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ARTICLE



# Cultural policy, the public sphere, and public libraries: a comparison of Norwegian, American, and Japanese models

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## ABSTRACT

This study compares cultural policy, public libraries, and the public sphere in Norway, the United States, and Japan. Results of the comparison indicate that Norway emphasizes physical meeting spaces and the public sphere. In Japan, there is more emphasis on the literary public sphere. Norway and Japan have strong centralized governance structures, which influence how public libraries function in the public sphere. In the US, cultural policy administration is more diffuse and local. There is not an explicit national cultural policy related to public libraries. In the US, legitimation of public libraries in the public sphere is strong and occurs locally. Public libraries in the US are used less as public sphere infrastructure and more for educational and recreation purposes. The results of this comparison are significant for understanding public libraries and the public sphere from an international cultural policy perspective.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## KEYWORDS

Cultural policy; public libraries; public sphere; governance; legitimation

## Introduction

Public libraries act as public sphere infrastructure (Aabø, Audunson, and Andreas 2010; Audunson et al. 2017; Audunson and Evjen 2017; Audunson et al. 2018; Vestheim 1997b; Audunson et al. 2019). As public sphere-supporting institutions, public libraries are civilizing spaces and they perform certain lifeworld functions related to morality, sociality, and politics (Skot-Hansen 2001; Jochumsen, Rasmussen, and Skot-Hansen 2012; Jochumsen, Skot-Hansen, and Rasmussen 2017). Public libraries serve as physical and virtual meeting spaces (Aabø, Audunson, and Andreas 2010; Audunson 2005b; Audunson et al. 2007) and they support a literary public sphere (Habermas 1962). They are sites for enculturation (Johnston 2016, 2017; Johnston and Audunson 2017) as well as sites for social capital creation (Vårheim 2011; Vårheim, Steinmo, and Ide 2008). While serving as physical and virtual public sphere infrastructure, public libraries are themselves subject to cultural-political discourse. This is because cultural policies related to public libraries are contested and legitimated in public sphere arenas (Widdersheim 2015; Widdersheim and Koizumi 2016, 2017; Ingraham 2015; Audunson 2005a; Evjen 2015; Kann-Christensen and Pors 2004; Smith and Usherwood 2003; Usherwood 1993; Rasmussen, and Jochumsen 2003; Vestheim 1998). This multifaceted and reflexive nature of the public sphere as it relates to public libraries must be recognized when attempting to understand how cultural policy shapes and is shaped by public libraries.

Existing cultural policy research related to public libraries and the public sphere has attempted to reveal – both conceptually and empirically – the links between public libraries and the public sphere

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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

(Widdersheim 2017; Vårheim, Skare, and Lenstra 2019; Audunson et al. 2019). While several general conceptual models have been proposed (Jochumsen, Rasmussen, and Skot-Hansen 2012; Widdersheim 2015; Widdersheim and Koizumi 2017; Skot-Hansen 2001), there is a need for more nuanced descriptions that recognize regional differences. Though Larsen (2018), expanding on Engelstad, Larsen, and Rogstad (2017), proposes a distinctively Nordic model of the public sphere as it relates to public libraries (as well as academic libraries, archives and museums), there is still a need for additional systematic comparisons between public spheres and public libraries internationally. As demonstrated by Larsen (2018), international comparisons are important because they highlight significant differences that are otherwise overlooked in more generalized models. Further attention is therefore needed to understand regional differences in cultural policies, public libraries, and the public sphere.

## Research problem, research question and research purpose

An international comparative study of cultural policy, the public sphere, and public libraries has remained on the periphery of cultural policy research. There is not yet an established framework for systematically describing regional differences in cultural policy, the public sphere, and public libraries. It is also not yet clear what the results of such a comparison might look like.

This research project addresses three related research questions:

RQ1: What standards, criteria, or framework can be used to compare cultural policy, the public sphere, and public libraries from different regions of the world?

RQ2: How are public libraries connected to the public sphere in Norwegian, American and Japanese cultural policies?

RQ3: What are the similarities and differences in cultural policies of public libraries in Norway, USA, and Japan?

The purpose of this study is to understand cultural policy as it relates to the public sphere and public libraries internationally. This study adopts a comparative approach that juxtaposes public spheres and public libraries in three regions of the world: Northern Europe, North America, and East Asia. One country was selected from each region for this study. The countries are Norway, United States, and Japan. The analysis applies a governance-legitimation-commons framework as a basis for comparison. This framework has been developed in previous publications (Widdersheim 2015; Widdersheim and Koizumi 2016), and will be given a short presentation in the following sections. Results of this study provide a fuller understanding of the relationship between the public sphere, public libraries, and cultural policy.

## Literature review

### *Definitions of cultural policy research*

As defined by DiMaggio (1983), cultural policies are government actions that affect cultural production. Cultural production encompasses activities that 'shape and regulate the cultural marketplace' (DiMaggio 1983, 245). More specifically, cultural production is 'the production of materials that are primarily expressive, ideational, or aesthetic, like books, paintings, television programs, scientific research reports, school textbooks and curricula, sermons, dramatic productions, or videocassettes.' (DiMaggio 1983, 242). Today, significant cultural production manifests in not only analog but also digital and electronic media artifacts.

Referring to the work of Williams (1961, 1958), Hall (1980) defines the work of cultural production broadly. According to Hall (1980), a definition of culture must account for two dimensions:

*both* the meanings and values which arise amongst distinctive social groups and classes, on the basis of their given historical conditions and relationships, through which they 'handle' and respond to the conditions of existence; *and* as the lived traditions and practices through which those 'understandings' are expressed and in which they are embodied.

Cultural policy research may therefore be said to include the study of state policies that affect ideas, meanings, identities, and practices, as well as those technologies and practices that express particular values, interests, and meanings. According to Miller and George (2002, 1), 'cultural policy refers to the institutional supports that channel both aesthetic creativity and collective ways of life ... Cultural policy is embodied in systematic, regulatory guides to action that are adopted by organizations to achieve their goals'.

Cultural policies are important to understand, in that state cultural policies influence which 'values, interests, or ideologies' are encouraged or discouraged within a society (DiMaggio 1983, 246). Hall (1997) further elaborates why the study of cultural policy is important:

Why should we be concerned with regulating the 'cultural sphere' and why have cultural questions increasingly taken centre-stage in these public policy debates? At the heart of this question lies the relationship between *culture* and *power*. The more important – 'central' – culture becomes, the more significant are the forces which shape, regulate and govern it. Whatever has the capacity to influence the general shape of the culture, to control or determine the way cultural institutions work or to regulate cultural practices, exerts a definite kind of power over cultural life. (Hall 1997, 227–228)

The field of cultural policy research is closely affiliated with the field of cultural studies. Bennett (1992) defines cultural studies as 'a term of convenience for a fairly dispersed array of theoretical and political positions which, however widely divergent they might be in other respects, share a commitment to examining cultural practices from the point of view of their intrication with, and within, relations of power.' Cultural studies is said to be divided by 'cultural' and 'structural' strands (Hall 1980) as well as by 'political economic' and 'linguistic' strands (Garnham 1995; Hall 1997). Given the diversity of approaches within cultural studies, one can expect to see similarly diverse approaches within cultural policy studies. Indeed, though there is overlap between cultural studies and cultural policy, the two fields often diverge (Cunningham 2003 [1991]).

Miller and George (2002) define cultural policy study historically and anthropologically. Cultural policy developed as a field out of UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), which sponsored conferences on cultural policy in the latter half of the 20th century (Miller and George 2002, 2). In the Anglosphere, cultural policy then gained legitimacy as a research area with the formation of research centers and the establishment of dedicated journals. Today, cultural policy research is less visible in the United States than in other English-speaking countries and in Europe.

Within cultural policy studies, one key distinction exists between 'functionalist' and 'transformative' research (Miller and George 2002, 3). Functionalist research tends to report on actually existing policies and infrastructure, while transformative research seeks to change it. Transformative research may be further subdivided into more or less *critical* or *applied* approaches (Scullion and García. 2005; Bennett 2004). A 'critical cultural policy studies,' as espoused by McGuigan (1996) and Lewis and Miller (2003), is described as

a reformist project that necessitates both an understanding of the ways in which cultural policies have traditionally been deployed, and a disciplined imagining of alternatives. It also relies on making connections with progressive social and cultural movements as well as technical bureaucracies. A critical approach to cultural policy ... involves both theoretical excavations and practical alternatives. It requires us to understand not only how cultural policies have worked, but how different policies might produce different outcomes. Lewis and Miller (2003, 2)

While the critical approach certainly 'accounts for resistance and agency,' and therefore the possibilities for change (Bennett 2003, 61), the applied approach goes a step further in that it embraces praxis more fully. Applied cultural policy requires engagement with the politics of cultural policy

development. According to Cunningham (1992, 9–11) cultural policy research must incorporate not only criticism but also reform. Bennett (1998) explains that

The Foucaultian perspective suggests that any effective involvement of intellectuals in the cultural sphere must rest on a ‘politics of detail’ that entails ways of addressing and acting effectively in relation to the governmental programs through which particular fields of conduct are organised and regulated. (Bennett 1998, 84)

Speaking to a cultural studies audience, Cunningham (2003[1991]) espouses a similar view of applied cultural policy research:

Replacing shop-worn revolutionary rhetoric with the new command metaphor of citizenship commits cultural studies to a reformist strategy within the terms of social-democratic politics, and thus can connect it to the wellsprings of engagement with policy. (Cunningham 2003 [1991], 19)

Both the critical side and the applied side of cultural policy research have been criticized: the applied side for its lack of a ‘self-reflexive edge of a theoretically “critical approach”’ (Scullion and García. 2005, 118), and the critical side for its withdrawal from politics into privileged academic discourse. McGuigan (1995) says of the applied side, ‘it is too high a price to pay for cultural studies to cease to be critical so as to become directly useful in an administrative sense for practical policy-making.’ Nevertheless, both critical and applied knowledge play important roles within cultural policies research.

### **Cultural policy, the public sphere, and public libraries**

The term public sphere has been an important concept for cultural policy scholars (McGuigan 2005; Duelund 2008; Vestheim 1997a), influenced by the work of Habermas 1989 [1962]. In order to update Habermas’ theory to contemporary patterns of cultural consumption, McGuigan (2005) argue for applying the term cultural public sphere. Similarly, cultural sociologists have argued for applying the term aesthetic public sphere (Jones 2007; Jacobs 2012). In the Nordic countries, the state plays an active role in promoting and securing the infrastructure of the public sphere (Engelstad, Larsen, and Rogstad 2017), of which public libraries are a part (Larsen 2018; Audunson and Evjen 2017).

Studies of the public sphere and public libraries may be classed according to themes, methods, and research foundations. Widdersheim and Koizumi (2016) and Widdersheim (2015) apply a governance-legitimation-commons typology, where *governance* literature examines public sphere discourse directed toward the library regarding library services, *legitimation* literature examines discourse directed to decision-making bodies regarding library support, and *commons* literature examines the public library as public sphere infrastructure. Audunson et al. (2018) analyze relevant literature according to methods and themes. The authors identify 5 main themes in the literature: 1) public libraries as meeting places/infrastructure of the public sphere, 2) digitization of public sphere as seen in public libraries, 3) history and roles of public libraries in the public sphere, 4) decline of the public sphere as seen in public libraries, 5) and theoretical perspectives in library and information science. In their literature review, Vårheim, Skare, and Lenstra (2019) define the research area according to research questions, methods, theories, and findings. The authors identify five themes: 1) community, 2) knowledge organization, 3) new tools and services, 4) institutional structures and practices, and 5) management and funding. A further literature review by Audunson et al. (2019) identifies four themes in the literature: (1) the importance of public libraries by using Habermas’s theory, (2) the function of meeting places within the public library and setting those places in the center of the library in order to enhance and encourage democracy, (3) the relationship between social inclusion and public libraries and its functions in current society such as diminishing the digital divide, (4) the emerging electronic resources and arena of SNS in public libraries and utilizing them to reach citizens. Widdersheim and Koizumi (2019) examine the research foundations of existing literature related to the public sphere and public libraries. Research foundations included methodology, data collection method, data analysis method, evidentiary basis, resulting knowledge, ontology, epistemology, and paradigm. The results showed a diversity of research foundations with a tendency

toward qualitative methods, interview and documentary sources, idealist ontology, interpretivist epistemology, and constructionist paradigm.

In most literature related to the public sphere and public libraries, the connection to cultural policy is implicit. Most studies identify structures of the public sphere or functions of the public library. Associations with cultural policy are therefore assumed but not explicitly mentioned. For example, substantial literature related to the public sphere and public libraries takes a critical cultural policy approach in order to analyze neo-liberal cultural policies related to public libraries in various nations. These critical works identify potentially damaging effects of these cultural policies on the public sphere supported by public libraries (Buschman 2003; Greenhalgh, Worpole, and Landry 1995; Webster 1995). On the other hand, literature originating from Nordic countries makes more explicit connections between the public sphere, public libraries, and cultural policy. For example Vestheim (1997b, 1997a, 1998) describes the changing ideologies of cultural policies related to public libraries in Norway in the 20th century, and Rasmussen, and Jochumsen (2003) describe specific legitimation strategies for public libraries.

Engelstad, Larsen, and Rogstad (2017) describe a distinctively Nordic model of the public sphere composed of five organizational fields: religious organizations, voluntary organizations, organizations of research and higher education, media organizations, and arts and culture organizations. According to Larsen (2018), public libraries form part of the arts and culture sector. In a separate study, Larsen (2016) also proposes a cultural approach for analyzing how the legitimation work of publicly funded culture organizations plays out in the public sphere.

## Methods

### *Comparative structural analysis*

This study compares the public sphere structures of three nations. Like a comparative case study, comparative structural analysis is suitable for exploration and in-depth comparison of heterogeneous units (Gerring 2007, 38–53). This study explores differences in how public libraries are organized in terms of cultural policy and public sphere functions. Qualitative structural models of the three regions are developed and compared. Structural models are general in nature – they distill the essential elements within the public sphere of each country and articulate the relationships between them. The models are constructed based on researchers' extended knowledge and expertise through communication/discussion with co-researchers. Each of the three researchers in this study is an expert on one of the nations that is compared. The structural models are based on researchers' extended research in this area. The comparative approach adopted in this study follows Schuster (2002) who examined cultural policy information infrastructure ecologies in France, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and Canada.

### *Case selection*

This study examines the public sphere, public libraries, and cultural policy in Norway, the United States and Japan. The countries were selected because they are diverse and located in three different regions of the world. Due to their respective histories, forms of government, geographies, populations, economies, and cultures, the countries represent variation in terms of the public sphere, public libraries, and cultural policy (Gerring 2007, 97–101, 2008). Even though it is common to treat the Northern European countries of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland as a distinct region with many similarities (Larsen 2018; Engelstad, Larsen, and Rogstad 2017, Engelstad et al. 2017), we have decided to focus on only one of the Nordic countries in this analysis, in order to conduct a comparative case study of three countries.

Table 1 illustrates the diversity of characteristics among the cases.

The governance structure of cultural policies in Norway, the US, and Japan has been addressed in previous literature. For example, Mulcahy (2000) describes how Norway represents a social-

**Table 1.** Comparison of demographic, geographic, political, economic, and public library characteristics in the Nordic countries, United States, and Japan.

	Norway		USA		Japan
Date of most recent constitution	1814	1788		1947	
Population	5,295,619 (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2018)	327,167,434 (United States Census Bureau 2018)		126,230,000 (総務省統計局, 2019)	
Land area	365,094 km <sup>2</sup> (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2019)	9,147,593 km <sup>2</sup> (United States Census Bureau 2010)		377,975 km <sup>2</sup> (総務省統計局, 2020)	
Form of government	Unitary parliamentary constitutional monarchy	Federal presidential constitutional republic		Unitary parliamentary constitutional monarchy	
GDP	417,627 (Nominal, millions of \$) (29th) (International Monetary Fund 2019)	21,439,453 (Nominal, millions of \$) (1st) (International Monetary Fund 2019)		5,154,475 (Nominal, millions of \$) (3rd) (International Monetary Fund 2019)	
Number of public libraries	667 (Nasjonalbiblioteket 2019)	16,549 (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions 2010)		3,292 (日本図書館協会 2019)	

democratic mode of public culture where culture is locally administered, funding is in the form of entitlements, and cultural politics is redistributive. By contrast, the US represents a libertarian mode of public culture where cultural administration is pluralistic, funding takes the form of tax exemptions, and cultural politics is redistributive. Japan is absent from the comparative analysis by Mulcahy (2000), and the analysis does not explicitly mention public libraries. Nevertheless, case selection for this study includes at least two types of governmental structure identified by Mulcahy (2000), thus reflecting a diverse case selection. Japan is a hybrid case insofar as its governance structure includes both central administration like Norway and decentralized governance like the US (Havens 1987).

### **Data collection**

The qualitative structural models produced in this study are interpretive in nature. They are based on researchers' extended inquiries into the public sphere throughout their careers. Data sources thus include a variety of materials, including unstructured interviews with librarians from each region, first-hand observations from libraries in each region, and policy documents related to libraries from each region. Since the structural models are interpretive in nature and based on researchers' experience and expertise, there is no definite number of source materials used.

### **Comparative framework**

In order to compare cultural policy, the public sphere, and public libraries from the three regions, this study uses a framework developed within the literature related to the public sphere and public libraries, the governance-legitimation-commons model (Widdersheim 2015; Widdersheim and Koizumi 2015, 2016, 2017). This model describes three arenas of public sphere discourse related to public libraries. In the governance arena, the discursive issue is library resources and services. Users direct communication to the library regarding desired services. In the legitimation arena, the discursive issue is library support. Library constituents petition decision-making bodies such as local politicians to fund and maintain the library over time. And in the commons arena, the library serves as physical and virtual public sphere infrastructure for library users. Patrons of the library utilize library functions to participate in public sphere discourse. The issues raised in the commons arena are those of common concern beyond the library. The governance-legitimation-commons model is helpful because it highlights three distinct yet interrelated public sphere arenas that must be described in order to fully understand cultural policy, public libraries, and the public sphere.

The governance, legitimation, and commons arenas are visualized using cues from the tessellation model developed by Widdersheim (2018b, 2018a). The tessellation model provides a concrete way to map and describe public sphere discourse. A tessellation is a distributed, network-like structure formed by smaller units called circuits. In the tessellation model, public sphere activity can be described by mapping communicative events amongst actors. The tessellation model is similar to the ecology metaphor adopted by Schuster (2002). The tessellation model recognizes not only verbal but also nonverbal media such as money, thereby acknowledging the 'distribution of funds to organizations involved in the production or distribution of cultural materials' (DiMaggio 1983, 243).

Both explicit and implicit, direct and indirect influences on cultural policies are recognized in the descriptions (Ahearne 2009; Miller and George 2002, 35–71; DiMaggio 1983, 243).

## **Results**

### **Norwegian model**

In Norway, as well as the other Nordic countries, cultural policy related to public libraries and the public sphere is primarily directed downwards from central, national ministries of culture. There is a strong and explicit connection between cultural policy, public libraries, democracy, and the public



sphere. Public libraries are first and foremost treated as cultural institutions, not as educational institutions, as in Japan and the US. While there are three governmental levels in Norway (state, county, municipality), the county level has limited administrative responsibilities for public libraries, mostly related to such support functions as inter-library lending, and library buses and boats in remote areas (St.meld. nr. 23 (2008–2009)). Recently, there has nevertheless been a shift at the county level towards emphasizing its advisory functions related to the development of public libraries (Kulturdepartementet, and Kunnskapsdepartementet 2019). Public libraries are funded and administered by the municipalities. They are regulated by the state through library laws, and they receive support and advisory functions from the state and the county level.

The Ministry of Culture establishes broad policy directions for public libraries, and funding and administration for individual libraries is derived locally. The national library is also an influential actor, as it has an overarching responsibility for documentation and library development for public libraries in the country. It has also played an important role in supporting individual public libraries to develop their public sphere functions, through financial support and other forms of guidance. The National Library of Norway has been assigned this role as a response to changes in the library law, taking effect in 2014, where public libraries are expected to serve the community through being a meeting place and an arena for public debate, in addition to providing other library services. This closeness or tightness between the national library and local public libraries is a feature distinctive of Norway, and other countries in the Nordic region. Figure 1 shows the governance arena of public libraries in the Nordic countries.

Legitimation of public libraries is carried out on national, county and local levels. Figure 2 shows the legitimation arena in Norway. Legitimation of individual public libraries is directed towards politicians and bureaucrats at the municipal level, while professional organizations representing librarians and library managers direct their legitimation towards politicians and bureaucrats in the Ministry of Culture. In order to maintain and develop the role of the county library, county library managers will seek to influence politicians at the county level. Because public library funding and functions are established in national law and policy, legitimation needs are not so great compared to the US.

The commons arena in the Norwegian model takes place in two spheres: national and local. In a comparative perspective, culture policy is important in the Nordic countries, and public libraries are primarily considered cultural institutions. There is a strong and explicit connection between public

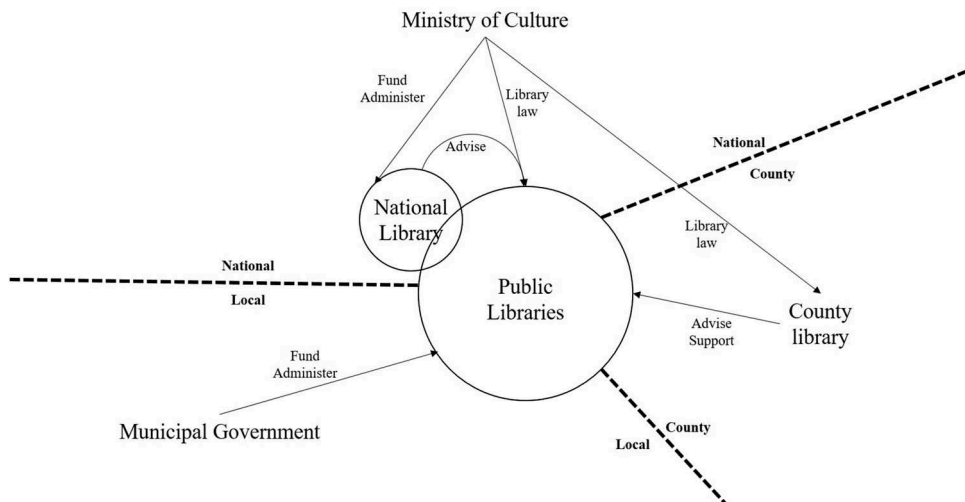


Figure 1. Governance arena in Norway.

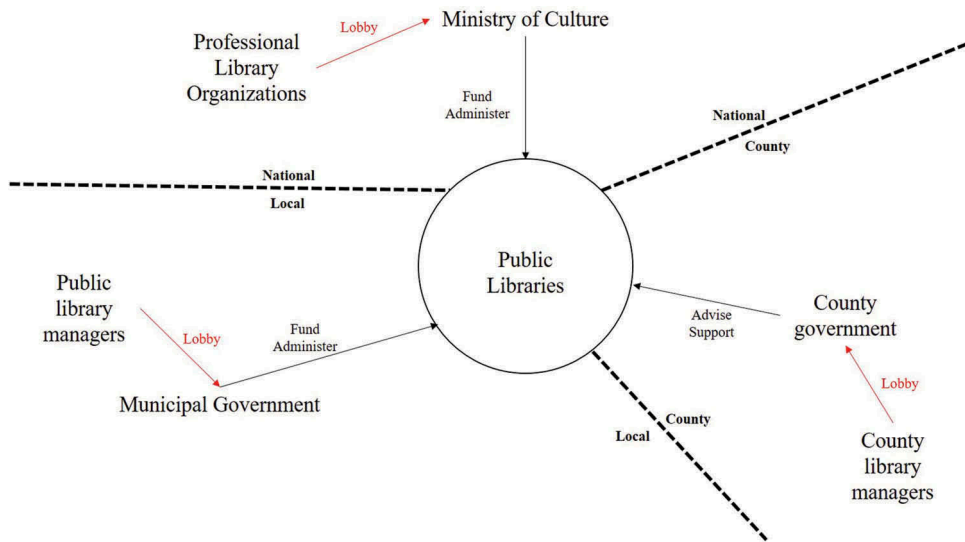


Figure 2. Legitimation arena in Norway.

libraries, cultural policy, and the public sphere. The relationship between public libraries and the public sphere is explicitly stated in Norwegian law (Audunson and Evjen 2017). The importance of physical meeting places in public libraries is therefore emphasized. There are more meetings with politicians at public libraries in the Nordic countries compared to the US and Japan. The public sphere role of public libraries, and the underlying cultural policies that support that role, are a central characteristic of the Norwegian model. The commons arena of Norway is shown in Figure 3.

### United States model

Unlike its Nordic counterparts, the United States does not have a single, national, centralized decision-making body such as the Ministry Culture out of which cultural policy is decided. Of course, it does not follow from this that America has no cultural policy. The American model of cultural policy is primarily implicit rather than explicit (Ahearne 2009; Miller and George 2002, 35–71; DiMaggio

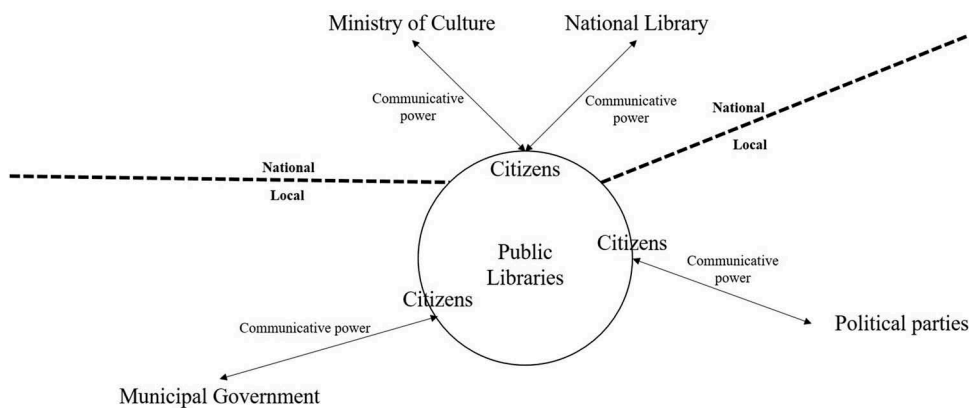


Figure 3. Commons arena in Norway.

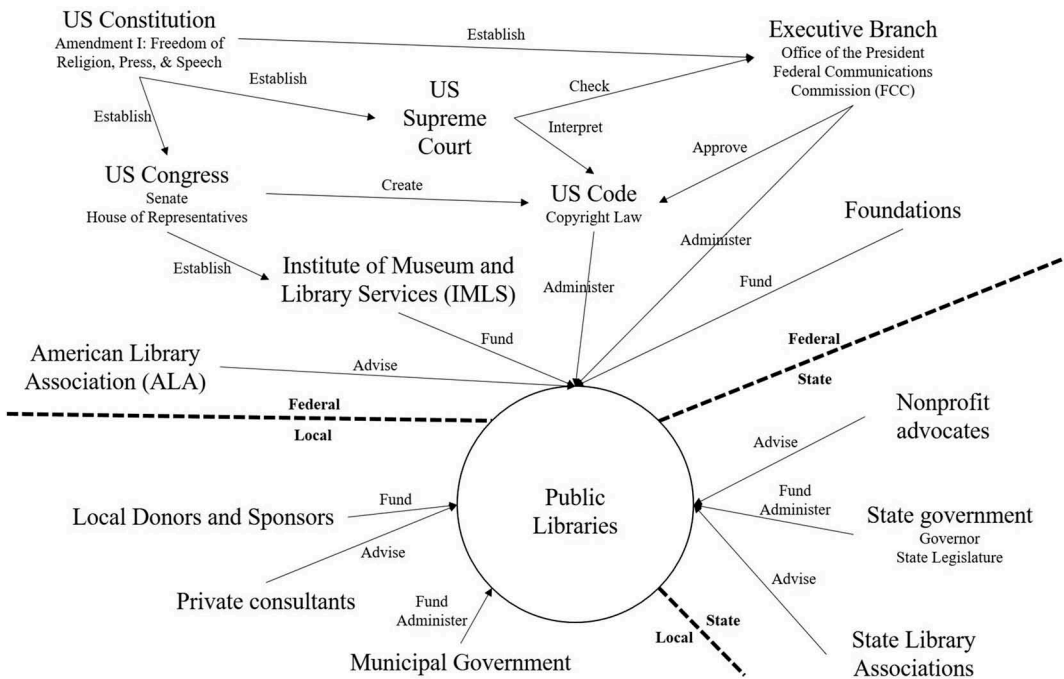


Figure 4. Governance arena in the United States.

1983, 243). On a national level, US cultural policy is shaped by several agencies and decision-making bodies, as well as by professional organizations. Similar to Norway and Japan, cultural policy of public libraries in America is based on constitutional rights, especially the first amendment right to freedom of speech (Miller and George 2002, 35).

Funding for public libraries in the US does not stem from the national budget. The proportion of federal spending is quite small and in the form of grants. In contrast to the Nordic countries, cultural policy, the public sphere, and public libraries in the US are shaped less by national decision-making bodies than by state and local governments. This distributed governance structure is due to America's federated republic form of government. This governmental structure of the US distinguishes it from the Nordic region and Japan. The result is cultural policy related to public libraries that is more diffuse, fragmented, and complex than that in countries with a unitary form of government.

Figure 4 illustrates the complex governance arena related to public libraries in the United States. There are national, state, and local spheres of influence. The influences move inward toward individual public libraries at the center. In the federal sphere, individual public libraries are funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). IMLS is an independent agency of the federal government with a budget allocated by the US Congress. IMLS funding to libraries is in the form of grants. The IMLS determines the amount and substance of the grants. Individual libraries may also be funded in small part by private, national-level foundations. Several national-level agencies and legal structures administer libraries. These institutions include the US Code, which is created and interpreted by the three branches of government (Executive, Legislative, and Judicial). A further executive agency with some indirect administrative power over libraries is the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The FCC has the power to implement policy related to Internet use, such as Net Neutrality, which carries potentially large implications for public libraries. At the state level, public libraries are funded and administered by state governments, which include state legislatures and state governors. State nonprofit organizations and state professional associations may also advise public libraries in terms of policies and services. Finally, at the local level, public libraries are funded and administered by local municipal governments. The exact

administrative structure may take any variety of forms: the public library may be a unit of local government, a stand-alone non-profit organization, or a special district unto itself with taxing authority. The majority of public library funding is derived locally from a local or a provincial tax base. Also, at the local level, public libraries may receive advising from local consultants and funding from local donors. This collection of national, state, and local actors and their relationships to the public libraries constitutes the governance arena of the public sphere related to public libraries. Cultural policy related to public libraries and the public sphere is in part administered in this arena by the actors who administer, fund, and advise public library organizations.

Following the governance arena is the legitimation arena. This arena is shown in Figure 5. What distinguishes the legitimation arena from the governance arena is the presence of lobbying efforts within the national, state, and local spheres. The most powerful lobbying group on the national level is the ALA, though ALA is quite weak compared to lobbyists representing other interests. The ALA networks engages directly with lawmakers in the US Congress, thus influencing the cultural policies administered in US laws. On the state level, nonprofit advocates such as EveryLibrary and the state library associations lobby state lawmakers, thus affecting funding levels for public libraries within each state. Taxpayers may also advocate to lawmakers directly. Individual taxpayers have a more palpable advocacy effect on the local level where they legitimate the library to local municipal governments. Mobilization is more active in the US compared to Norway and Japan because there is no stable, national library law, meaning that public libraries are inherently tenuous and in need of perpetual legitimation.

After the legitimation arena is the commons arena. This arena is shown in Figure 6. In the commons arena, citizens use the library as a physical and virtual public sphere infrastructure in order to raise issues of common concern and transmit communicative power to decision-making bodies at the national, state, and local levels. Compared to Norway, the function of public libraries as democratic institutions is not emphasized. Public libraries are seen primarily as educative and recreation facilities rather than as public sphere infrastructure.

### Japanese model

Similar to the Norwegian and American models, in the Japanese model there are 3 spheres of influence in the governance arena: national, prefectural, and local. Japan has a National Diet library, the single national public library in Japan, which consists of one main library in Tokyo and a branch

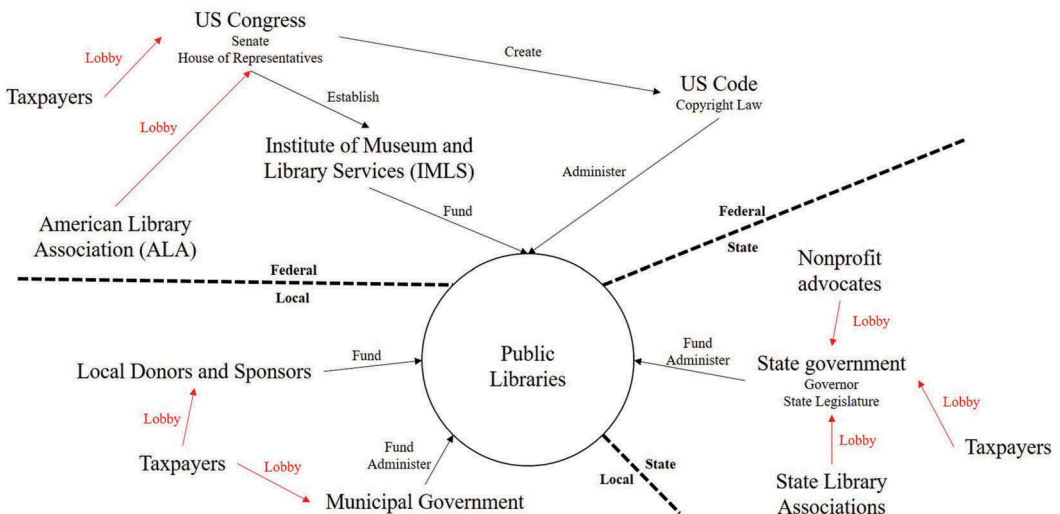


Figure 5. Legitimation arena in the United States.

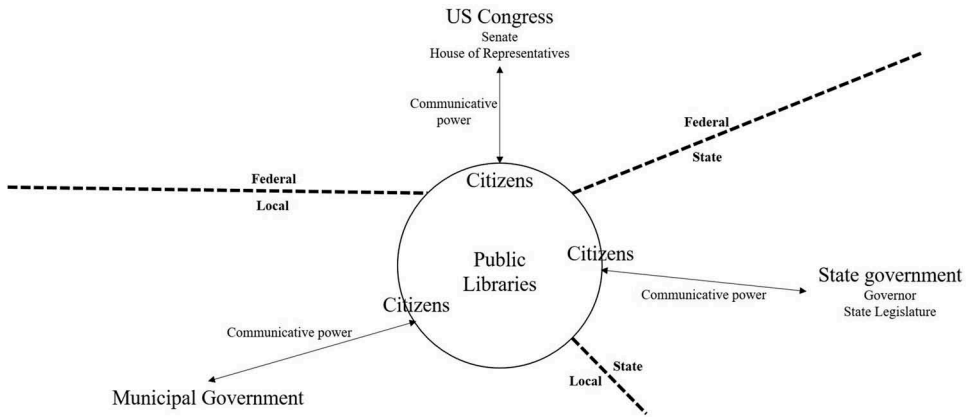


Figure 6. Commons arena in the United States.

library in a western region. In each of Japan’s 47 prefectures, there is a prefectural public library. Municipalities in Japan also fund and administer local public libraries. On the national level, public library policy is dictated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). MEXT only weakly funds and administers public libraries directly, similar to the IMLS in the United States. Yet, similar to the Ministry of Culture in Norway, MEXT is a strong cultural policy agent. However, unlike cultural policy in Norway, public library law is found under education law, not culture, thereby making public libraries primarily educative institutions, rather than cultural institutions. In Japan, there are national laws not only for public libraries, but also for academic, school, and national libraries. Library laws are not so specific, but they provide direction and a general budget. The actual budget for public libraries is determined by the organization the library belongs to, such as the municipality or the prefecture. The governance area for Japan is shown in Figure 7.

In the legitimation arena in Japan, local library support by library friends-groups is average. There is not so much activity in the legitimation arena as there is in the US model. Unlike the US model, however, there is very little private financial support for public libraries. Also, unlike the US model, the influence of the national professional organization, Japan Library Association (JLA), is minimal.

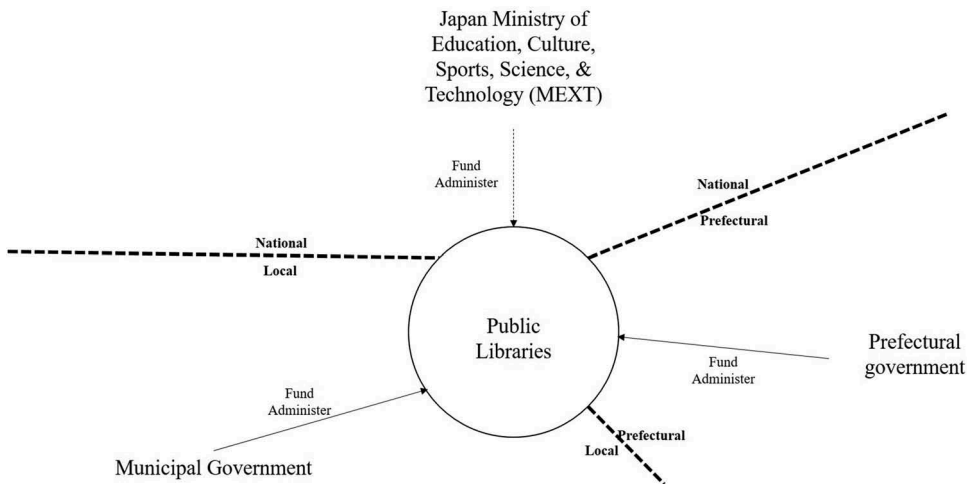


Figure 7. Governance arena in Japan.

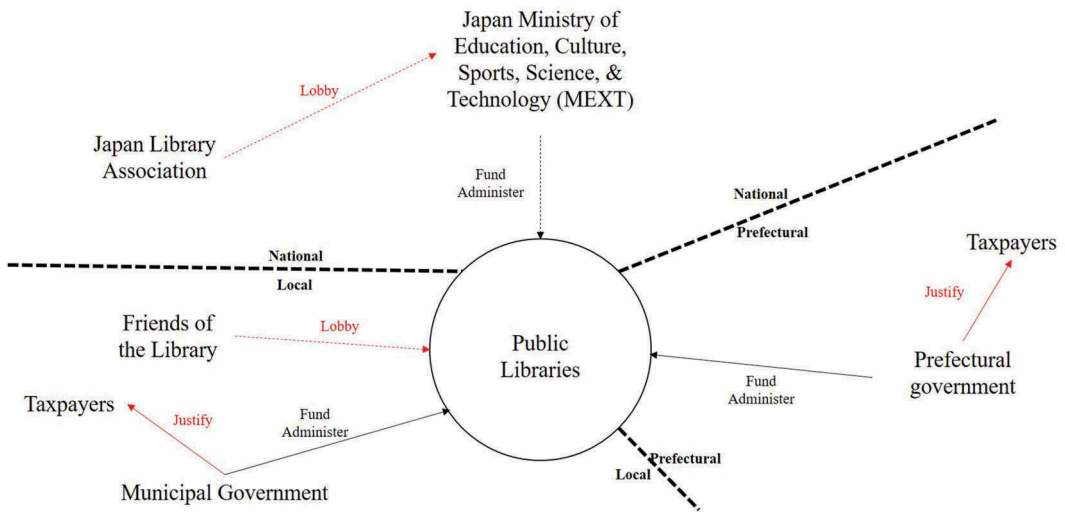


Figure 8. Legitimation arena in Japan.

While JLA publishes position papers on library issues, its influence on the government exists but is not so strong. The legitimation arena for Japan is illustrated in Figure 8.

Japan has a distinctive commons structure compared to Norway and the US. In Japan, libraries are considered more recreation facilities than facilities for promoting democracy. There is not an emphasis on libraries as physical meeting spaces, as is the case in Norway. Physical meetings typically take place in community centers (公民館, *kōminkan*), which outnumber libraries 3 to 1 in Japan. That being said, there is recently a library building boom in Japan, and the emphasis on the physical public sphere may soon change. Also, in Japan librarians are public servants. This strongly affects libraries' public sphere functions. As with other public servants in Japan, public library employees are subject to regular personnel changes (人事異動, *jinji idō*). More and more public agencies in Japan also outsource operations to private companies. Due to the job rotation and outsourcing from these trends, librarians are trained to be generalists, not specialists. Sometimes librarians possess no formal library training. Japanese librarians therefore may only weakly relate public libraries to the public sphere and democracy. This is because they are not trained to do so. In some municipalities, librarians have a distinctive career path, but this percentage is small. In Japan, there is a library certification program, but certification is often not required to be a librarian. Most practicing librarians are therefore not trained in how to utilize library space as a public sphere. This situation in Japan is unlike Norway and the US where librarians receive specialist training. Librarians in Japan operate according to a public management model and do not operate under an ideology of public libraries as democratic, public sphere institutions. Because there is not such a strong emphasis on the democratic functions of public libraries, citizens and users of public libraries typically consider public libraries to be reading and recreation facilities for activities such as lifelong learning. That being said, public libraries in Japan are also considered educational institutions. There is therefore an emphasis on the literary public sphere (Habermas 1962) rather than a physical, face-to-face public sphere as in Norway. Figure 9 shows the commons arena in Japan.

## Discussion

### Governance

Norway and Japan are similar in terms of governance structure: there is a centralized, national ministry that administers cultural policy related to public libraries. In Norway, it is a cultural ministry;

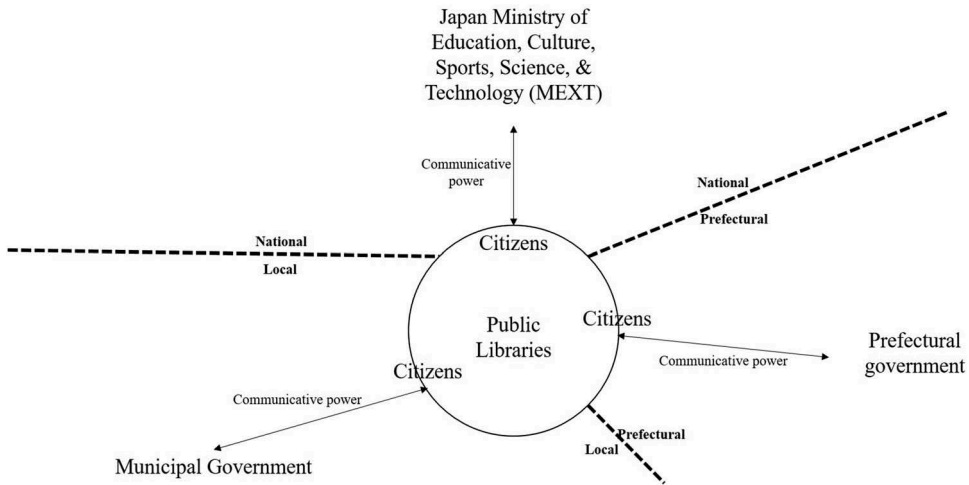


Figure 9. Commons arena in Japan.

in Japan, it is an educational ministry. In the United States, federal policy is weak, and cultural policy is governed primarily on state and local levels. The United States and Japan are similar in that there are 3 spheres of influence, while in Norway the county level has limited administrative functions related to public libraries. Norway have the least complex governance structure, and the United States has the most complex structure. Both Norway and Japan have a 'top-down' structure, whereas the United States has a 'bottom-up' governance structure.

These results confirm previous descriptions of national-level cultural policy in the US, Norway, and Japan. National-level cultural policy in the US is decentralized, fragmented, and minimal (Mulcahy 1987); in Norway, there is a mix of centralized and municipal administration of funding (Berg 1987); and in Japan, cultural policy is centrally-guided with a mix of funding from national, prefectural, and local sources (Havens 1987).

At the same time, the results complicate the ideal types of governance models described by Mulcahy (2000). He describes Norwegian cultural policy as localistic (Mulcahy 2000, 140), but our results show nationalist influences in Norway and localistic influences in the US. Our results also show direct local funding, federal-level grants, and private donations in the US in addition to tax exemption. A different cultural policy model seems to exist for public libraries compared to other arts organizations.

### Legitimation

Legitimation of public libraries is most active in the public sphere in the US. In the US, mobilization takes place on a relatively low level at the national scale, but local public sphere activity in support of public libraries can be quite strong. The American Library Association (ALA), the national professional library association in the US, raises library issues for members and mobilizes support for library-related issues on a national scale. The ALA is a relatively weak lobbying group compared to better-funded lobbyists in Washington, such as those representing business interests. There is no strong explicit cultural policy on the national level related to public libraries. In Japan, there is some legitimation for public libraries on local levels. This is carried out by friends-groups. In contrast to the Japanese and US models, in Norway legitimation for public libraries occurs on a national-level public sphere that is directed toward the centralized cultural ministries.

## Commons

Norway, as well as other Nordic countries, emphasize the physical public sphere infrastructure that public libraries provide. The use of public library space as a physical, face-to-face meeting place is important. The democratic function of public libraries is explicit, and public libraries are considered primarily cultural institutions rather than educative institutions. By contrast, public libraries in the US and Japan are seen as recreational and educational institutions. Compared to Norway, the literary public sphere supported by public libraries is emphasized more in Japan than their function as physical meeting places. The different uses of public libraries in the three countries is rooted in part in existing cultural policy. In Norway, the democratic purpose of public libraries is written into law (Audunson and Evjen 2017). The relationship between public libraries and the public sphere is therefore more pronounced in Norway than in the US and Japan. In Nordic countries, public libraries are explicitly grouped as cultural organizations. This is less so in the US and Japan. In Japan, public libraries are to some extent administered by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). While this is in part a cultural ministry, public libraries are nevertheless treated as educational institutions, and a distinction is maintained between culture and education. Similarly, in the US, public libraries are funded in small part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Currently, IMLS is an independent agency, but it used to be part of the Department of Education. Thus, public libraries are treated primarily as education institutions, not cultural ones that support a physical and virtual public sphere.

## Conclusion

Nordic countries have a centralized governance structure where cultural policy is decided. In existing cultural policy related to public libraries, there is a strong and explicit relationship between public libraries and democracy. There is an emphasis in Norway on the physical meeting spaces and the public sphere. Japan also has a strong centralized governance structure, but it has a more layered ecology than Norway. The connection between democracy and public libraries is not so apparent. In Japan, there is more emphasis on the literary public sphere than the physical public sphere. In the US, cultural policy administration is more diffuse. Cultural policy related to public libraries is decided locally. The connection between democracy and public libraries is emphasized by the national professional organization, but there is not an explicit national cultural policy related to public libraries. Legitimation of public libraries in the public sphere occurs locally. Mobilization for public libraries is more important because unlike Japan and Norway, there is no explicit national law supporting public libraries. There is not such a strong public sphere presence by citizens in the public library in the US as public libraries are used for educational and recreation purposes. Future work will continue to elaborate the similarities and differences related to cultural policy, the public sphere, and public libraries internationally with a view to regional challenges and possibilities for public sphere development.

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.



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