



Neo-tribal elements in policies for the creative industries: A theoretical proposition and some Nordic examples

Ådne Meling

Ådne Meling is associate professor at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences. He received a PhD from Loughborough University in 2020 on a thesis that compares public policy and practitioner perspectives on the legitimization of public funding of the classical music sector in Norway. His research interests include cultural sociology, cultural policy and cultural economics.

aame@hvl.no

Abstract

The article proposes the concept of *neo-tribalism* (Maffesoli 1996) as a theoretical tool in the study of policies for the creative industries. *Neo-tribalism* entails a turn to pre-modern forms of social organisation based on solidarity, as in traditional tribes, but it also denotes that the solidarity is more liquid. The paper illustrates the analytical relevance of this concept with Nordic examples. In general, economic forms of instrumentalism have significantly impacted the Nordic countries in recent decades and can be observed explicitly within the creative industries. Moreover, welfare economics has constituted a vital component in the post-war construction of western welfare states. Thus, it might seem reasonable to assume that the discipline of economics can provide cultural policy researchers with a complete range of analytical tools to analyse cultural policy that targets the creative industries. However, in this article, it is argued that economics faces limitations when it comes to explaining and interpreting political communication about the creative industries. The article discusses ways in which public authorities in the Nordic region seem to emulate *neo-tribal* trends from the corporate sector in their policy documents, in addition to pursuing more traditional utilitarian goals. Governing bodies can use this emulation as an instrument for the generation of increased feelings of belonging within the creative industries and society overall. When authorities add a neo-tribal touch to policy documents, they can also bolster their credibility among creative workers who themselves participate in neo-tribal networks. Thus, textual, visual and musical elements that promote feelings of solidarity and belonging are probably best interpreted as a softer form of economic instrumentalism that mirrors the pre-modern and liquid characteristics of neo-tribes. Some policy documents might fail to comply with utilitarian principles from welfare economics but instead derive rhetorical support from a logic that is closer to a neo-tribal one.

Keywords

Neo-tribalism, corporate tribes, instrumentalism, creative industries, welfare economics, policy analysis, textual analysis, visual analysis, musical analysis.

1 Introduction

In research on Nordic cultural policy, we can trace the discussions around the concept of *instrumentalism* at least back to a report from 1989, where Arnestad (1989:iv) proposed a Norwegian definition with application to cultural policy. In 1994, Vestheim brought Arnestad's definition to the international research community by translating it into English:

(...) instrumental cultural policy can be said to mean *to use cultural ventures and cultural investments as a means or investment to attain goals other than cultural areas*" (Vestheim 1994:65, emphasis in original).

Arnestad's definition, in Vestheim's translation, is now routinely quoted as authoritative within cultural policy research (e.g. Belfiore 2004, Belfiore and Bennett 2008, Giraud-Labelte et al. 2015, Gray 2007, 2008, Kizlari and Fouseki 2018, Lacroix 2010, Langen 2010, Lee 2018, McGuigan 2004, Nisbett 2013, Pergola 2016, Valtysson 2018, van den Hoogen 2010). Economic objectives are at the core of the concept, and Vestheim (1994) made this clear in his examination and elaboration. He proposed that the instrumentalism of cultural policy in Scandinavia in the 1980s and the 1990s had been a "mixed product of bureaucratic order and economic result orientation" (Vestheim 1994:69).

Some twenty years after his 1989 report, Arnestad (2010) expressed concern that economic instrumentalism was now being used strategically by researchers who were selling their services to public authorities. He observed that authorities were now publishing reports that were highlighting the economic potential in the creative sector without providing rigorous economic analyses. In his 2010 article, Arnestad asks, rhetorically: "Can a researcher simply 'believe' in the wonders of the experience economy?" (Arnestad 2010:110). In his 2010 article, he also looks back to the 1980s and 1990s, when public authorities had used numerous reports on the economic benefits of culture to legitimise public funding, and concludes that during the 1990s, the enthusiastic reports on the economic benefits of art and culture were accompanied by the sobering views of economists. Citing publications taking the perspective of welfare economics, Arnestad concludes that these publications correctly criticised report-producing researchers who were misusing data to demonstrate the economic benefits of art and culture.

Arnestad laments in his 2010 article, however, that while the production of reports on the economic potential of the creative industries was reaching even higher levels in 2010 than in the 1980s and 1990s, the (according to Arnestad) much needed sobering voices of economists were now absent:

(...) in the Nordic countries we are riding the waves of studies that map and document the [benefits provided by] the experience economy and the creative industries. Research and industry seem to go hand in hand. Nowadays we have no [economists] ... who question this. Also in the Nordic countries it is silent. Where have the critical cultural economists and cultural policy researchers gone? Now they are needed. (Arnestad 2010:120)

Arnestad is here requesting analyses emanating from the analytical framework of welfare economics. According to Arnestad, we need the rigour of welfare economics to scrutinise the mappings and reports and to reveal the real economic potential, or lack thereof, within the creative sector.

Beyond doubt, welfare economics was essential in the building of European welfare states after WW2. What is also beyond doubt is that economists still play a vital role in the current economic and political planning within western countries (Christensen 2018). That is why Arnestad's observations are particularly interesting: Despite the political power of economics as a social science discipline, Arnestad observes a lack of welfare-economic scrutiny of cultural policy in Nordic countries. How can that be?

This article offers some reflections in this regard. It does not take a *normative* stance when it comes to the use of economic expertise in the policy making process. What the article aims to do is to argue for an expansion of the *theoretical repertoire* in our understanding of economic instrumentalism in cultural policy, and more specifically, in public policies tar-

getting the creative industries. One possible expansion is to include Maffesoli's concept of *neo-tribalism* in our theoretical repertoire, as a supplement to the traditional welfare-economic model of interpretation.

The following section explains the methodology of the article. Subsequently, in Section 3, the article discusses Maffesoli's (1996) concept of *neo-tribalism*. Sections 4a, 4b and 4c examine textual, visual and musical examples from contemporary Nordic cultural policy. Section 5 discusses the analytical value of the neo-tribal perspective, and Section 6 sums up the main conclusions.

2 Data and methodology

I studied ten Scandinavian policy documents that target the creative industries (see Appendix). In many instances, authorities include policies for the creative industries in more general strategies and action plans where they treat the creative industries alongside the more traditional art sectors. Alternatively, governing bodies can include the creative industries in industrial policy plans where they identify culture and creativity as areas with economic potential. However, if we include both general cultural plans and industrial plans, the empirical material can become unmanageable. That is why I decided to confine the material to a more limited sample of dedicated Scandinavian strategic plans for creative industries. This sampling strategy entails a variant of purposive sampling that we can refer to as "typical case sampling" (Palys 2008:697, Patton 2002:236). In Section 4A, I have also included some Finnish examples. I have not studied Finnish documents in full, but I use the quote in Section 4A for illustrative purposes. Moreover, I have included aesthetic examples in Sections 4B and 4C which stem from other internet sources than the ten policy documents.

The article emanates from a three-step methodological process inspired by Swedberg's examinations of theorisation in the social sciences:

(a) *Identification of a surprising phenomenon*. As Swedberg puts it: "The phenomenon is surprising, because based on your knowledge you would expect something else to happen" (Swedberg 2014:238). In the case of this article, based on our knowledge about the prominence of welfare economics in policy development, we should expect that the language and concepts from welfare economics should dominate in documents targeting the creative sector. However, based on observations akin to the ones made by Arnestad (2010), and which I referred to in the introduction, it seemed to me, as an initial surprising observation, that Nordic authorities downplay welfare-economic concepts in their policies for the creative industries.

As Belfiore (2015) maintains, a central part of economic theory that authorities can apply in the case of cultural policy is the theory of *public goods*. This type of goods are non-excludable and non-rivalrous (Samuelson 1954, Sandmo 1989). By definition, it is impossible to *exclude* consumers from enjoying public goods even if consumers do not pay for them. Consequently, possible private suppliers of public goods face notorious free-rider problems that prevent them from making a profit and staying in business. Moreover, by definition, consumers do not have to *rival* each other to enjoy public goods. For example, the benefit that a ship gets from lighthouse signals is unlikely to reduce the benefit that other ships receive from the same lighthouse. In theory, governing bodies can increase overall utility by financing the production of this type of goods. In the case of art and culture, it is possible to argue that these sectors, at least in part, produce goods and services that fulfil the criteria for being public goods (Cwi 1980, Frey 2011, Fullerton 1991, Peacock 1994, Throsby 2010). We can make similar arguments for art and culture by referring to

economic concepts such as externalities, asymmetric information and merit goods (e.g. Musgrave and Musgrave 1989, Stiglitz and Rosengard 2015). In other words, the public sector might be able to increase overall utility by financing the production art and culture.

Now, what if policy documents omit the economic concepts referred to above? As Hecló (1972) has pointed out, policy is not only about what is being said. It is also about what is *not* being said. For example, in the ten policy documents that I studied, there is a surprising lack of reference to welfare-economic principles. There are few or no explicit references to concepts such as public goods, externalities, asymmetric information, merit goods or other welfare-economic concepts. Based on our previous knowledge about the importance of economics in policy-development, it seems surprising that Nordic authorities are so modest in using these concepts in recent policy documents for the creative industries.

(b) *Identification of possible interpretations.* One advice that Swedberg gives is that “in the context of discovery, you do better to cast your net widely” (Swedberg 2014b: 82). In principle, there are many potential explanations of the initial surprising phenomena that we observe or do not observe. Swedberg has noted that we can search for either explanations or conceptualisations, and that we can produce these by abduction. Referring to pragmatist philosopher Charles Peirce, Swedberg suggests that “(...) not only new theories but also new concepts come about through abduction.” (Swedberg 2012a:9). He further concludes that “concepts are extremely useful in carrying out an analysis” (Swedberg 2017:196), in that “a concept allows you to approach reality in an attempt to master it” (Ibid.). What this article offers is not an *explanation*, but a *conceptualisation*.

It is essential in the theorising process not to force data into a pre-defined concept. As Swedberg puts it, “(...) all too often an awkward attempt is made to force the research findings into some existing theory (...)” (Swedberg 2012b:12). This is a reminder that we should make sure that conceptualisations are the result of abduction and not the result of “guru effects” (Sperber 2010). However, there will *inevitably* be a bias in the process of conceptualisation, because the researcher only has a limited repertoire when he or she encounters the empirical material. Mills (2000) illustrates this point when he says that theoretical discovery can emanate from “(...) say, a mess of ideas from German philosophy and British economics” (Mills 2000:135). Before the researcher can create any form of discovery out of such a mess of ideas, he or she must *know* about these ideas in the first place. In other words, the researcher is biased, because he or she knows about some ideas, and he or she does not know about other ideas. My interpretation of elements of cultural policy as *neo-tribal* is biased in the sense that there might be alternative interpretive routes that are better, but which I am not aware of at this time.

(c) *Identification of examples* that illustrate how our conceptualisation can help in understanding the surprising phenomenon. I decided to use this step for the sake of illustration of the theoretical proposition made in the article. In Sections 4A, 4B and 4C, I use textual, visual and musical elements to exemplify policies that are, in my interpretation, influenced by neo-tribal trends. I have used aesthetic examples because cultural policy is not only inevitably *about* aesthetics (Vestheim 2004, Bjurström 2018, Hylland and Bjurström 2018), but it also inevitably *is* aesthetic. In particular, visual elements should not be ignored in cultural policy analysis, because they can reveal political dimensions that texts fail to show (Ball and Smith 1992, Banks 2014, 2018, Barnhurst and Quinn 2014, Björkvall 2012, Rose 2016).

Moreover, aesthetics are at the core of the theory of neo-tribalism (Maffesoli 2007). That is why, in an assessment of the theoretical relevance of the concept of neo-tribalism in cultural policy, it is necessary to examine the aesthetic elements that accompany or constitute these policies.

3 Neo-tribalism

We can use the concept of neo-tribalism in at least three different ways: A literal, an institutional, and a sociological one. In its literal sense, *neo-tribalism* can refer to tendencies where political or economical forms of power become more connected to membership in specific *ethnic tribes*. A couple of recent studies use the term *neo-tribalism* to denote the renewed relevance of ethnicity in the distribution of economic or political power (e.g. Bangstad et al. 2017, Rata 2005, 2011, Strathdee 2013). For example, Strathdee concludes that

(...) as a result of the emergence of neotribalism, class inequalities, such as those present in New Zealand, have been subsumed in the discourse as ethnic inequalities. (Strathdee 2013:503)

In Strathdee's example, neotribalism denotes new relevance of tribes in its literal sense, where tribal belonging stems from genetic relationships.

A second use of the term *neo-tribalism* is institutional. It refers to ways in which fractionalisation within political institutions or corporations stifles the internal communication and cooperation within these institutions. For example, Fox and Miller state:

Neotribalism suggests a dilemma. Will the groups embrace their robust realities and eventually abandon the larger polity (already faced with hyperreal discourse) in favour of dead-end identity politics? (Fox and Miller 1997:72)

According to Miller and Fox, "(...) the fragmentation and neotribalism of hyperreality make governance of any kind difficult" (Miller and Fox 2007:126). This is an *institutional* use of the term *neo-tribalism*, which entails that it becomes difficult for agents within institutions to compromise and reach common decisions due to deep ideological disagreements.

Maffesoli's use of the term neo-tribalism is what we can refer to as a sociological interpretation. In this interpretation, *neo-tribalism* entails that groups emerge around activities, interests or work in ways that remind us of traditional tribes in that the participants establish emotional bonds and a sense of belonging. But there is also a metaphorical element in this third conceptualisation in that it considers *neo-tribalism* as a fluid force. While studies within the literal interpretation (e.g. Bangstad et al. 2017, Rata 2005, 2011, Strathdee 2013) refer to neo-tribalism as a revival of *literally* tribal forces, this third interpretation does not involve literal kinship.

Maffesoli (1996) is probably the most cited work for this sociological interpretation of *neo-tribalism*. This article is informed by Maffesoli's use of the term and also by several other sociological studies that build on his conceptualisation (Bauman 1992a; 1992b, Bennett 1999, Cayli 2017, Evans 1997, Goulding and Shankar 2011, Goulding et al. 2002, Meling 2020:159–161, Norman 2014, Spencer and Walby 2013, St John 2012). *Neo-tribalism* in Maffesoli's (1996) conception entails an archaic yearning for belonging. Maffesoli (1996) assumes that this need for belonging is an essential attribute of the human condition. The neo-tribes that he refers to, primarily with French examples, can be regarded as contemporary representations of traditional tribes. According to Maffesoli, if a human society becomes dominated by rationality, instrumentalism and individualism, there is going to be an archaic reaction of disindividuation, empathy and affect (Maffesoli 1996:133). As Evans (1997:222) concludes, Maffesoli describes something "archaic within the modern (...) world which is resistant to 'disenchantment'".

Maffesoli (1996:139) himself points out that the neo-tribes "recall somewhat the archaic structures of village clans or tribes". However, the neo-tribes do not possess the more *fun-*

damental sense of belonging provided by the sociality and religion of hunter-gatherer tribes. While hunter-gatherers are born and die within the same tribe, humans in the contemporary West enter and leave multiple neo-tribes that can offer them an equivalent sense of belonging on a shorter term. Bauman concludes that neo-tribes, as opposed to traditional tribes, are notoriously unstable. Their existence is “(...) transient and always in flux” (Bauman 1992a:137). Bauman contextualises this observation by stating that the neo-tribes are less stable than what he refers to as “Tönnies’ solidly pre-conscious *Gemeinschaften*” (Bauman 1992b:697, emphasis in original).

The following list, although not exhaustive, contains some additional essential elements of neo-tribalism in Maffesoli’s (1996) conception:

- *Barbarism*. There is a Dionysian spirit (see also Maffesoli 1993) that vitalises members of the neo-tribes. Although this is a barbaric force, it is a force that is necessary for the sustenance of a society: “The barbarians are at our gates, but should we worry? After all, we are in part barbarian ourselves.” (Maffesoli 1996:110)
- *Ritual*. Maffesoli observes that neo-tribes need rituals to maintain their coherence: “The confidence established between the members of the group is expressed through rituals: specific signs of recognition which have no other goal than to strengthen the small group against the large.” (Maffesoli 1996:93)
- *Collectivism*. Feelings of the warmth of tribes stand against notions of universal morals. Also, contemporary observations of narcissism are only superficial, according to Maffesoli, because neo-tribes replace the collectivism of traditional hunter-gatherer tribes: “beyond the surface of narcissism, we shall pay closer attention to the group attitudes that develop in our societies.” (Maffesoli 1996:104, see also Maffesoli 2016)
- *Empathy*. Individuals extend their feelings of self to their neo-tribes, and they maintain feelings of solidarity that exclude outsiders: “we are witnessing the tendency for a rationalised ‘social’ to be replaced by an empathetic ‘sociality’, which is expressed by a succession of ambiances, feelings and emotions.” (Maffesoli 1996:11).
- *Aestheticism*. Maffesoli explains that he uses the term “aesthetics” in “the etymological sense of the word, as the common faculty of feeling, of experiencing” (Maffesoli 1996: 74): “We might possibly be witnessing the development of an aesthetic aura containing varying proportions of elements related to the communal drive, mystical propensity or an ecological perspective.” (Maffesoli 1996:13, see also Maffesoli 1991, 2007)
- *Tactileness*. The feeling of being-together is most prominently supported by the senses and by the tactile dimension of existence. A logic of touch replaces abstractions: “The return of image and sensation in our societies is undoubtedly linked to a logic of touch.” (Maffesoli 1996:77)

Now, if we juxtapose this list with Arnestad’s (2010) call for critical welfare-economic scrutiny of reports on the creative industries, we can see that we are dealing with two entirely different theoretical perspectives. Where welfare economics focuses on aggregate utility in abstract societies consisting of rational individuals, neo-tribalism entails a preoccupation with belonging and the social primacy of collectives.

Maffesoli’s most famous book (Maffesoli 1996) has been criticised for presenting an essentialist view of social ontology. For example, one reviewer writes:

Constructionists might take offence at [Maffesoli’s] ontological claim of the natural, instinctive aspect of ‘groupism’, and if I were to raise a tentative warning finger it would be raised against what I found to be a

measure of naivety in the text, and his subsequent neglect of the murky ‘backside’ of contemporary neo-tribes, a ‘distasteful’ backside marked by, for example, ethnic nationalism and fascist exploitation of the *tribus* (Peterson 1997: 326–327).

Others have observed that Maffesoli’s view is optimistic (Keller 2018:90). Perhaps this optimism is what Peterson (1997) perceives as naivety. In any case, it is correct, as Peterson (1997) observes, that Maffesoli’s most famous book (Maffesoli 1996) does not discuss ethnic nationalism. It is also correct that the book presents an essentialistic view of human sociality. Maffesoli assumes that emotions emanate from the animalistic and instinctual (Maffesoli 1996:44). In this regard, the book resembles recent sociological studies on the evolutionary background of human cognition (e.g. Turner and Abrutyn 2017, Turner and Machalek 2018, Turner et al. 2018). But the book does not, at least explicitly, take a normative stance for or against the social forces that it examines.

The private sector has to some extent adopted a tribal approach, in that scientific management principles (Taylor 1919), with their focus on reason and rationality, are currently being replaced by notions of belonging and solidarity (Braun and Kramer 2018, Jensen 2002, Logan et al. 2011). This new form of management literature does not refer to Maffesoli’s work, as far as I am aware, but the two perspectives have a lot in common. What the corporate tribalism literature does is to emulate the principles of kinship, which is assumed to be a strong motivating force behind human behaviour. For example, Braun and Kramer, who present themselves as *corporate anthropologists*, suggest that corporations should consider their “(...) organisational chart as [a] kinship system” (Braun and Kramer 2018:55). In other words, they view kinship emulation as an instrumentally more efficient way of generating profits than rational, scientific forms of management. The following quote from the best-seller Jensen (2002) is also illustrative of this type of modern organisation, where managers substitute reason and rationality with tribal enchantment strategies that are more “human”:

If “strategy plan” is a nice word, “human capital” is even nicer. All managers want that now. But what is it actually? We can make it complicated, but in my head it is very simple: Human capital expresses the degree to which we learn more, year by year, share our knowledge, get to use our resources, the creativity, the joy, the madness and the passion – all that which has arid living conditions in a strategy plan. Even more so when the strategy plan has been written by mathematical men who believe the world is a formula. For example, there is far too little about magic in the strategy plans. Other things that get too little attention are symbols, rituals and confessions. (Jensen 2002:31)

While economists (“mathematical men”) have conceptualised human capital for use in various models (Becker 1962, 1993, Mincer 1958, Schultz 1958, 1962), defined as the stock of “skills and knowledge and health of workers” (Schultz 1962:7), Jensen interprets the concept of “human capital” differently. In his view, “human capital” is capital that is morally superior because it is human. It includes intimacy, empathy and solidarity, which are desired feelings within an overall management style that attempts to create an illusion of kinship.

What Vestheim (1994) observed was that public authorities had started to emulate management principles from the private sector. Moreover, researchers have thoroughly investigated how *New Public Management* principles influence of cultural policy (e.g. Belfiore 2004, McGuigan 2005, van den Hoogen 2014, Vestheim 2007). But what also seems to be the case in some current Nordic policy documents for the creative industries, is that authorities emulate neo-tribal trends and the tribal approach of the corporate anthropologists.

4a Textual elements

Some recent textual elements give us a taste of the *disindividuation* that Maffesoli (1996) describes, and that the corporate anthropologists have embraced in their designs of tribal management principles. Instead of treating cultural stakeholders as abstract producers of culture in a landscape that requires correction of market failure, we can find examples where authorities treat them as irrational agents that participate in unique networks of solidarity:

[The government will] create growth boosters in selected export markets with anchors in Denmark that will strengthen the sharing of experiences and networks in markets, to increase exports. (Danish Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs 2019:13)

The government will strengthen the matchmaking between business and art and culture to ensure that potential investors and partners from business life will invest in and develop cultural products. (Danish Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs 2019:23)

[Creative companies] do not always have good existing models for the development of contracts. Creative professionals and inventors sometimes conceal their ideas for too long, and the interest from larger cooperating companies might therefore fade. (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture 2017:28)

Many cultural businesses need help in strengthening their cooperation with other businesses, creating trust, and identifying common challenges and opportunities for cooperation. (Norwegian Ministry of Culture et al. 2013:40)

Some of the first tasks for the network [“Design Stryn”] was to establish a common pavilion during the Stryn exhibition. This became the location of a social happening for the whole town (...) (Norwegian Ministry of Culture et al. 2013:70)

Regional authorities should help smaller businesses within the cultural and creative industries to become active and visible on the international stage. This has to do with both informing about the new possibilities that are available and equipping businesses with the tools required to access international markets. (Region Västra Götaland 2018:18)

From a welfare economic point of view, it is difficult to see the relevance of formulations such as “sharing of experiences and networks”, “matchmaking”, “inventors conceal their ideas for too long”, “creating trust” and “help smaller businesses”. From a welfare-economic point of view there is no reason to believe that potential investors are irrational when they abstain from investing in cultural products. Nor is it relevant, from a welfare-economic point of view, that businesses “conceal their ideas for too long”. These phrases do not belong in a political realm where “economic planners” legitimise public funding by referring to market failure.

Instead, what authorities seem to do in these cases is to adopt the role of the empathetic tribal patriarch. Creative businesses are viewed not as production units but as irreplaceable representatives of capital that is “human” in the sense that Jensen describes (Jensen 2002). The authorities empathetically express a wish to *help* businesses in their networking efforts where these businesses get the opportunity to form personal and emotional bonds. Tribal particularism replaces economic universalism. A bureaucratic dilemma in this regard is where to draw the line between *help* and corruption. If authorities help some businesses, they cannot help others. Thus, the ethos of help, matchmaking and trust in creative industries policies breaks with the universalist “economic scientization” (Christensen 2018) of public governance.

The underpinning idea of such an intimate relationship between authorities and creative businesses is probably to promote *personal relationships* in business development. Presumably, authorities believe that such personal relationships are more promising than transactional economic relationships in the generation of societal, economic benefits. According to Maffesoli, modernity entails an obsession with “the individualist and economic model” (Maffesoli 1996:113). But what the quotes above seem to indicate, is that in the case of the creative industries, the public sector is certainly not always obsessed with this model. On the contrary, the quotes exemplify how authorities downplay the importance of the individualistic and disinterested examination of artistic value as well as the methodological individualism and rationalism assumed within economics. If we are to believe Maffesoli (1996), this is because, at some point, the pendulum must swing back to emotional forms of collectivism when individualist rationality has run its course.

4b Visual elements

An essential element in Maffesoli’ (1996) analyses of neo-tribalism is the return of *image*:

(...) there are moments in time that are abstract, theoretical or purely rational, and others in which culture, in its broadest sense, is constructed from participation and ‘tactileness’. The return of image and sensation in our societies is undoubtedly linked to a logic of touch. (Maffesoli 1996:161)

Below are a few illustrations and photos used by Nordic authorities to underpin their policies for the creative industries. They contain elements that we can interpret as neo-tribal.

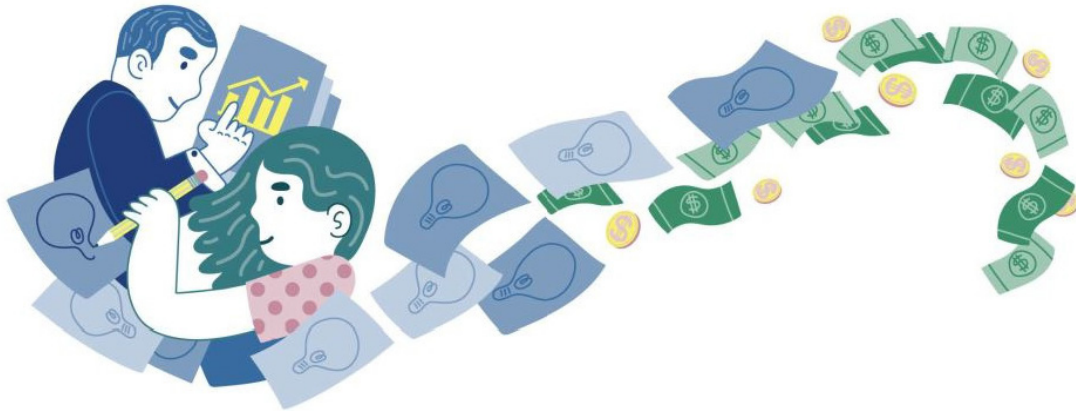


Figure 1 Visual element supporting Danish policies for the creative industries.

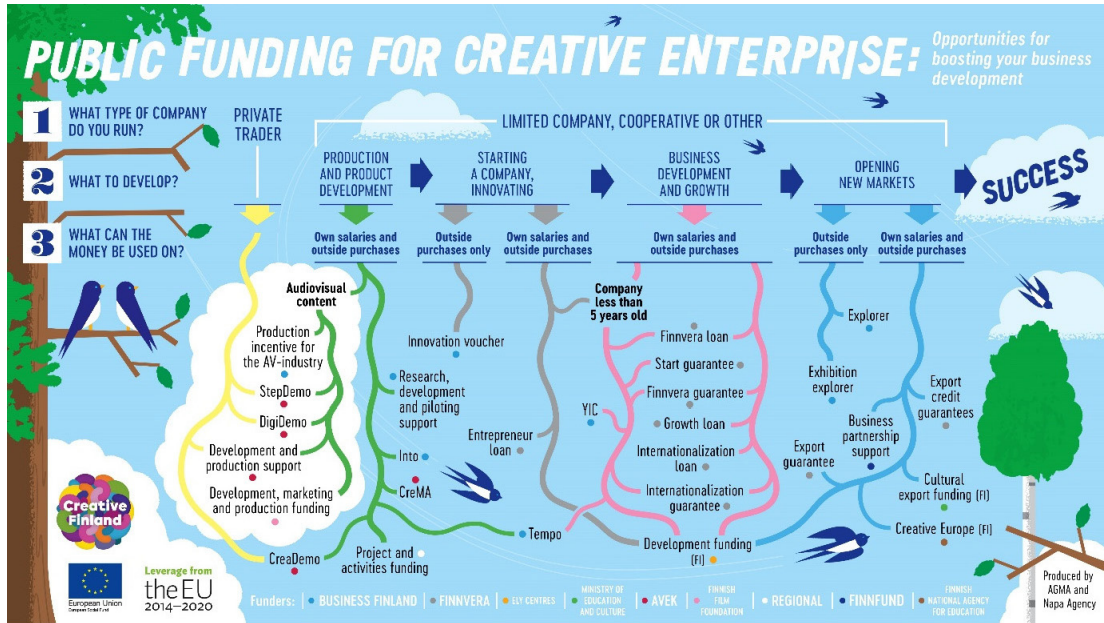


Figure 2 Visual element supporting Finnish policies for the creative industries.

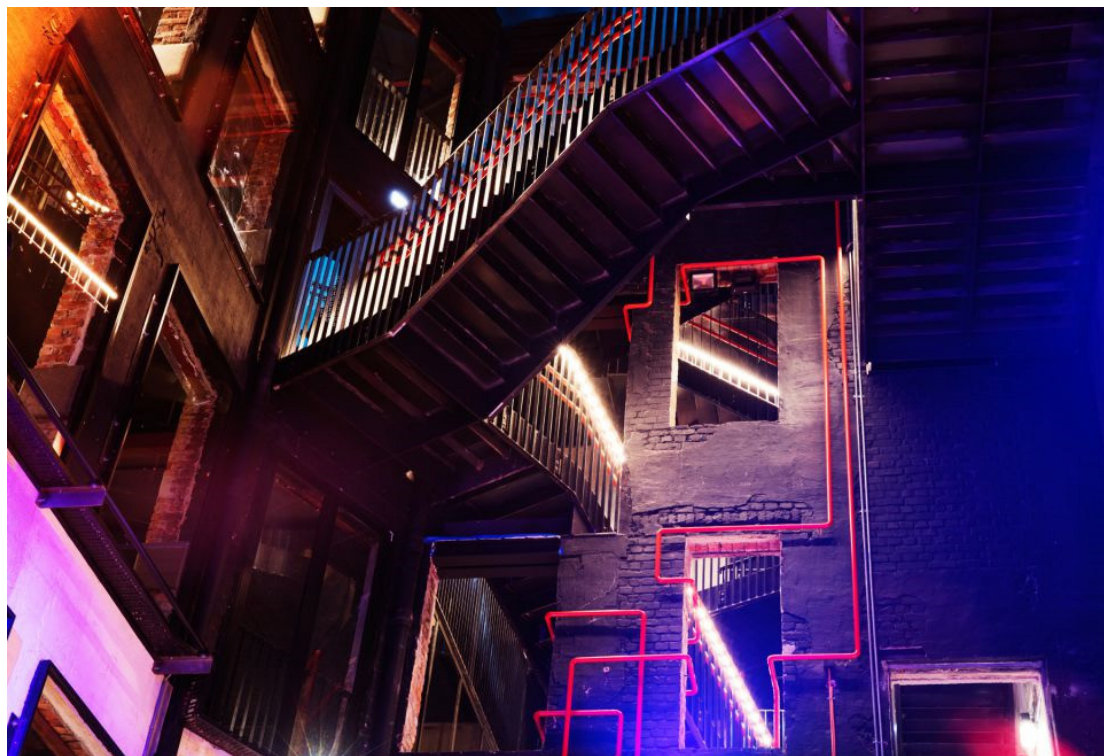


Figure 3 Visual element supporting Norwegian policies for the creative industries.



Figure 4 Visual element supporting policies for the creative industries in Gothenburg.

Figure 1 is an illustration produced for the Danish government by the Danish company *e-Types* (Danish Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs 2019:25). The image is part of a series of illustrations that accompany a white paper on policies for the creative industries. It seems plausible to regard the image as an example of naivety in art (Brodskaya 2007). The two individuals in the figure have characteristics from adults and children. They have small noses, which resemble child physiology, but they have marked eyebrows, which seems to be a visual representation of the adult. The authorities depict creative industries workers as adult individuals, but with the social characteristics of children.

A possible motivation behind this naïve visual expression is that naivety resembles the heteronomy and intimacy in the world of children. This intimacy communicates the creation and maintenance of bonds that are emotional, not rational. Thus, infantile artistic expressions have the potential of communicating a form of belonging within the unstable business landscapes of creative entrepreneurs. Piaget observed, in the case of children between the ages of 5 and 8: “As in the organised clan so in these groups, temporarily formed and isolated in relation to each other, the individual does not count. Social life and individual life are one.” (Piaget 1997:102).

As we saw in Section 3, corporate anthropologists use tribal mechanisms instrumentally. One way of doing this is to convert employees into children in a tribe. When the employees have taken the role equivalent to the role of children in a tribe, supported by corporate rituals of belonging, the newborn children-employees no longer require authoritarian forms of supervision to be productive. Consequently, the corporation can generate its profits by an organic emulation of the tribe, instead of using more rationalistic management principles. It is probably that same logic *e-Types*, and the civil servants in the Danish government, have applied in their illustrations. The illustrations remind us that the creative industries do not just represent “any industry” for the government. For example, it seems unlikely that the

government would have selected this type of illustration in a policy paper for the fishing industry or the banking sector. Presumably, policies targeting the creative industries requires a more intimate touch to mirror neo-tribal elements within the creative networks that they support.

Figure 2 is from a set of infographics from Creative Finland (2019), with visualisations by Jukka Pylväs from *Napa Arts and Licensing Agency*. The visualisations are comparable to the ones by *e-Types* referred to above, in the sense that they present measures for the creative industries within an aesthetics of naivety. The language in these infographics is economical, but Pylväs' visualisations turn the focus in a different direction. It is possible to view them as a visual reflection of a turn to sustainability in the creative industries. But we can also view them as representations of a vitalist social counterforce to the rationalist separation between culture and nature. According to Maffesoli, we can view this type of vitalism as a "naturalisation of culture":

(...) [vitalism] can take different forms. I see it currently as something beyond the strict separation of nature and culture. It was on that sort of separation that the modern *épistémè* was based. But there are numerous signs, in our era, that show the confusion, or at least interpenetration, between the two poles in question. We can summarize this in a well known formula: culturalization of nature and naturalization of culture. (Maffesoli 1991:9, emphasis in original)

Presumably, the employees within Creative Finland who purchase visual design services believe that in the case of the creative industries, this form of visual argumentation is the most politically persuasive one. The use of nature in the visualisations serve as illustrations of Creative Finland's ambitions of sustainability. But they probably also serve a different purpose, which is to invigorate the policies with a *social* vitality that economic language lacks.

Figure 3 shows the artwork 'Ikaroskomplekset' by the artists Marius Dahl and Jan Christensen. This work is currently used by Innovation Norway (2019) on its webpages and it visually supports policies for the creative industries. The idea behind using this image is probably that it mirrors the *buzz* that policymakers believe that the creative industries have the potential of generating. In a literal sense, the image seems to mirror the visual aesthetic of the club scene that some ephemeral neo-tribes emanate from (Bennett 1999, Goulding and Shankar 2011).

Figure 4 is an image from Brewhouse Gothenburg (2020), which is a publicly supported incubator for creative businesses. The image was used in the web section for events and conferences until mid 2020, but has for some reason been removed as of September 2020. Presumably, the Brewhouse has a gallery of images that rotate on the web pages. Various comparable images can be found on the Brewhouse Gothenburg web pages as of September 2020, but the image in Figure 4 is suitable for the purpose of illustration. In the image, the main venue of the organisation is decorated with a red light that warms up the otherwise aesthetically cold production landscape of the old brewhouse. As it is written about the venue on the web page, "(...) this is where industrial rawness meets warmth". The cold utilitarian logic is accompanied by a warm logic of belonging. The creative industries conferences that take place in this type of venue can be suitable for the visual emulation of a neo-tribal ambience. What seems to take place in Gothenburg, is that the *events* are becoming essential political-rhetorical elements. Politicians, civil servants and cultural workers participate in creative conferences that emulate the ambience of the musical neo-tribes. The rhetorical function of the venue design is probably to create an atmosphere of solidarity between the participants and to transform institutional relationships into personal ones.

These examples illustrate ways in which the economic instrumentalism within policies for the creative industries can get a neo-tribal touch from visual elements. We can try to imagine what kind of illustrations *e-Types* would have created if the Danish policies for the creative industries were to comply with the principles of welfare economics. In hypothetical cultural-political white papers relying on welfare-economic expertise, it is unlikely that the civil servants would have been able to accept *e-Types*' infantile form of visual decoration. Within the traditional individualist methodology of economics (Schumpeter 1909, Hayek 1942), infantile illustrations are probably phenomenologically inadequate.

It is also worth noting that the *quantity* of visual elements in policy documents for the creative industries is sometimes substantial. The considerable emphasis on visual elements in recent policy documents might reflect technological developments that make it easier for authorities to include visual elements. But also, we can interpret the extensive use of images as a demonstration of how important the tactile and personal dimensions have become in these policies.

4c Musical elements

Referring to Schutz (1951), Maffesoli observes that music has the potential to facilitate strong feelings of a social bond among the people who play or listen to music together (Maffesoli 1996:73, see also Freeman 2001, Overy and Molnar-Szakacs 2009, Schutz 1951). Maffesoli has coined the term “syntony” as a synonym for Schutz’s (1951) concept of the “mutual tuning-in relationship” that is made possible by music, and Maffesoli writes that “the whole of social existence is involved in this form of empathy” (Maffesoli 1996: 73). This is why musical aesthetic is at the core of neo-tribal aesthetics.

Nordic authorities rarely use music deliberately in their political communication, but a recent musical choice from Region Blekinge in Sweden can serve as an example of how economic instrumentalism can take a softer expression. On the webpages of Region Blekinge, there is a video entitled: “Cultural and Creative Industries: Creativity That Generates Growth” (Region Blekinge 2018a). The video states that “(...) together we will create a Blekinge whose cultural and creative industries are one of many reasons for visiting, working and living in Blekinge”. Region Blekinge shows the potential of the cultural and creative industries by economic statistics that are referred to for a few seconds in the video. The numbers seem to fail in logically supporting the conclusion that the region should support the creative industries. But the music in the video play an equally significant rhetorical role. The music, represented in Figure 5 below, seems to communicate a more empathetic and collectivist form of economic instrumentalism where the goal probably is to strengthen a regional identity.

The excerpt in Figure 5 shows a harmonic movement known as a plagal cadence, from the subdominant C major in the second bar to the tonic G major in the third. According to Aldwell et al. this is a harmonic progression that creates a “feeling of repose” (Aldwell et al. 2019: 231). The pattern shown in the excerpt is repeated throughout the whole three minute soundtrack, and has probably been composed and performed for the particular purpose of supporting Region Blekinge’s policies for the creative industries. The social function of the “feeling of repose” that the plagal cadences create might simply be to mirror the serene landscape of Blekinge. But the harmonic structure of *stability* could also represent an equivalent political desire for *social* stability and belonging. The politicians probably want it all: They want the coolness of Milan’s fashion industry and Hollywood’s film industry, which are the industrial examples that the voice in the video mentions. But also, they want the



Figure 5 Musical element supporting the creative industries policies of Region Blekinge.

belonging and stability of a regional identity. It is probably this identity element that Peterson (1997:327) normatively recognises as a reflection of the “murky backside” of Maffesoli’s theorisation of neo-tribal trends.

Whether Region Blekinge’s policies for the creative industries work, or not, is probably impossible to measure, in terms of the quantitative objectives that the region has defined (Region Blekinge 2018b:22). From a welfare economics point of view, we can question the rigour of the policy paper (Region Blekinge 2018b) that the soundtrack supports. For example, the policy paper does not discuss the opportunity cost of the public funds used to bolster the cultural and creative industries. But the regional government seems to assume, at least rhetorically, that the long-term economic benefits of belonging outweigh the short-term costs of supporting the creative industries.

5 Discussion

If the above textual, visual and musical examinations are plausible, which is of course a matter of discussion, then we can see the contours of a channel of sentiments that feed into the policymaking process from a source that is both archaic and “cool”. What this entails is that the economic instrumentalism of the policies for the creative sector has a soft variant. What I have argued is that we can observe elements of pre-modern forms of social organisation in cultural policy, represented by an intimate relationship between authorities and creative workers. Governing bodies use creative entrepreneurs as an instrument to achieve economic benefits, but authorities also view them as partly irrational and incompetent. Due to this irrationality and incompetence, it becomes less feasible for the public sector to maintain the analytical distance of the traditional “economic planners”. By entering into a role as helper and matchmaker for networks of solidarity within the creative sector, authorities take a new role akin to the role of the corporate manager who explicitly or implicitly aims to establish illusions of tribal kinship. This entails a conversion of societal neo-tribal sentiments into soft variants of economic instrumentalism:

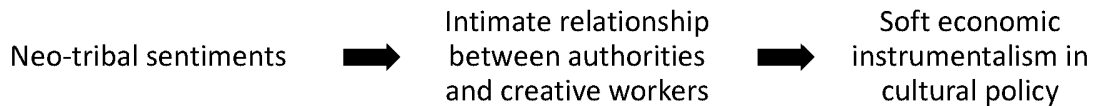


Figure 6 Conversion of neo-tribal sentiments into soft economic instrumentalism in cultural policy.

However, some observations might induce us to ask whether this interpretation is plausible, and whether it is really the case that *belonging* is the new currency of creative industries policies. First, there is a significant use of *numbers* within these policies. As Bille et al (2014) have pointed out, authorities commonly communicate policies in cool cash. The presence of numbers might be a sign that the economic instrumentalism for the creative industries is still a “hard” one. For example, the Danish government concludes that the creative industries supports 117 000 employees, contribute with 93 billion DKK to GDP, generates 348 billion DKK in revenues for the Danish economy, contributes with 8 billion DKK in income to the treasury, and have increased their exports with 4,2 per cent annually from 2008 to 2016 (Danish Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs 2019:7). The syllogism that seems to be implicit in the white paper is the following: Industries that increase their exports significantly should receive public support. The creative industries have increased their exports significantly. Thus, the Danish government should support the creative industries. Does this type of argument not show that creative industries policies is dominated by welfare-economic thinking?

The simple answer to this question is that although some stakeholders might regard such a syllogism as valid, it is difficult to see that this syllogism represents a plausible welfare-economic argument for public support of the creative industries. The primary function of the numbers in the documents seems to be to create the illusion that the policies are *also* economically rational. If we take the perspective of policymakers, we can reasonably assume that stakeholders will only feel genuinely enchanted by the political communication within the creative industries if they *also* believe in the illusion that the policies are rational from a welfare-economic point of view. But this does not prove that policies for the creative industries represent a *de facto* application of economic theory. As long as policymakers manage to establish the illusion of welfare-economic rationality, *neo-tribal* rhetoric can still constitute the most persuasive element for the stakeholders.

A second reservation we can make is regarding the degree to which authorities use aesthetic elements *deliberately* to underpin policies. Do policymakers not simply decorate their policies for the sake of decoration in itself? Are these not arbitrary forms of aesthetics? What the article has suggested is that the aesthetic elements are not arbitrary. For example, they seem to represent feelings that are otherwise typically generated by kinship. However, this is a matter that is up for dispute.

Finally, a third possible reservation is that there may be other concepts than *neo-tribalism* that we can use to describe the observations in this article. As mentioned above, the choice of neo-tribalism as theoretical perspective emanates from my own prior familiarity with it, and as Swedberg (2012b) underlines, there is always a danger of awkwardly forcing data into previously known concepts. On the other hand, Maffesoli’s concept seems to *fit* with the current Nordic political landscape of the creative industries. Creative industries are often associated with the young, funky, cool and sometimes ephemeral. At the same time, the creative soul probably needs to belong to a network in some form. It is this combination of *belonging* and *fluidity* within the creative industries that the concept of *neo-tribalism* seems to grasp, and that some policy papers seem to reflect.

6 Conclusions and future research

The article has argued for an expansion of the theoretical repertoire in the analysis of cultural policy. More specifically, it has argued that there are elements in contemporary policies for the creative industries in the Nordic countries that we can interpret as *neo-tribal*. Policies for the creative sector occasionally seem to adopt a tactile logic where authorities modify their cultural-political instrumentalism into a soft economic variant.

Corporate anthropologists have discovered that if they manage to create an illusion of kinship among employees, this illusion can engender tribal feelings of solidarity as well as ritual energy. The tribal illusion that the corporate anthropologists instrumentally create, has the potential of generating profits for the shareholders as a by-product. Similarly, authorities sometimes seem more concerned with the creation of the ambience of cultural neo-tribes than with engaging in discussions about the utilitarian benefits of their policies for the creative sector. Corporate anthropologists enable corporations to increase the profits for shareholders. Analogously, authorities in some cases seem to assume that tribal feelings of belonging, created by policies for the creative sector, can generate long-term economic benefits for society.

Arnestad (2010) has suggested that economists should engage in a more rigorous assessment of the benefits of the public funding of the creative industries. This article has not taken a stance on the use of economic expertise in the policy-making process. But what the paper has argued is that Nordic authorities, in their policies for the creative sector, do not exclusively pursue welfare economic goals. Thus, researchers within cultural policy might want to consider supplementing their theoretical toolbox with the neo-tribal vocabulary of Maffesoli (1996) and the tribal vocabulary of the corporate anthropologists.

Some might sympathise with Arnestad and lament what is seemingly a retraction of the rational gaze of economics from the policymaking process in the case of the creative industries. Also, some might question the ethics of public sector emulation of tribal management principles. A pertinent question in that regard is whether it is indeed feasible for policymakers to maintain a position of rational analysis and non-participatory detachment to the creative sector in the long run. For political reasons, politicians probably feel forced to emulate the ambience of the creative networks that they support. Conversely, they probably also think it causes political harm for them if they adopt “economic man” rationality in the policymaking process for the creative industries.

This article has only focused on a limited number of policy examples which seem to convey softer variants of economic instrumentalism. Thus, the article should be considered a preliminary theoretical proposition and not an assessment of the overall impacts of these softer variants. Future systematic empirical analyses could help to investigate the magnitude of neo-tribal elements in policies for the creative industries or perhaps generate better conceptualisations for the social forces that this article has examined.

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