Enabling Cultural Policies? Culture, Capabilities, and Citizenship

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This article mobilizes the capabilities approach to offer a new and empirically grounded critical perspective on how cultural policy should promote citizenship to audiences. The capabilities approach posits that public policies should be designed and measured in terms of what they actually enable subjects to do or be. Focusing on the case of Norway, we operationalize the capabilities approach in two steps. First, based on survey data, we highlight systematic relationships between social background, cultural consumption, and citizenship. Based on extensive interview data, the article thereafter offers insight into how people engage with culture and whether this engagement enables them to function as citizens. In contrast to common assessments of cultural policy, we argue that the merit of this approach is that it focuses attention on how different measures actually empower different groups of citizens and fail to empower others, thus providing a basis for more effective and just policy measures.

Keywords: capability approach, citizenship, cultural policy, cultural consumption, democracy, TV series, fiction literature

Cultural policies in Western democracies are motivated partly by the idea that audiences' engagement with expressive culture should enable them to function as citizens. Such engagement should ideally stimulate political interest and knowledge, and forge social ties to the polity. Success or failure of a specific policy initiative is, however, often measured in exposure or access, asking how many watched a state-supported documentary film or how many visited the library or the opera (Stevenson, Balling, & Kann-Rasmussen, 2017).

This article proposes a different take. It starts from the capabilities approach developed by Amartya Sen (1993) and Martha Nussbaum (2000), which suggests that public policies should be designed and assessed in terms of what policies actually enable subjects to do or to be. Further, the approach foregrounds the resources people have available to make use of what they are offered.

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Whereas the approach is already informing fields such as development and welfare policy, it is now emerging into discussions about how to motivate cultural policies (Hesmondhalgh, 2016; Moss, 2017). This article offers a first attempt to apply the capabilities approach in the empirical study of culture. More specifically, we are concerned with the role of culture in promoting democratic capabilities (Coleman, Moss, & Martinez-Perez, 2018). In this context, we mobilize concepts from democratic theory and cultural sociology to explore links between how audiences make use of the expressive culture to which they are exposed, to which extent this use enables them to function as citizens, and to what degree such enablement relies on the economic and cultural resources audiences possess. To substantiate such an exploration, we suggest a two-step empirical approach with data from Norway.

The first step of the empirical analysis draws on a nationally representative survey undertaken in late 2017 (N = 2,064), which illuminates how Norwegians with different social resources make use of expressive culture and engage with the political sphere. In the second step, we use an extensive qualitative data set based on two rounds of in-depth interviews with 50 informants, intercepted by a media diary phase. Insights from this material are used to flesh out how different forms of expressive culture may be enabling for certain members of the audience, as resources for citizenship. This combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses allows us to, first, highlight systematic relationships between social background, cultural consumption, and what we will call public connection (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2010), and, second, get insights into how people engage with culture, and whether this engagement actually enables them to function as citizens.

In this analysis, we pay particular attention to two genres of expressive culture: TV series and fictional literature. TV series make up an interesting case for several reasons. For one, TV series is perhaps the most important source of fictional entertainment in Norway (82% say they watch one or more TV series in a normal week). Moreover, TV series are a prioritized genre in Norwegian cultural policy, and are subject to extensive state funding. From a policy perspective, this focus on TV series is partly legitimized by the assumed civic benefits TV series have for its audience. Further, empirical research (Nærland, 2018) has documented the potential of TV-series usage for facilitating informed citizenship. Fictional literature, while historically being one of the most important genres for cultural policy, is by contrast marked by being used less often, and by fewer people, and its use (and in particular, nonuse) is, as we will explain, marked by greater social differences. At the same time, reading literature is a form of culture that traditionally has been assigned major importance in contributing to critical citizenship (Habermas, 1991).

We aim, first, to show how the capabilities approach can be empirically applied in the context of expressive culture, and thus further the agenda within policy-oriented communication studies. Second, our aim is to provide original empirical insights into how audiences' use of culture facilitates citizenship, and on this basis stimulate critical discussion about how cultural policy should be designed to strengthen equal opportunities for all.

In the following, we first present our approach. We then outline our methodology. Thereafter, in the first step of the analysis, we use survey material to show patterns in how consumption of culture, citizenship, and background resources are related to each other. In the next step, we draw on in-depth informant interviews to illustrate how the use of these genres may or may not enable citizenship, and the

significance of background resources for such enablement. In the conclusion, we outline key implications for cultural policy. Our claim is that cultural policymaking needs to pay more attention to how different measures actually empower different groups of citizens, and fail to empower others. We demonstrate how the empirical application of the capabilities approach can be vital in facilitating such attention.

Culture, Cultural Policy, and Capabilities

The capability approach was originally introduced by the economist Amartya Sen (1993), and later in a different version by philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2000). Grounded in a liberal yet redistributive idea of social justice, the capabilities approach foregrounds individual flourishing and well-being as the aim of development and policy. A fundamental objective is thus to extend discussions beyond economic measurements and metrics. In Sen's conceptualization, a capability is the opportunity people have to be or to do things they have reasons to value. Capabilities are in turn vectors for what Sen terms "functionings," such as to be happy, have self-respect, or take part in community. Crucially, the perspective is sensitive to the different resources people have available to realize the same capabilities—that is, the resources they have available to make use of the goods or services they are offered.

There is a long-standing debate about how to substantiate and justify capabilities (Robeyns, 2003; Moss, 2017. A central feature in Sen's theory is that people should be free to pursue their own visions of a good life. From his perspective, capabilities can be thought of as any condition that makes possible the pursuit of this life. Others, most prominently Nussbaum, have developed lists of basic capabilities to which all persons are entitled, such as bodily health, emotions, affiliation, and bodily integrity (Nussbaum, 2011, pp. 32–34). Whereas Sen's approach has been criticized for offering a weak basis on which to substantiate a framework for motivating or assessing policies, the latter has been criticized for being paternalistic and universalistic. Our ambition is not to solve this debate. Yet, as we will return to, we take inspiration from Nussbaum in that we predefine democratic capabilities that we argue enable inclusive and informed citizenship.

In a policy perspective, a capabilities approach posits that policies should be designed to enable people, rather than to simply offer goods or services. It is thus a normative perspective, used both to motivate policymaking and for critical evaluation of existing policies and policy outcomes. As this article aims to show, the approach has relevance for policy-oriented research on cultural consumption. We are not the first to propose such an argument. Nussbaum (2012) sees the strengthening of liberal arts education and institutions as a vital means to enable people to become democratic citizens. Drawing on the capabilities approach, Appadurai (2004) argues that culture—also in its expressive forms—is key to facilitate the capacity to aspire toward a better life among economically marginalized citizens.

In the context of media and cultural policy, Garnham (1997) argued 20 years ago that a capabilities approach could reframe policy discussions by stimulating "a move away from focus on goods (and exposure) in itself, to what goods do to human beings" (p. 28). Garnham also argued that we need to move beyond crude measures of access and usage in media and cultural policy, and attend to how people make use of what they are exposed to and the resources they have available to benefit from such usage. As such, he argued for a bottom-up perspective: Policymaking should be informed by people's needs and experiences.

We take inspiration from Garnham's call and aim to contribute to emerging discussions about how to motivate media and cultural policies, and how to evaluate such policies critically (Couldry, 2019; Hesmondhalgh, 2016; Moss, 2017; Schejter & Tirosh, 2016). In the context of political communication and broadcast media, empirical research based on the capability approach has also been carried out recently (Coleman & Moss, 2016; Coleman et al., 2018). In the field of cultural policy research, Sen's work has been important for discussions of culture and sustainable development, in debates related to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (e.g., Isar, 2017; Throsby, 2017), and as a framework for evaluating and motivating urban planning (Zitcer, Hawkins, & Vakharia, 2015). This article offers a first attempt to operationalize a capabilities approach in the empirical study of people's use of expressive culture.

In recent cultural policy scholarship, there has been a great deal of debate about how policy should be motivated, what policies should achieve, and how achievements should be measured, centering on the often-conflicted relationship involving cultural value, instrumentalism, and accountability (e.g., Carnwath & Brown, 2014; Hadley & Gray, 2017; Holden, 2004). By focusing bottom up on how culture enables some and not others, and by grounding policy measures in the context of people's resources and conditions, we argue that a capabilities approach has the potential to provide new impetus to this debate.

To operationalize the capability approach, we mobilize concepts from democratic and sociological theory. First, public connection, conceptualized by Couldry et al. (2010) as people's "orientation toward a public world where matters of common concern are addressed" (p. 5). The idea is that for people to be able to function as citizens, they need to have a minimum orientation toward issues or problems that require collective solutions. To be publicly connected thus typically involves attention, interest, and knowledge concerning issues of political relevance. As such, public connection constitutes a bottom-line factor in functioning democracies, and a factor implicitly inherent in all major theories of democracy (Couldry et al., 2010, pp. 8–10). In this study, we premise that to be oriented toward the public sphere where matters of common concern are addressed—to be publicly connected—is a capability that enables a person to function as a citizen.

Second, to examine the significance of background resources for people's opportunity to use culture in a manner that enables public connection, we draw on Bourdieu's (1979) cultural sociology for our methodology and theory. In so doing, we build on studies that have employed his framework in different Western European countries in more recent years (e.g., Coulangeon & Duval, 2014; Hovden & Moe, 2017, for studies on Norway). We argue that Bourdieu's sociology of culture complements a capabilities approach in key respects. First, it casts light on how economic and cultural capital informs cultural tastes—which in turn may or may not facilitate public connection. Second, cultural capital informs the dispositions and sensibilities through which people make sense of the cultural works they encounter—and thus their differing ability to make use of culture to orient themselves toward the world of politics.

Cultural Policy and Citizenship in Norway

We focus on Norway for a combination of three reasons. The first concerns the features of cultural policy itself—defined as the responsible public authorities' structured actions vis-à-vis the cultural sector (Mangset, 2018, p. 1)—which is proactive and far-reaching. Following Dubois' dimensions of cultural policy

(as cited in Henningsen, 2015), the Norwegian case can be characterized by an expanded notion of culture, encompassing not least local, amateur, and civil society initiatives. Cultural policy has been legitimized with reference to national identity building internally and status building externally, balanced by a strong strand of popular enlightenment (Henningsen, 2015, p. 30). The second and third reasons for the case selection are contextual. Norway is, mainly due to its oil fortune, a wealthy country characterized by a high penetration of information and communication technologies (e.g., Syvertsen, Enli, Mjøs, & Moe, 2014) as well as consumer appliances and money spent on spare-time activities. And, finally, it is a Nordic welfare state with still relatively small class divisions (Hjellbrekke, Jarness, & Korsnes, 2015). In sum, then, Norway appears as a challenging case for studying how, despite relative equality both socially and in the potential access to culture, different cultural goods might be unequally used and mobilized by citizens, in a society with strong and active policy measures in place.

The promotion of citizenship is a staple objective in Norwegian cultural policy. White and green papers from the past decade have all emphasized the role of culture as a basis for democracy and social community. The most recent white paper on culture, from November 2018 opens with the following:

> Art and culture constitute expressions with society-building powers, and cultural policy shall be built on freedom of expression and tolerance. The cultural domain and civil society are prerequisites for Bildung [dannelse] and an enlightened public sphere, and therefore an investment in democracy. (Kulturdepartementet, 2018, p. 7)

This is a bold statement of the links among cultural policy, expressive culture, and citizens' role in democracy. It is worth noting that the sender was a conservative/populist coalition government, which underlines the features of the Norwegian case.

Such grand aims trickle down on specific policy instruments, art forms, and cultural domains. Support schemes for documentary filmmaking, for instance, are explicitly about facilitating the portrayal of certain aspects of social life or uncovering shady sides of political life—both of which are thought to serve the viewers as citizens. The maintenance and development of museums is likewise a tool to bring history to citizens. In this study, we apply the capabilities approach to examine whether such aims are actually realized, and on this ground shed critical light on existing policies.

This basic assumption that engagement with culture cultivates citizenship can be problematized. As found by Stevenson and colleagues (2017) in other small-nation contexts, this "discourse of enlightenment" is key in legitimating cultural policy and state support, while constructing other types of engagement as a problem or deficit. Yet, as it constitutes a fundamental motivation for Norwegian cultural policy, here, we focus our attention on how engagement with certain forms of culture—TV series and literature—can be seen to facilitate citizenship.

Method: A Two-Step Approach

In this study, we apply a two-step methodological approach with a quantitative and a qualitative part.

Quantitative Approach

The quantitative part of the analysis is based on a representative Web-panel survey of 2,064 Norwegian citizens (18 years and older), conducted in November—December 2017. The survey consisted of 76 main variables (600 items) that included questions about social background, media and cultural use, and participation and interest in civil and political life.[1]

Following the sociological and methodological example from *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1979), we will first present a rough model of the Norwegian social space (based on Hovden & Moe, 2017), aiming to statistically reconstruct the major divisions in central resources (capital), and in effect, the space of social classes, using variables for educational level (five categories), type of education (three), type of occupation (seven), working in the private or the public sector (three), the value of one's house (six), household income (seven), and cultural capital in the parental home (four). The first two axes of the model explain respectively 40% and 18% (in sum, 58%) of the significant variance of the variables, using Benzecri's modified rates.[2] The resulting model, with selected supplementary categories added to indicate major differences in political and cultural orientation, is given in Figure 1. Although there are important links between the resources and practices studied and age and gender, we will focus on the class-based social differences.

The analysis of these survey data allows us to identify relationships between central resources, preference for culture, and public connection. This first analytical step is needed then, to build a basis for exploring in detail how people actually make use of different forms of expressive culture that we map based on the survey. This forms the second step of our methodological design.

Qualitative Approach

In the autumn of 2016, a team consisting of five researchers and three assistants carried out in-depth semistructured interviews of 50 informants. The informants were split across age, gender, and across social, ethnocultural, and regional backgrounds, and recruited to reflect the sociodemographic composition of the Norwegian population. To systematically capture diversity in social background, the recruitment was based on preestablished occupational categories adopted from Norwegian sociological register data class schemes (Hansen, Flemmen, & Andersen, 2009). The selection of informants covered occupational categories from cultural, professional, and economic elites; cultural, professional, and economical upper/lower middle classes; and occupational substrata of the working classes.

Each informant was interviewed twice. In between the two rounds of interviews, each informant also kept a diary. In the first round of interviews (carried out in September), we investigated various factors. These included their everyday media habits and repertoires, interest in news, interest in topical affairs, civic engagement, and also their use of culture. In the month-long diary phase, we asked informants to chart their media and cultural habits: what sort of media and culture they had engaged with, and whether some

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[1] For details and the questionnaire, see Kantar TNS (2017).

[2] Although the third axis also appears as statistically significant (explaining 6% of the variance), it offers only nuances to the interpretation of the second axis and will be left out of the following.

of this had made a particular impression on them. In the second round of interviews, we focused specifically on the informants' experiences of engaging with particular cultural products. We also asked the informants to reflect on their cultural preferences. We further asked whether their textual engagement had made them think about matters in culture and society, and whether they experienced the cultural works to have given them any insights or added to their knowledge. The interviews amounted to approximately 100 hours of recorded material, which was subsequently transcribed by assistants. Our analysis focuses on the second round of interviews yet takes advantage of the whole process to attain a comprehensive understanding of how the use of culture is integrated into the informants' overall lifestyles. We concentrate specifically on the extent to which the informants' accounts of engaging with different cultural genres involve reflections about politics, or matters of collective importance more generally.

Taken together, the two steps allow us to explore the links between how audiences make use of the expressive culture to which they are exposed, to which extent this use enables them to function as citizens, and to what extent such enablement relies on the economic and cultural resources audiences possess.

In this study, we operationalize public connection as people's interest, understanding, and attention concerning issues related to institutional politics, its processes, and mediations, encompassing also questions of value and identity when these are contested or on the public agenda. Whereas previous conceptualizations of public connection also emphasize the reflexive dimension—that is, people's own sense of being connected (Couldry et al., 2010)—our operationalization foregrounds connections to the sphere of politics proper and indicators of manifest orientations toward the world of politics. As discussed in depth elsewhere (Nærland, 2020), this narrower operationalization limits the scope, but it also allows for the elucidation of manifest links between engagement with expressive culture and politics proper.

Relationships Among Social Background, Use of Culture, and Public Connection

Here, we start by sketching the distribution of Norwegian citizens' basic social resources (the distribution of capital), before investigating how this social logic (i.e., the class-based structuration) is related to, first, indicators of public connection, and second, citizens' actual use of various cultural institutions, and their reported interest in various forms of culture.

The differentiating principles for the distribution of basic resources in Norwegian society appear to be a variant of the pattern first established for France by Bourdieu (1979). This pattern has later been shown to be a feature of most modern Western societies (Coulangeon & Duval, 2014): A first division by capital volume—for example, citizens' overall level of resources (economic, cultural, social, etc.), represented by the vertical opposition of the map shown in Figure 1, and a second dimension by capital composition (horizontal opposition). In regard to the latter, citizens on the right are characterized first and foremost by being richer in economic capital and often working in the private sector, whereas citizens on the left more often are characterized by cultural capital (via having culturally active parents, having an education in the humanities or the social sciences, working in the public or cultural sector, and often all of these). The second dimension in this way distinguishes between different fractions inside the dominant and dominated classes

(e.g., between university professors and successful business leaders in the former case, and between lower level teachers and public servants versus lower paid employees in the private sector).
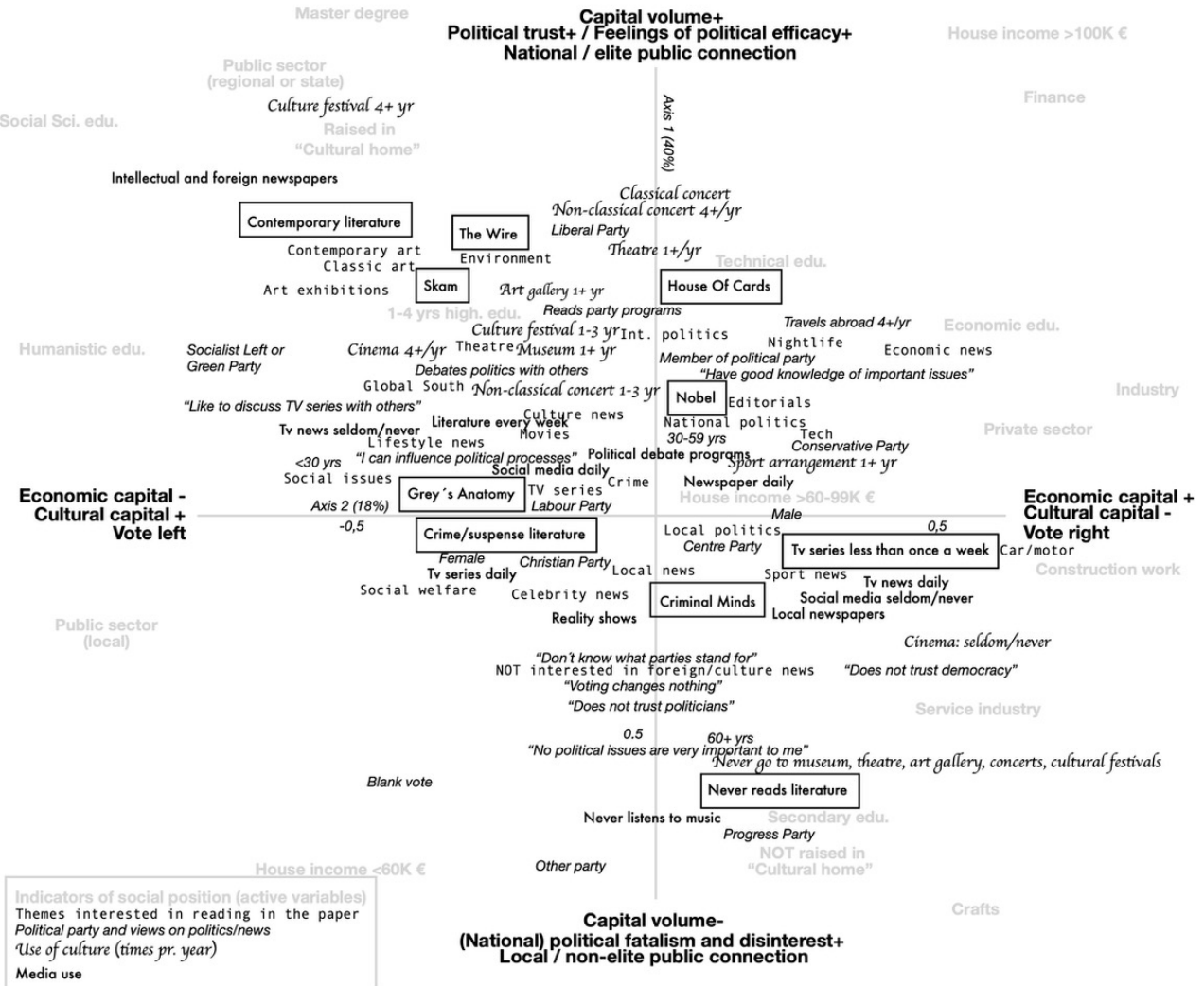

Figure 1. The Norwegian social space with projected cultural and political lifestyles, 2017.

Being in a less affluent and prestigious position in the distribution of wealth (of all kinds) and honor is closely related to educational level, which must be regarded as a particularly important resource for many types of public connection. At the same time, such a position is characterized by diverse indicators of a looser and more disenchanted connection to the political system. These indicators include more distrust of politicians, more feeling that politics is irrelevant for them, fewer who think that they are knowledgeable about politics or can influence political processes, and so forth. A similar disposition is seen toward the news, where the politically disenchanted are also less likely to be interested in national and international political news and news-related debate content. Significantly, the lower classes typically show a high (and higher) interest in local news and local politics. Closer readings suggest that the basic opposition is not simply between higher and lower levels of public connection, but between varying attachment to more or less socially prestigious and powerful parts of society, between elite versus nonelite forms of public connection, where lower classes are typically more oriented to their local community (see Savage, 2015) and feel less connected to the worlds of national social elites (in particular political, but also other types). At stake here is varying attachment toward more and less prestigious parts of the public, most fundamentally between a national/international versus a local public connection.

The reasons for these differences are complex. For example, different types of higher education and occupations offer very different opportunities and motivations to engage in and be knowledgeable about various core institutions in the political discourse (compare, e.g., being a civil servant in a government department with working as a carpenter, or a senior policeman with a fisherman). The differences, in any case, emphasize that attention to "important" issues and national politics follows a basic social logic of affluence versus precariousness, also in a society of such relative social equality as Norway.

Although different forms of expressive culture are enjoyed by all social classes, their use and interest clearly vary by social position. Use of traditional cultural institutions (e.g., having been to a theater, art gallery, museum, cultural festivals, concerts) is generally much more likely for citizens with high volumes of capital. Such use is, at the same time, clearly related to the volume of cultural capital and education (increasing toward the upper left of the social space). By contrast, attending sports events is more likely in the economic fractions of this space. One can, as we will see, hold that the use of such forms of culture (at least compared with nonuse) offers a potential resource for public connection. To this, however, one might argue that such institutionalized forms of culture today comprise a very small part of people's actual cultural consumption. For example, only 40% say they have been to a museum in the past year, and only 33% to the theater.

In contrast, 82% of citizens say they watch one or more TV series—our first case—in a normal week, and 52% at least three days a week. Rather than being the great leveler in terms of offering a means for public connection, however, the TV-series people say themselves interested in follows a similar social logic as for more traditional cultural forms. The lower social classes have typically a higher interest in traditional crime-related series (*Criminal Minds*), whereas higher social classes typically are more interested in series with more complex narrative structures, which often tackle issues of current social and political relevance, such as Norwegians' engagement in foreign wars (*Nobel*), homosexuality, and the integration of immigrants (*Skam*), the workings of the political process behind the scenes (*House of Cards*) and realistic portrayals of social problems in modern urban societies (*The Wire*).

The proportion of the population who say they read fictional literature—our second case—is lower than for watching TV series: 28% do this at least three days a week. Whereas we find almost no difference in regard to educational level for the use of TV series, someone with a secondary degree is clearly less likely to read fictional literature than someone with a master's degree. This finding is in line with other statistics showing that such reading is a consistently more socially select cultural activity than the use of TV. As in the case of TV series, there are also big differences among the literary genres. For instance, 31% of the population say they are interested in reading newspaper reviews of crime and suspense literature, but only 14% say the same for contemporary literature (almost half, in contrast, are interested in reading reviews of movies or TV series). And where there are small differences in educational background for interest in crime and suspense literature, those with a master's degree are almost three times more likely to be interested in contemporary literature. Also suggested by the position of the categories in the map in Figure 1 and Table 1, literary preferences appear to be even more strongly linked to cultural capital than the use of TV series. Similar findings on the importance of cultural capital for such reading that demands symbolic mastery (Bourdieu, 1979) or a political interest have been reported in other countries (e.g., Atkinson, 2016).

Table 1. Positive Preference for Three Forms of Expressive Culture by Class Position Among 30–50-Year-Olds (N = 612). Percentages, Controlled for Gender and Age.[3]

Capital volume		Capital composition		
		Cultural fraction	Balanced	Economic fraction
High	N	248	204	209
	Literature: crime/suspense	37%	34%	27%
	Literature: contemporary	33%	23%	11%
	TV: *Criminal Minds*	12%	24%	25%
	TV: *Grey's Anatomy*	26%	28%	17%
	TV: *Nobel*	34%	39%	26%
	TV: *Skam*	43%	45%	40%
	TV: *The Wire*	21%	12%	16%
Intermediate	N	297	313	218
	Literature: crime/suspense	30%	34%	33%
	Literature: contemporary	21%	1%	1%
	TV: *Criminal Minds*	31%	39%	45%
	TV: *Grey's Anatomy*	29%	23%	29%
	TV: *Nobel*	26%	29%	15%
	TV: *Skam*	31%	23%	29%
	TV: *The Wire*	22%	12%	4%

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[3] Table 1 is based on a division of the social space in Figure 1 in nine class fractions, based on capital volume (high, intermediate, low) and capital composition (culture, balanced, economic). To control for the effect of gender and age, the percentages are the predicted marginals following a logistic regression with class fraction, gender, and age group (by 10-year intervals) as predictors, with interaction effects between gender and age.

Low	N	150	290	136
	Literature: crime/suspense	11%	26%	31%
	Literature: contemporary	5%	3%	7%
	TV: *Criminal Minds*	46%	33%	46%
	TV: *Grey's Anatomy*	28%	29%	27%
	TV: *Nobel*	25%	22%	27%
	TV: *Skam*	28%	27%	29%
	TV: *The Wire*	12%	5%	5%

The main finding from the quantitative analysis is thus one of a strong affinity between social resources (capital), elite-oriented forms of public connection, and the use of expressive culture. The findings indicate the varying potential for the use of expressive culture (including TV series and fictional literature) to support, energize, and amplify citizens' public connection—first, through exposure, second, through the socially varying interest in these forms, and finally, through the strong probability that certain resources (such as some forms of education) put citizens in a better position to bring out not only the aesthetic, but also the political (in the widest possible sense of the word) potential of a cultural work. To explore this link further, however, we will need to engage in qualitative analyses of how citizens actually engage with cultural works.

Everyday Engagement With Culture and Public Connection

Drawing on in-depth interviews, we can now substantiate the broader tendencies outlined above. We illustrate how the consumption of first TV series and then fictional literature, for some informants constitutes a resource for public connection and for others not. Moreover, we exemplify how connecting to the world of politics through the use of culture depends also on background resources.

Use of TV Series and Public Connection

The following two informants are both avid consumers of TV series, yet exemplify differing positions in the social space. Tina, exemplifying a position toward the middle left of the social space, is a 34-year-old secondary school teacher. Her cultural tastes are exclusively directed toward popular culture. Yet her parents' occupations (father, economist; mother, teacher) suggest relatively high levels of inherited cultural capital. Tina's news habits are extensive; she thinks of it as a "duty" to be kept informed, and she is knowledgeable about current political events.

Tina watches TV series habitually, several times a week. She identifies TV series as a means to understand "what goes on in society." In the diary phase of the data collection, Tina wrote that she watched the Norwegian series *Nobel* on a daily basis. *Nobel* centers on Norway's contested military involvement in Afghanistan and offers a graphic portrayal of military operations. On watching *Nobel*, Tina reflects,

> [In the series] we are shown that orders are given to shoot children and similar kinds of
> stuff. And you are shown children with suicide bomb vests. . . . Norway is supposed to be
> a peace-keeping nation . . . we're so concerned about peace . . . but they (the Norwegian
> soldiers) actually engage in battle and shoot and they kill. . . . This is something that this

> series helped me understand: Norway plays a role which is not all about peace . . . it is a
> war . . . and they are active in that war.

As illustrated, watching *Nobel* for Tina clearly facilitated public connection. For one, watching focused her attention on a highly contentious and topical issue. More importantly, the graphic depiction of war operations as part of the fictional universe of *Nobel* offered a narrative through which she could make sense of war operations. She further problematizes Norway's collective self-understanding as a "humanitarian superpower" or "nation of peace." Through her engagement with the TV series, the informant can be seen here to elaborate meanings and connect dots within the wider case complex of which the Norwegian military's involvement in Afghanistan is a part.

Our next informant example, Astrid, is 43 years old and works as a secretary. She exemplifies a position toward the lower right in the social space. Her level of achieved education (high school), parents' occupation (father, painter; mother, secretary), and cultural tastes (stand-up, light talk shows, and action movies) indicate overall low levels of acquired and inherited cultural capital. She reads online newspapers on a daily basis, but is mainly focused on local news and sports.

She watches TV series habitually and prefers series such as *Criminal Minds*, *CSI,* and the Norwegian crime series *Frikjent.* When talking about why she enjoys the latter series, she reflects,

> Well, it is because I like that actor Nicolai Cleve Broch. I think his acting is so good. And
> it is very exiting. . . . I like the suspense! In general, I like series because of the suspense
> and pastime . . . yes pastime. And of course, the actors.

Compared with the first example, Tina, there is little suggestion that Astrid's engagement with TV series enables her to enact critical citizenship. In the interviews, she does not identify TV series as a means to keep informed or to understand political or social issues. Neither do her tastes, which are mainly confined to crime, seem to offer support for an orientation toward the sphere of politics.

These two informant examples illustrate the relationships between the taste for certain types of TV series and public connection indicated through the statistical analysis, in which series that explicitly portray social or political conditions emerge as a self-evident resource for public connection. However, there are features in the interview material that complicate this picture. For some, engagement with seemingly a-political TV series also emerges as a resource for public connection. Victor, a 41-year-old journalist and academic, for instance, makes the following reflection about his affinity for kung fu and blaxploitation series: "[The series] addresses important issues, whether it tries to or not. Sure, we need series that address issues explicitly, but also those that mirror reality more indirectly."

This example illustrates a common trait among many of the informants who have extensive news habits, developed an interest in politics, and who generally possess high levels of cultural capital. For these informants, seemingly apolitical series become objects for political interpretations. Crucially, this also points to the significance of social dispositions. Engaging with TV series as a means to connect to society constitutes a natural and morally desirable practice for some; for others, it does not.

Use of Fiction Literature and Public Connection

The following two informants are both avid consumers of science fiction literature, yet exemplify differing positions in the social space. Comparing their use and experiences of engaging with the same genre allows us to elucidate two key aspects of how the use of expressive culture may, or may not, work as a resource for public connection. First, the comparison brings to our attention the significance of interpretative resources, dispositions, and also other media and cultural habits for what they gain from such textual engagement. Second, this comparison highlights the significance of taste within a genre.

Our first informant, Marcus, is a university professor in the humanities, in his mid-40s. Marcus inhabits a position toward the upper left in the social space. He possesses high volumes of cultural capital. His parents' occupations indicate relatively high levels of inherited cultural capital (father, bank manager; mother, economist). Marcus exhibits an omnivorous cultural taste. In addition to science fiction literature, his tastes include light sitcoms, punk music, and sophisticated novelists. Marcus's media habits and practices support and enable an orientation toward the sphere of politics; his news consumption is comprehensive, and he exhibits considerable interest in and knowledge about politics.

As the following quote illustrates, the reading of science fiction literature for him functions as a means to orient himself beyond his private world, to issues of political significance:

> Science fiction literature is to a considerable degree concerned with the present. I've just read a trilogy by the Chinese science fiction author Cixin Liu. . . .These are books that have been hugely popular in China, so they must resonate in some way. And that's a strange and unfamiliar universe to me . . . to put it that way. But, if I want to intellectually legitimate my reading . . . I can, in this case, say that this is a means to gain insight into a completely different way of understanding the world from what we have. And I think it is interesting, . . . many of the thematics on which these books focus are about politics, . . . they're about technology—they're about how we handle different kinds of challenges.

In this example, science fiction literature thus emerges as a means for reflecting on conditions in China and also Chinese modes of thought. And more generally, as he contends, reading inspires both reflection about how we are to approach political challenges. His interpretations of the literature he reads are indicative of a sensitivity to the political relevance of art. Marcus exhibits a general inclination to connect art works—high and low—to social and political conditions. Moreover, his taste within the sci-fi genre facilitates public connection: he prefers authors that thematize societal matters. For Marcus, the engagement appears to deepen and expand his orientation to the world of politics and thus enable him to function as an informed citizen. It is important to note, however, that the example of Marcus also highlights the classed nature of engaging with research. Although his articulations indicate that culture for him is a means to connect with society, they also testify to a familiarity with the perceived expectations of the researchers, and of discursive competency to address such expectations.

Our next informant, Ove, is 33 years old and works within logistics. Ove inhabits a position toward the lower right in social space. Compared with Marcus, he possesses considerably less cultural capital,

acquired and inherited (father, engineer; mother, shop assistant). Ove's cultural tastes center on popular culture such as sitcoms, Bruce Springsteen, the men's magazine *FHM*, and football. Ove reads news on a daily basis. Yet, compared with Marcus, his habits are centered on local issues and less on politics. He defines himself as "not interested in politics" and expresses a lack of trust in politicians.

Ove spends considerable time reading fictional literature; he reads in idle moments at work and often in the evenings when he comes home. His taste in literature is entirely confined to the genre of science fiction. As the following quote illustrates, for Ove, the extensive and habitual consumption of science fiction literature can be seen to fuel an orientation away from the sphere of politics. Although he maintains that there are parallels between the fictional universes of science fiction and the real world, he foregrounds the pleasure of "being sucked into a fantasy world":

> When I read something, I like to dream away from reality, you know . . . I don't like reading crime novels and that kind of stuff. Then, you might as well read the newspapers where you find the same as in a crime novel. So that's not so interesting to me. . . . I like to get into another universe, something that doesn't exist, and use my imagination.

This example suggests how the engagement with sci-fi can form part of weak orientations toward the sphere of politics, in which science fiction emerges as a means for civic withdrawal. Moreover, Ove's accounts of engaging with science fiction exemplify a type of disposition that involves limited sensitivity to the political aspects of popular culture. However, Ove's limited inclination to articulate connections between his engagement with culture and the political world may also be a matter of class-based unfamiliarity with the themes and language of research interviews. This unfamiliarity does not exclude the possibility of such connections taking place.

These two informant examples illustrate the strong affinities among social position, cultural capital, and civic uses of fiction literature indicated through the survey material. Yet evidence from the interview material also complicates the matter. Grete, a 47-year-old office worker, makes the following reflections on reading the historical novel, *Girl With a Pearl Earring:*

> The story was really strong . . . about a maid and a high-ranking man who grew feelings for each other, and how social status matters. And also how people are mean to other people lower down on the social ladder. . . . And if you think about people from different cultures who have just moved here (to Norway), it's common to see them act that way. But when immigrants come to us and don't know our ways, when you're at the bottom of the ladder. . . . People are not nice to you. But we've got to change that.

This example illustrates, for one, how connecting to the current world of politics through fictional literature is not exclusively a matter of cultural capital. For Grete, who has little formal education beyond high school and whose cultural habits otherwise center on light TV entertainment, the reading of *Girl With a Pearl Earring* clearly provided her with material to reflect further on a highly topical political issue in Norway—how immigrants are treated. Second, the example illustrates the more subtle nature of how engagement with fictional literature can stimulate public connection. Grete highlights how affective

experiences of injustice or human nature induced from the engagement with a narrative far removed from present-day political reality may energize reflections about issues of current political significance.

Conclusion: The Need for (Re)Motivating Cultural Policy

This article started from the basic observation that although cultural policy is motivated by grand aims of facilitating civic belongings and participation in democracy, our discussions of cultural policy and expressive culture often rely on limited measures of engagement. If we want to take the democratic role of culture and cultural policy seriously, we need a different approach.

We have argued that a capabilities approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how different groups of audiences make use of the expressive culture to which they are exposed, and the extent to which such use enables them to function as citizens. We have mobilized the concept of public connection to show how people's use of culture can contribute to democratically desirable orientations toward issues of collective significance. Moreover, by mobilizing Bourdieu's cultural sociology, we have shown how and to what extent such enablement rely on the economic and cultural resources audiences possess.

Our analysis relied on a two-step methodological design, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses. We have demonstrated statistically how public connection and use of the selected forms of expressive culture appear clearly dependent on social resources. Specifically, we find that those most likely to prefer genres and works that provide the most obvious and direct potential for public connection (e.g., direct engagement with contemporary public issues) are also, statistically, those generally most socially resourceful. Thus, they are also most likely to have a strong public connection via other means than culture (e.g., via higher interest in the news and their place of work). Importantly, such exposure appears particularly strongly linked to cultural capital.

At the same time, the analysis suggests that a general and one-dimensional view of public connection is problematic, as it tends to naturalize an elite conception of citizenship, and downplay how local and nonelite forms of public connection might positively contribute to local citizenship. This problem is nourished by methodological concerns when studying the working class. Typically, both surveys and interviews with such groups on political and cultural matters are marred by researchers' middle-class mistaken views that practices of the lower classes are easily measurable and read. Surveys, for example, seldom capture the more informal forms of participation by such groups (Savage, 2015).

Through qualitative analysis, we have further suggested how socioeconomic resources are vital for the audience's ability to make use of the culture they have on offer in a way that enables public connection. Concentrating on fictional literature and TV series, we have illustrated how the use for some informants clearly seems to facilitate public connection, and for others not. Our analysis brings to attention three key aspects of how the use of culture may work as a resource for public connection. First, it highlights the significance of taste—some forms of culture facilitate public connection better than others. As we have shown, this is also a matter of taste within specific genres. Second, it highlights the significance of interpretative resources and cultural capital for making use of culture as a means to connect with politics. Third, it highlights the significance of other supporting resources. Engaging with culture stimulates public

connection when it is supported by high news consumption, civic values, and general knowledge about what goes on in the world. The qualitative analysis thus highlights the need to understand the use of culture as integrated into socially constituted lifestyles. However, social scientists often lean toward a view of such groups as defined by what they lack, and not measuring up to "respectable" standards in political and cultural matters (Skeggs, 2013). To fully explore the view from the precariat in such matters, more extensive ethnographic work is needed.

Our analysis has thus shown how a capabilities approach yields better insights into where exactly cultural policy works, and where it does not. Cultural policy should not be expected to even out social inequalities and differences in democratic engagement—other policy sectors and domains of society clearly matter as well, such as social policy. Still, cultural policies need to address inequalities of the kind we have identified.

To address these inequalities, we suggest the following basic measures. The first concerns (re)motivation and implementation. The capabilities perspective should be implemented in actual policymaking and cultural production. This means that the attainment of empirical knowledge about the needs, experiences and conditions of audiences should be integral to processes of policymaking and cultural production. It also means, as suggested by Sitcer and colleagues (2015, p. 47), that policy initiatives need to be evaluated in terms of how well they advance democratic capabilities. Such a measure has the urgent potential to ground policy in people's needs and conditions and thus to counter what Hadley and Gray (2017) term "hyperinstrumentalism," in which culture becomes a means to noncultural policy ends.

The second concerns the relevance and appeal of cultural content. We argue that a cultural policy committed to promoting democratic capabilities needs to stimulate cultural production that appeals to the tastes, stylistic sensibilities, and thematic orientations of those who are less advantaged. Our study offers only a scant empirical basis on which to further concretize such a proposal. Yet our findings suggest that such a strategy could, for instance, be to stimulate the production of socially and politically committed crime programs or sitcoms. The logic of this strategy is thus to address those who are less advantaged on their own "turf," with content that is also empowering. As such, it is a strategy that resonates with Appadurai's (2004) call for policy initiatives that engage the dispossessed locally and on their own terms, to facilitate recognition and voice. By extension, it is a strategy that also points to the importance of sociocultural diversity in cultural production to ensure relevance and appeal.

The third concerns the introduction and exposure to arts through basic education. Although there is an abundance of evidence showing that education in many cases amplifies sociocultural inequalities (Bourdieu, 1979), and although Nussbaum's (2012) emphasis on liberal arts education as a means of cultivating democratic citizens has been criticized, and perhaps rightly so, for being elitist, we still maintain that the education system—at the basic levels—remains a key mechanism for addressing the inequalities we have identified in this study. The education system remains one of the few domains which can ensure that everyone is introduced to and familiarized with different forms of culture. This is not the least the case in welfare states such as Norway, where the basic education systems remain, predominantly, publicly owned and comparatively egalitarian. A measured and sociologically reflexive introduction to art through education can help disadvantaged groups both familiarize themselves with genres and expressions and master the

interpretative resources necessary to make sense of these—and in this way enable themselves to make use of culture to connect to society.

We have addressed the capacity of cultural policy and culture to promote citizenship. Whereas (cultural) policy is always instrumental, insofar as it is concerned with using certain mechanisms to achieve certain ends (Hadley & Gray, 2017), our study also implies an instrumental view on the value of culture—indeed, we have framed culture as a means to achieve democratic goals. Yet we acknowledge that both culture and cultural policy are important for many reasons other than democratic ones. Most fundamentally, the task of cultural policy should be to advance essentials of human flourishing and well-being, such as recognition, voice, and positive social identity. Or even more radically, as Sen proposes, to promote capabilities that enable people to achieve the freedom to choose the life they think is worth living.

Our study has limitations. The first is related to the complexity of the phenomena studied, and the methodological difficulties involved in making causal claims about democratic capabilities from statistical correlations and people's own narratives. The second is the limited number of cultural genres and works studied. The third is connected to the national case—we have relied on empirical data from a wealthy welfare state with extensive cultural policy schemes. Finally, our data are mostly connected to national forms of public connection. Further research is needed to extend the approach proposed here to other cases—with different political cultures, different histories of cultural policy and different macroeconomics. Our study can thus be seen as a "plausibility probe" (Eckstein, 1975), an empirical trial to gauge the potential for the capability approach in the context of cultural consumption. However, the relation we have found among social class, interest in the specific cultural forms, and politics appears not unique to Norway, but resembles those suggested by other European studies (e.g., Warde et al., 2009, in the case of UK). The findings presented here thus make probable such links between people's engagement with expressive culture and their role as citizens. A task ahead is to further explore and document such links.

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