Promote scientific publication, especially in recognised international publication channels. All projects funded under the programme must prepare and implement their own publication plans.
5. Raise the level of knowledge among the general public, users (especially the cultural sector) and scientific communities about the findings and significance of cultural research through targeted dissemination of research findings. All projects funded under the programme must prepare and implement their own dissemination plans.
6. The programme board will prepare a dissemination plan and create a framework for enhanced publication and dissemination activity, both under the auspices of the programme itself and under the auspices of the researchers funded under the programme.
7. Promote cooperation with other programmes and initiatives within the Research Council.

7. The programme board, organisation, budgets and time frame

Programme board and administration

The overall responsibility for the programme lies with the research board of the Division for Science, which has appointed the KULVER programme board. The programme board acts on behalf of the Research Council and is responsible for ensuring that the programme achieves the stipulated objectives and is implemented in the most effective manner possible with regard to the plans that are drawn up and within the framework adopted by the research division board.

The tasks of the programme board are mainly strategic in nature. This implies that the programme board's main task is to assume responsibility for the Research Council's efforts within the area covered by the programme and help to realise relevant components of the Research Council's overall strategy. The programme board has the authority to allocate funding within the confines of the programme's budget. The research board of the Division for Science has appointed the following members to the KULVER programme board.

- Kjersti Bale, Professor, Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Language, University of Oslo (chair)
- Ellen Aslaksen, Head of Research, Arts Council Norway, Oslo
- Mikkel Bogh, Rector, Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Schools of Visual Arts, Copenhagen
- Anne Eriksen, Professor, Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo
- Narve Fulsås, Professor, Department of History, University of Tromsø
- Cecilia Sjöholm, Assistant Professor of Aesthetics, Södertörn University College, Huddinge, Sweden
- Magne Velure, Project Director, Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs, Oslo
- Permanent deputy: Erik Hedling, Professor, Film Studies, Centre for Languages and Literature, Lund University
- Deputy: Hans Dam Christensen, Associate Professor of Visual Media, Royal School of Library and Information Science, Copenhagen

The programme board has been appointed for the period 1 June 2007 – 30 June 2013.

Solbjørg Rauset, Senior Adviser, is the programme coordinator and heads the programme secretariat at the Research Council. The programme secretariat implements the programme board's decisions and is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the programme, including contact with the research communities.

Budget

The programme's budget framework is assumed to be at least NOK 77 million in total for the programme period 2008 – 2012. The main portion, some NOK 65 million, is funded by the Research Council's general allocations to the humanities from the Ministry of Education and Research. Plans call for the remaining amount to be funded by the Department of Culture and Church Affairs.

One of the programme board's tasks, in cooperation and dialogue with other sections of the Research Council, is to work for a budgetary increase in the programme's field of research.

Time frame

The programme period runs from 2008 to 2012. The programme board began its work in June 2007. Research funding will be announced with an application deadline of 28 November 2007 and project start-up of May 2008.

Addresses

Programme mailing address:

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