**Advice on cultural policy matters: changing times for the Council of Culture**

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As an advisor and co-author on the music policy advices of the Art Council from 2009 until 2011 Lelieveldt is able to connect the processes that are traceable/accessible through public written sources with developments behind the scenes. Minnaert is finishing a PhD on the changing discourse of Dutch International Cultural Policy and in recent years has written several articles on this topic.

**Abstract**

A closer look at the Dutch cultural policy discourse reveals that the position of the Council for Culture is increasingly disputed. In in the recent debate on financial cutbacks the government explicitly neglected much of the Councils advice, thus damaging the Councils authority. In the international cultural policy, reports of the more generalist Scientific Council on Government Policy have had more impact on the policy primacy than those of the Council for Culture. A recent advice of the Council for Culture on ICP that was followed effectively weakened its own position, separating the practice of internationalization from the more strategic choices. Three recent changes in the Council – decreasing in size, the focus on generalists rather than specialist and hiring of external advisors – reflect a search for regaining relevance and a change in the way cultural policy and its surrounding discourse is given shape.

**Keywords:** advisory councils, Council for Culture, shifting paradigm, evaluation

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**Introduction: the Council for Culture under pressure**

In 1862 Dutch statesman Jan Rudolf Thorbeke stated it was not the duty of the state, nor in the true interest of art itself, that the government had any substantive involvement in the arts. This statement, since then referred to as the Thorbecke-adagio[[1]](#footnote-1), clearly appoints the complicated relation between the arts and (national) governments. Thorbecke suggested it was undesirable that governments decide between good and bad art; he did not necessarily mean that there should be no government involvement in the arts. He definitely had a point. One only needs to look at the way dictatorships abuse the arts to spread their ideology to see that this is an undesirable situation. On the other hand many governments, at least for most of the 20th century and also the beginning of the 21st century, have influence in the art world through subsidization and other policy measures. As we will try to make clear later in this article, the cultural field itself also asked and still asks for such a substantive judgement to be part of the subsidization process. This poses a dilemma: how can a government make choices if it is not able to allow some kind of reasoned judgement on the art itself? In the case of the Netherlands the founding of the Council for the Arts (*Raad voor de Kunst*) in 1956[[2]](#footnote-2) provided – at least partially – a solution for this dilemma. The involvement of cultural experts through this Council for the Arts, which in 1996 merged with three other councils in the Council for Culture (*Raad voor Cultuur*)[[3]](#footnote-3) for a long time allowed a substantive judgement to be part of the decision-making process.

But two developments have affected the position of the Council in the last few decades. In the beginning the Council was primarily asked for statements on the artistic quality of artists that requested government funding. The basic scope of Dutch cultural policy in the post-WWII years was to ensure a minimum supply of artistic work and support for the social and geographic distribution of that supply. But with the increase of both the budget for and the scope of cultural policy the role of the Council changed. It was increasingly asked to advise on a wider array of policy issues, for example on policy instruments, on the role of intermediary institutions and – a bit sour – on suggestions to cut funding for the arts in general or for specific sectors. A second development is the increased involvement of other advisory councils in the cultural policy process. Aside from private consultancy agencies and specially created by the government, general advisory councils such as the Scientific Council for Government Policy (*Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid*, WRR[[4]](#footnote-4)) and the Institute for Social Research (*Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau*, SCP) have been given an important role in advising on cultural policy related issues. This affects the policy discourse, because these advisory councils use a different frame of reference. Also, in those councils there is less room for cultural experts.

The pressure on the Council culminated in 2010, when a right wing government took office. Its liberal opinions on government support for the arts lead to a radical shift in funding structure and mergers in many cultural policy fields. The councils advice was mostly ignored and the council itself was slimmed down and moved from its impressive office in the embassy neighbourhood of The Hague to a plan office in the National Library. In this paper we will explore some of the consequences of these developments on the role of the Council for Culture in Dutch cultural policy. On a more abstract level we investigate whether these developments reflect a more fundamental change in society, where the citizens and politicians become more opinionated and refrain from trusting experts opinions on policy issues. We explore how this change in the Council’s role might be exemplary for a shift in paradigm, in the way culture is addressed in government policy. In order to address this issue, we describe two different policy processes: the Dutch national cultural policy and the Dutch international cultural policy. With regard to the first process we discuss the first debate on the involvement of cultural specialists in decisions on government funding and the debate around the drastic cutbacks in 2011; with regard to the second process we discuss two shifts in the Dutch international cultural policy (in 1987 and 2007). We have analysed the political discourse (e.g. policy documents, debates in parliament, advisory reports) that supported these developments. This analysis can best be described as a combination of the insights of discourse analysis and policy research. This paper is an exploratory paper explicitly designed to investigate the potential for this approach for cultural policy research; We are interested in the influence of advice on the discourse surrounding Dutch cultural policy. Most of the research on Dutch cultural policy is on the policy itself and the possible effects. The notion of evidence-based policy is leaving a trace in the research agenda, with focus on the effects of cultural policy. But that leaves some of the other influences of cultural policy neglected, namely the influence on how notions of culture or the arts are influenced by the policy discourse it has become a part of.

**National cultural policy**[[5]](#footnote-5)

When in 1913 the Liberal Minister of Culture Heemskerk reserved funding for the Concertgebouw Orchestra (nowadays known as the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra[[6]](#footnote-6)) on the national budget, this caused some outrage in parliament. Some of the MPs feared a precedent, others were outraged because no funding was foreseen for the Residence Orchestra. If only the Concertgebouw Orchestra received funding, it would undermine the competitiveness of the young and special initiative of Henri Viotta in the Hague. The vote on the budget was suspended twice, after which the budget post was removed.

After the debate two things happened. Firstly, in addition to the Residence Philharmonic Orchestra, both the orchestras in Arnhem and Utrecht applied for funding. Secondly, the Ministry of Internal Affairs started designing an advisory body to the government. The previous debate had turned out to be an unedifying spectacle, with MPs clearly advocating for their respective causes. The plan for this advisory body was eventually dropped because the top officials at the Ministry feared that this body would outflank their position. But in 1918 for the first time government funding was reserved for orchestras, and the constitution of an Advisory Commission for Musical Work Commission recommendation for Musical Works (*Commissie van advies voor de Toonkunst*) was announced. For more than thirty years this commission would offer advice to ministers and officials on the allocation of grants and other issues related to music policy. Intriguingly, these advice were given in secret. Apparently asking advice from specialists outside the government was seen as a sign of weakness (in any case, by the government officials).

The commission, composed of representatives of several orchestras and music notables of conservatories in the Netherlands, played an important role in distribution of grants and the formulation of grant conditions. Those conditions, for example accessibility for the less educated and decent fees for musicians, reflected the plurality of visions on art that were then prevalent among political parties. One condition however was missing: quality. With the exception of scholarships to art students, artistic quality did not play an explicit role in the distribution of grants. The commission did want to apply artistic quality as a condition for funding. It did for example want to honour the high status and international position of the Concertgebouw with an additional grant. The background to this plan – top official Duparc explained to his minister in 1921 – was the fact that Willem Mengelberg, who was conductor of the Concertgebouw Orchestra from 1895 until 1945, made it a habit threatening to leave abroad if he didn’t get a higher wage. The request for a higher remuneration for the Concertgebouw Orchestra again lead to a fierce debate in parliament. Particularly MP Van Beresteijn referred to the use of the quality-criterion in this matter: he considered it inappropriate to distribute grants based on quality in this country “because if Mengelberg becomes conductor of the Residence Orchestra than that orchestra should receive the highest subsidy".

In general financial government support for the arts was still very limited in the first half of the 20th century; theatre and dance had to wait until after WWII before the first subsidization took place[[7]](#footnote-7).When the Dutch government started subsidizing the performing arts right after WWII, other goals than just the blossoming of the arts prevailed. The main reason for support for theatre for example was the geographic and social distribution of the arts within a government-supported theatre system. With government support theatre groups were established in different regions (north, south and east) to avoid a situation where only the population in the more densely populated western part of the country had access to professional theatre. Theatre companies were also obliged to travel outside their home town.[[8]](#footnote-8) The same kind of distribution-ideal was applied to classical music, resulting in the establishment of several regional classical orchestras.

As strikingly explained by the title of the book *Beauty, well-being, quality* (*Schoonheid,welzijn, kwaliteit*, Oosterbaan 1990) by Dutch sociologist Warna Oosterbaan Martinius, over the years the legitimizing grounds for government policy shifted. Along with the place of culture in the government infrastructure, a gradual shift can be perceived towards a less-instrumental and more intrinsic motivated cultural policy. It was under Minister of Culture Elco Brinkman in the late Eighties that quality became the leading principle in the dissemination of subsidies. It had of course already played a role in the previous policy. As mentioned, in 1956 the Council for the Arts was established and the role of the cultural specialists in advising the government was no longer a secret endeavour. But in the new policy system it became the leading criterion, and in the determination of that artistic quality the Council for the Arts played a decisive role.

For a long period of time the advice given by the Council for Culture on national cultural policy issues were followed by the government.[[9]](#footnote-9) Of course the judgment of the Council was sometimes criticized, and sometimes it was reversed in parliament, but in general the advice of the specialists was seen as weighty.[[10]](#footnote-10) But during the last financial cutbacks in 2010-2011 the Council was asked to advice within a strict financial framework. The Council was asked how to cut 200 million euros structurally by 2014. Of those 200 million euros 125 million euros had to be cut on institutions that were part of the Basic Infrastructure (BIS)[[11]](#footnote-11). The imagery was used of ‘building a new house for the BIS’, making it viable for the future. Besides more general measures the Council was asked to develop specific scenarios, for example for the future of the music infrastructure. The council was asked for ideas on

* how to reduce the amount of orchestras, also looking at possibilities for clustering and cooperation
* how to perform the task of accompaniment of dance and opera more efficiently[[12]](#footnote-12)
* how efficiency can be reached by letting the audience travel more instead of the orchestras

Although the list of questions seems reasonable, many of these questions had already been looked at very recently. The issue of the amount of orchestras was part of an ongoing debate, and had been addressed in 2010 in an advice exclusively focussed on the future of the orchestra system. On April 23rd 2009 Minister of Culture Ronald Plasterk had asked the Council for Culture for an advice on the extent to which the former system was suited for keeping alive the symphonic tradition in the Netherlands. In that request the Council was asked to take into account the existing budget. On February 18th 2010 the Council published the advice, and stated in the introduction that this advice – in contrast to previous advices – would not be about closures or mergers, but about more fundamental issues such as different funding bases, professionalization and collaboration (RvC 2010: 2).

With this advice in mind it is, to put it mildly, strange that within the same year the same Council for Culture was asked to come with an advice that deals with precisely those issues that the Council wanted to avoid in the advice in 2010. On October 14th the first administration under the leadership of the liberal Prime Minister Mark Rutte is installed. For the first time the position of Secretary of State for Culture was filled by a liberal as well, Halbe Zijlstra.[[13]](#footnote-13) One of the first actions of Zijlstra was to announce a drastic cutback in funding for the arts. The Council for Culture was asked by Zijlstra to look at ways to cut funding. One of the suggestions Zijlstra made in the public debate was cutting at least one of the symphonic orchestras. In February 2011 Zijlstra announced that the cutbacks would already take place in 2013, because ´institutions want to know as quickly as possible what they can expect´. This announcement characterizes the state of affairs surrounding the cutbacks on the budget for culture and the advices on how to fill in those cutbacks and more specifically **the lack of time**. The administration wanted to speed up measures, because the economic crisis was hitting hard.[[14]](#footnote-14) This announcement caused the Council to speed up as well and in April 2011 the Council publishes its advice on how a cutback of 125 million euros could be realized. One of the strong recommendations was that the government would take more time to implement the cutbacks. Also, the entire cultural field would have to carry the burden, both the top institutions and the starting artists. The Council also explored new grounds for legitimizing support for the arts in values openness, diversity and freedom of expression. In many ways the Council tried to stay within the conditions that Zijlstra had given. But it also tried to limit the damage the cutbacks would cause and start a debate on the role of culture and the arts in society.

In June 2011 Zijlstra reacted to the advice. He ignored the suggestion to take more time to realize the cutbacks and also made some different choices on what was being subsidized and what not. Some MPs accused him of breaking with the Thorbecke-adagio by explicitly choosing what was being subsidized. He wanted to focus more on the top institutions. Also, museums, cultural heritage and libraries were spared. These measures went strongly against the advice of the Council to divide the pain over all layers of the cultural field. The reactions to his approach were mixed. As was to be expected, the coalition parties supported the approach. Zijlstra’s fellow VVD-MP Bart de Lieve stated that the Secretary of State was making real choices and did not proceed with the blunt slicer the Council had handled. This answer by Zijlstra cause a dilemma for the Council. Its advice was basically ignored and some concluded that the Council was insulted by the Secretary of State. In the end the President of the Council, Els Swaab, and the entire Theatre Committee (*Commissie Podiumkunsten*) resigned.

This brief description of the turbulent events surrounding the drastic cutbacks and the role of both the Secretary of State and the Council for Culture is necessarily (and unfortunately) too brief to reflect on all the views, opinions and events. One event that deserves mentioning here is the March of Civilization, held on June 26th/27th 2011 marked the impact that these cutbacks had on the cultural field. It was of course a protest against the huge decrease of funding, but also against the negative tone of the government. Expressions as subsidy-infusion and subsidy-addiction were used to depict the cultural field as being too dependent on government funding e.g. being too lazy to be a good entrepreneur. Basically what happened was a clash of styles and principles.

**International Cultural Policy**

The goals of national cultural policy have been relatively consistent: maintaining a national cultural infrastructure and supporting the role of culture and the arts within the Dutch society. Of course the policy instruments have changed, and as shown in the previous paragraph the obviousness of support for the arts by the Dutch government has diminished. But in general cultural policy has been the responsibility of one department, the department of Culture.[[15]](#footnote-15) The primacy of international cultural policy[[16]](#footnote-16) however has shifted over the years between foreign policy and cultural policy (Minnaert 2009, 2012, 2013). The policy has been about the role of culture and cultural differences in foreign relations, but also about the consequences of increased international exchange and globalization on both the artistic exchange and the notion of national cultural identity. The first policy documents (successively released in 1970, 1976, 1985) talk about foreign cultural relations. During that time bilateral cultural treaties were the main instrument for cultural exchange.

Although the Council for the Arts gave advice on these matters from time to time, its opinion was hardly included in the policy process. Displeasure about this was expressed in parliament from time to time, but since the primacy of the policy was foreign affairs, the advice of the cultural council did not carry too much weight. It was up to another advisory council of the government to enforce a change in policy; an advise by the Scientific Council for Government Policy (*Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, WRR*) caused a shift in focus to a more cultural-policy-oriented policy. Its report, ‘Culture without borders’ (*Cultuur zonder grenzen*, WRR 1987), marked the beginning of a new phase in the policy discourse. In the report the WRR strongly criticized the policy as it was carried out until then. The WRR had studied whether the policy of cultural relations sufficiently reflected the changing world. According to the WRR, the value of policy on this topic lay particularly in the value of frequent and intensive contact with foreign countries to develop their own culture (WRR 1987: 10). The WRR stated that the political and economic interdependence of countries had increased and concluded that new communication technologies had both positive and negative effects on national culture. On the one hand the dissemination of cultural products was faster and further, which offered many new opportunities to display Dutch cultural expressions to the world. On the other hand, the own national culture was at risk of being drowned out by cultural expressions from abroad – other countries could of course also benefit from the new opportunities. According to the WRR this led to cultural pessimism: Because of this internationalization some cultural philosophers and even national governments are concerned about the threat of disappearance of the cultural identity of their country (WRR 1987: 9). This pessimism was unfounded, according to the WRR. Moreover, globalization should be considered as a new reality and the Dutch government simply had to adapt. The argument that the Netherlands could be absorbed by European culture was identified by the WRR as too static a view of culture, ignoring the mobility and adaptability of culture. Also, it did insufficiently take into account the enrichment that the internationalization process derived (WRR 1987: 14). Especially a country that was highly dependent on the international economic market, the Netherlands should not look at internationalization as a threat but as an opportunity.

In its analysis, the WRR brought an important issue. With the policy on foreign cultural relations, the government had tried to achieve both policy goals of foreign affairs and policy goals of cultural affairs. According to the WRR, these two directions did not match and possibly even were opposite to each other. The three main objectives of foreign policy were to strengthen mutual understanding between countries, to enhance the reputation and prestige of the Netherlands and to protect national identity. For cultural policy internationalization had different consequences. The WRR stated that the frame of reference of the arts was no longer a purely national one and quality standards were in an international context. International exchange and influence were essential and inevitable for the arts and the cultural field, while foreign policy was primarily aimed at protecting national identity and its subsequent national culture. The WRR concluded that the encounter with other cultures should be considered as an enrichment, not as a threat. The current course was counteracting necessary developments in the cultural field Therefore, the focus should shift from foreign policy to cultural policy.

Interesting about this advice is that it contained a kind of meta-level. It considered the role of culture in a changing world, and exceeded the practice of cultural exchange. In a way it opened the door for the cultural field, placing its cultural exchange in a wider perspective. As a result of this advice, the primacy of the policy did indeed shift to cultural policy. In the Nineties internationalization became an important topic in the national cultural policy agenda for successive administrations. Minister of Culture Hedy D´Ancona[[17]](#footnote-17) for example stated in 1992 that the standard of quality was set internationally – thus confirming what the WRR had said – and Secretary of State of Culture Aad Nuis[[18]](#footnote-18) made international cultural policy one of his main policy targets. He introduced the imagery of the Netherlands as a free haven (vrijhaven), depicting the Netherlands as a very liberal country in regard to cultural expressions. His successor Rick van der Ploeg[[19]](#footnote-19) even published a special multi-year plan for international cultural policy. During this period, which roughly lasted from 1992 until 2007, the focus of the policy was on the participation of the Dutch cultural field in the international arena.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The shift of focus to cultural policy is partially reflected in the advice given to the government. The shift in policy focus resulted in a more important role for the Council of Culture, but also meant that specially appointed councils and external advisory councils were asked for (mid-term) evaluations and evaluations on the desired infrastructure to support the increasing international activities:

• 1978: a special House committee holds in preparation for the parliamentary debate on a broad consultation among the cultural field   
• 1984: Council of the Arts on cultural institutes   
• 1987: WRR on foreign cultural policy   
• 1988: Commission-Reinink on cultural institutions   
• 1989: advice from a parliamentary committee on cultural institutes   
• 1992: Commission-Gevers on an association or an institute of international cultural relations   
• 1993: Council for the Arts on an institute for international cultural relations   
• 1995: Council for the Arts on international cultural activities  
• 1998: Council for Culture on the intensification of international cultural   
• 1999: Council for Culture on the HGIS Cultural fund and cultural function on the posts.   
• 2000: Council for Culture on international networks   
• 2001: IOB on international cultural   
• 2003: Council for Culture: midterm advice HGIS and ICB.   
• 2005: Council for Culture on SICA and the ICB   
• 2007: BMC advice on HGIS cultural resources and Art of living   
• 2007: WRR on the national identity debate   
• 2008: Council for Culture on strategic choices   
• 2010: Council for Culture on cultural representation abroad

From this list it is clear that since the WRR-report the Council for Culture has played a much more prominent role in the debate on international cultural policy. But striking for its relative position is the way the distribution of the extra funding that became available in 1997 took place. In 1997 the Homogeneous Budget for International Cooperation (*Homogene Groep Internationale Samenwerking*, HGIS) was founded and within this budgetary system extra money was made available for intensifying the international cultural exchange. The yearly budget was 16 million Euros, and cultural institutions were asked to apply for grants for additional activities. But instead of asking the Council for Culture or one of the other cultural funds for expert advice, a commission consisting of state officials of the Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs was responsible for the distribution of the budget. Over the years the cultural funds got a more important role and 50% of the budget was placed under their responsibility, but the fact that this commission remained responsible for the other 50% was exemplary for the urge to maintain some control over the international cultural presence of the Netherlands. Questions were asked in parliament about this construction, also referring again to the Thorbecke-adagio. The explanation was that other factors than purely artistic reasons were taken into account. Also, the role of the Council was not to give advice on individual projects; in the Dutch system that was the role of the goverment-supported culture funds. But the funds had their own part of the HGIS-Budget and therefore could not be asked to advice on the other projects.

The Council for Culture was asked in 1998 for an advice on the policy regarding those extra funds, but most of its advice consisted of criticizing the role of the Department of Foreign Affairs and hinting on more possibilities for the Council to advice on. It sounded almost too eager, as if the Council had felt neglected for too long and now saw an opportunity to become a more important player in this policy field. Some parties in parliament noticed this eagerness and criticized the Council for wanting to play too big a role in this policy. Some political parties still considered the policy primacy to be foreign policy; a big role for the Council for Culture did not make sense in their opinion. The Councils influence in the policy process became clear in 2003 which the introduction of the distinction between practical and strategic international cultural policy. In that advice, the Council favoured separating the everyday practice of international cultural exchange from the more strategic choices. In their opinion the cultural funds were very capable of dealing with the more practical element, whereas the government should focus more on the strategic issues. Of course the Council expected to play a role in the advice on those strategic considerations, but its main concern was that the policy would be focused too much on detail.

Indicative of the relative role of the Council for Culture, it is once again an advice by the WRR that started a change in the scope of international cultural policy, more specifically in the role national cultural identity played in cultural policy. On September 24, 2007, the WRR presented the report ´Identification with the Netherlands (*Identificatie met Nederland*, WRR 2007). The report was a response to the growing interest in the Netherlands for the theme of national identity. According to the WRR, reasons for this growth were increased individualization, Europeanisation, globalization and migration associated with these developments. The WRR tried to answer the question what national identity meant in a society that had become more diverse ethnically and culturally (WRR 2007: 5). The political and social debate on the multicultural society in the Netherlands was more tense than ever, mostly as a result of the murder of the politician Pim Fortuyn (2002) and the artist Theo van Gogh (2004). With the report, the WRR tried to start a nuanced debate on this sensitive and complex issue.

The report contained an elaborate study on the complicated issue of national identity and some suggestions for specific measures. The WRR did not favour the cross-linking of identity and integration, because it led to a situation where the Netherlands had to describe and capture itself in images and words (WRR 2007: 29-30). This cross-linking had started with the article ‘The multicultural drama’ (*Het multiculturele drama*, Scheffer 2000) by publicist Paul Scheffer in January 2000, generally seen as an important benchmark in the Dutch debate on crosslinking the concepts of identity and inclusion. In that article, Scheffer was very critical on the image of the Netherlands as a multicultural and tolerant country. He pointed to the growing tension between a unity implying national identity on the one hand and the (growing) underlying cultural diversity within the Dutch borders on the other. As an example of an attempt for an explicit description of Dutch culture, the WRR referred to the canon committee, which in 2005 had been created to help define the setting of the major historical events of the Dutch identity. In 2006 this committee published the Canon of the Netherlands in 2006 (Oostrom 2006); the WRR had great doubts about the use of an explicitly stated national identity as a vehicle for national cohesion and as an example and target for migrants.[[21]](#footnote-21)

The WRR argued for a change of perspective in which national identity was considered as a processes of multiple identifications (WRR 2007: 5). In that process policy makers and politicians had to find a way to deal with the wide variety of positions and views on national identity, both extreme and moderate. But while the WRR contradicted the notion of a unified national identity (WRR 2007: 47), in politics more than ever the sound was heard that the Dutch identity had to be protected from threats from inside and outside the national borders. Exemplary for this movement was the debate that broke out the days after the presentation of the WRR report. During that presentation, Princess Maxima gave a short speech in which she recalled some memories of her introduction to the Netherlands: "About seven years ago began my quest for the Dutch identity.[…] It was a wonderful and rich experience for which I am extremely grateful. But the Dutch identity? No, I have not found it". In a way she was reflecting on the notion of a layered national identity, but Maxima's words led to a wave of indignant reactions. Especially the fact that a member of the Royal Family - in the eyes of the critics one of the undisputed symbols of the Dutch identity - made ​​this statement, encountered much misunderstanding. Numerous examples were given that would define Dutch, like the Dutch language, Remembrance Day, the celebration of the Queen and the exuberant dressing up in orange outfits during matches of the Dutch soccer team. PVV leader Geert Wilders described Maximas words as well-intentioned politically correct claptrap, and former Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers stated that they would recognize the Dutchman abroad and thus was indeed talk of the Dutch identity.[[22]](#footnote-22)

What this report also marked was the shift of the debate about national identity from an international arena – the international cultural exchange – to a national platform – the debate on immigration and integration. Because in contrast to the wish expressed by the WRR that the report would not be used for exclusive use in the intergration-debate, that is what happened. The official government reaction was signed by the Ministers of Justice and Integration. Although the same issues had been addressed by the Council for Culture in previous advices – on several occasions the Council had reflected on the consequences of globalization on notions of culture – the impact of those advices was limited and the national debate on culture remained focused on the more practical issues. It seemed once again that the impact of the WRR-reports dealing with cultural policy issues had more weight.

**Some observations**

Both cases show that the role of the formal Council of Culture is under pressure. The national case shows that, although the Council gave an informed opinion on how the drastic cutbacks in funding required most of all time for the cultural field to adjust, the government put the advice aside. The same happened with the suggestion that the cutbacks should be carried by all layers of the cultural field; the government choose to spare specific institutions, thus interfering directly in the distribution of grants. Specific for the advice on classical orchestras, an advice given just a few months earlier addressing the orchestra system seemed to have had no impact on policy, since the Council was asked by the same government a few months later to advice against some of the conclusions of the previous advice. The case of international cultural policy showed that the advices from the WRR caused fundamental changes in the policy primacy. In 1987 its report caused a change to a policy that was much more focused on the consequences of globalization on culture and cultural exchange. The Council for the Arts had requested this a few times before, but never was taken very seriously. With the ICP being a part of Dutch cultural policy the Council for Culture has some influence on the policy process, but with the shift towards a cultural-diplomacy oriented policy its role in the more general course of ICP is limited again. The advice to separate the practice of internationalization from the more strategic choices effectively placed the Council for Culture away from the policy process, reducing its role to comments on the cultural policy part.

The examples discussed above are just some snapshots of a very elaborate and complicated policy process. But despite its limitations, the cases provide some interesting insights in the role cultural specialists play in the development and decision making process in cultural policy. It is for example interesting to see how from time to time the Thorbecke-adagio is undermined. In the early days of government funding government officials feared formalizing the role of cultural experts. In a way they were evading the Thorbecke-adagio by claiming that other arguments than the quality of the work had to play a role in the decision making process. With the founding of the Council for the Arts the role of experts was formalized. But in recent times still the judgement of those experts is neglected. During the drastic cutbacks in 2011, Secretary of State Zijlstra neglected parts of the advice given by the Council, stating that other factors than artistic quality had to be taken into consideration. With the title of his main policy letter, ´More than Quality´ (*Meer dan Kwaliteit*) he explicitly rebelled against the conventional discourse. The dissemination of the HGIS-Culture fund was done by government officials, claiming that the Council for Culture could not play such a role. It seems that a way to evade the Thorbecke-adagio is stating that other factors than the content of the art itself play a weighty role in the considerations.

The Council itself of course also reflects on those developments. Several documents have been produced in which the role of the Council has been evaluated and some changes have been made. Interesting is for example the evaluation performed by the DSP-group (DSP 2011), consisting of several interviews with members of the Council.[[23]](#footnote-23) The advice given in the evaluation showed two directions: the Council focussing more on strategic policy and letting go of the advisory role for institutions, or the Council focussing on both roles. Also, the evaluation suggested a better internal work process and better visibility. In February 2012 another report on the Council was released by the ‘Dutch School of Public Administration’ (*Nederlandse School voor Openbaar Bestuur*, NSOB). This report gave the advice to revalue instead of reposition the Council (NSOB 2012: 27). It was optimistic about the chances for the Council, advising it to focus more on strategic, cross-sectoral advices. Both the DSP and the NSOB suggested a more flexible structure of advisory commissions and a better alignment between the Council and its commissions.

Three changes have taken place in recent years. The Council has cut back drastically in size and has changed its focus. It also has moved to a new office. The permanent Council for Culture was reduced to nine members (and later further down to seven), and four domain committees (There used to be sixteen members and over ten domain committees). As a consequence – and also as a specific choice – the nature of the Council member has changed. With less people the need for more broad knowledge was higher. This resulted in a choice for more generalist knowledge instead of specialist knowledge. Besides knowledge on culture also more knowledge on management issues is now present in the council with the appointment of professor in Cultural Management Annick Schramme and professor in Organizational Studies Mathieu Weggeman. This is both criticized and applauded, and also within the Council and its commissions there are different opinions on this choice.

Interesting is the role other advisory councils in the cultural policy process. In the described cases other institutes such as the WRR played an important role. Although not elaborately discussed before, also in the national cultural policy process other (private) advisory councils have been involved in changes of policy. For example Berenschot has been asked on numerous occasions for advice on policy matters regarding the performing arts. This search for expertise in different matters is reflected in another new development concerning the Council. As stated, the permanent staff of the Council has been drastically reduced and nowadays external advisors are hired by the Council. This is described by the council as a ‘circuit of advisors’ (*kring van adviseurs*). This makes the situation much more complicated, and one might wonder if this increases or decreases the transparency of the advisory process. In a way the new Council for Culture is much more a network organization – a description they also use themselves in their position papers – than a council with an institutional memory and the long term experience to reflect on policy issues

As a final thought we would like to place this change in advice structure in a broader movement; the change in the way authority is constructed in the policy debate. The pressure the Council for Culture is under reflects a more general shift in society. It appears we are in a transitional era of classic formal authority conferred to one more influenced by media positions. Authority does not automatically flow from the position of an actor, but from his or her way of communicating. This implies that the authority of established institutions can be challenged suddenly by communicative actors without clear supporters suddenly.[[24]](#footnote-24) It is therefore not surprising that the NSOB-advice to the Council contained explicit suggestions about its communication strategies, and also the Council itself is much more aware of its need to communicate. Another movement that follows this move is the need to collect facts.Science can play an important role in collecting those facts.[[25]](#footnote-25) This issue was also addressed by the Council in its follow-up plans; they stated the need to give advice with a high impact.

In conclusion we can state that the Council for Culture has gone through a rough period. It seems to be in constant search for relevance and authority.

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1. Ever since this statement this Thorbecke-adagio is raised in almost every Dutch debate on cultural policy, both in- and outside parliament. Over the years it has been used and abused to criticize government support for the arts, wrongfully interpreting this statement as a call by Thorbecke that art was none of governments business. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. a provisional council was established in 1947/1948 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. From hereon when we use the term Council we refer to the Council for Culture [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For clarity, we will use the Dutch abbreviation [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The information in the first three paragraphs is based on P.Lelieveldt, *Nie sollst Nie sollst du mich befragen’ De geheime adviezen van de Commissie van Advies inzake bevordering der Toonkunst van Rijkswege, 1918 – 1939* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The orchestra received its predicate Royal in 1988, when the orchestra celebrated ist 100-year existence [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For a more elaborate historic overview of the history of Dutch cultural policy, see Pots 2000, van Maanen 1995, van Dulken 1998 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For a more elaborate description of the Dutch theatre system, see *Theatre worlds in motion* (Van Maanen e.a., 1999) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In an evaluation report of 2011 it is noted that over the years 95% of the advices on institutions is followed and considered of good quality (DSP 2011: 10) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. As we will point out later, this was not so much the case for the Dutch International Cultural Policy, where the advice of the Council for Culture were for a long period of time often not of much influence on the policy process. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Earlier that decade a major restructuring had taken place; with the introduction of the Basic Infrastructure (Basisinfrastructuur, BIS) some of the cultural institutions were placed outside the four-year funding structure that was common at the time. They were considered vital to the cultural infrastructure. Organizations that did not become part of the BIS had to rely on funding by the Performing Art Fund. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Some of the orchestras received funding specifically for accompanying amongst others the National Opera and the National Ballet [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The Rutte-I administration was also noted for its special ‘tolerance-structure’; the populist party of Geert Wilders was not an official part of the administration (it did not supply any Ministers or Secretaries of State) but they supported the coalition agreement. One of the reasons for this special construction was Geert Wilders’ position regarding the Islam. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Exemplary for this hastiness is the increase of VAT on theatre tickets. One of the measures that Zijlstra announced almost immediately after taking office was the increase of VAT on theatre tickets from 6% to 19%. He wanted to start this on January 1st 2011. This resulted in much uproar. Introducing it in January – during the theatre season – would make it very complicated. Due to pressure from Parliament it was delayed for theatres until July 2011; galleries already had to implement the measure that January Exactly one year later, in July 2012, the measure was reversed and the VAT was brought back to 6% again. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Of course other Departments such as the Department of Finance, the Department of Economic Affairs and the Department of Education have been involved in elements of cultural policy; but the primacy was with the Department of Culture. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The field itself has also changed in name over the years. It started as foreign cultural relations, then changed in international cultural relations and eventually was called international cultural policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. She was Minister of Culture from 1989 until 1994 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. He was Secretary of State for Culture from 1994 until 1998 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. He was Secretary of State for Culture from 1998 until 2002 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For a much more elaborate description of the Dutch international cultural policy and the role of political ideology, see Minnaert 2009, 2012, 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The canon committee had also distanced itself from the use of the canon as a dictate or instrument and had especially called for the value of the canon in itself, not as the alleged solution of a particular problem, but as the gilt-edged basic knowledge of cultural history of the Netherlands (http://entoen.nu Part A: 24, last visited July 30th 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Recent discussions on *zwarte piet* and the statement on election night of the local elections in March 2014 by Geert Wilders that he wanted fewer Moroccans show that the public and political debate on the subject is still far from over. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. In this evaluation, the previously mentioned advice on international cultural policy is described as an advice with a big impact, and the previously mentioned advice on the orchestras as a bad example in which the role of advocate oft he cultural field was too prominent. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *From subversion to interrogation. On the structure of authority in a mediated world*, by Maarten Hajer & Versteeg Wytske. In *The Face of the public good*, H.Dijstelbloem (ea): p. 339 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid: p. 358 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)