

The Future Legitimacy of Culture regions in Denmark

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Synopsis:

This thesis explores the future legitimacy of culture regions in Denmark, focusing on the case of Kulturkanten, a cultural collaboration encompassing 11 municipalities in Northern Jutland. Through an ethnographic and techno-anthropological approach, the study examines how recent structural reforms—such as the withdrawal of the national Agency for Culture and Palaces (SLKS) and new annual agreements—have created a power vacuum and altered governance dynamics in culture regions. Using actor-network theory (ANT) and institutional theory, the research analyzes how various actors (e.g., municipal administrators, politicians, and culture consultants) navigate shifting roles and responsibilities. The study reveals how institutional legitimacy now has to be reestablished among a more diverse and decentralized network of actors. The thesis identifies communication gaps, unclear ownership, and challenges in maintaining cohesive collaboration as key risks to the sustainability of culture regions. Ultimately, the thesis argues that for Kulturkanten and similar regions to remain viable, they must develop new internal structures of legitimacy and communication to replace the centralized guidance previously provided by SLKS.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In Northern Jutland, there is an association called "Havnefruen," whose primary goal is to create cultural activities for children and their families. It aims to be a children's culture house, a physical space where kids can perform arts and express themselves in other ways. With a base in Aalborg, the board consists of four people and one creative coordinator (Havnefruen 2025b). In 2023-2024, Havnefruen launched a nomadic trip around Northern Jutland; the culture house traveled to six locations: Hadsund, Sæby, Strandby, Hals, Saltum, and Hobro. This means that the culture house set up shop in a local institution or location, where children between the ages of 3-11 could participate. The culture house would be located at this site for one month and then move on. Kids would be assigned a group that spanned the whole week with an artist or storyteller, who, together with the kids, would explore stories rooted in local legends, such as mosedamen. The kids would then tell their own stories about these legends and create performative acts to tell those stories. Some of these stories were later adapted into radio games, inviting people to explore their stories (Havnefruen 2025a). While the Havnefruen was a successful project, it was not an inexpensive adventure. Since the event was free for kids, it required outside funding. Five financial supporters of the project were Kulturkanten (North Jutlandic Cultural Agreement), the Municipality of Frederikshavn, Spar Nordfonde, and Børns møde med kunsten. These supporters help make projects like Havnefruen possible by supporting their expansion and cultivation of Danish culture. Some supporters are also official governmental institutions that aim to support these projects. There are many similar projects as Havnefruen, not necessarily with a focus on the younger generations, but projects that require outside funding to operate. Without the help of outside funding, these projects would never see the light of day, and they are essential, especially in areas outside major cities. The outskirts of Denmark have been experiencing a steady decline, both in terms of population and culture, as many people migrate to the larger cities. This has become a domino effect, where the fewer people who live outside the cities, the less cultural activity, which means less incentive to live in the smaller towns. Ultimately, this will result in the death of the towns, as no one lives there anymore. Therefore, projects like Havnefruen are essential to support as they are a direct force against this trend.

Chapter 2

Problemanalysis

2.0.1 The Term Culture

The term, word, and concept of "culture" are commonly understood phenomena; the intricate details of the word differ significantly in different social settings. In the social sciences, there have been numerous controversies and disputes regarding the use of "culture" in describing any social collective, as it can misrepresent and create boundaries around the culture it depicts and represents. Therefore, it is seen as a dirty word in some academic spheres when other terms or phrases do not apply to encompassing a phenomenon. Kirsten Hastrup writes in her book "Kultur: Det fleksible fællesskab" that the culture term raises questions and provides answer(Hastrup 2004). The cultural term complicates itself due to its duality, as there is no linear way to understand it. However, culture is rooted in everyday life; people experience it, and multiple cultures coexist and evolve simultaneously. Therefore, cultures are in constant flux, whether it is the culture of a local football team, a workplace, a city, a region, a municipality, or a country. These cultures coexist but influence each other, and the boundaries between them fade and get reinforced (ibid.).

The cultural term has been defined a hundred times through anthropology based on where the anthropologists were schooled and the traditions they cling to. However, Hastrup presents Clifford Geertz's attempt at the term, where he asks, "*How can we understand culture?*". Gertz sees culture as a system of meanings encoded into public symbols and social structures, which we can learn to understand by describing, interpreting, and observing culture(ibid.). However, the term "culture" has become a common term in spoken language, where it is overrepresented and overused in the subjects discussed in this thesis. The anthropological term "culture" and the spoken language term "culture" are separated, as the latter has become a commonly understood word, rendering the anthropological intent of understanding culture redundant (ibid.). Since the culture term has become common, what kind of culture are we discussing? Culture comes in many shapes and forms and is vigorously tied to social frameworks. The fine culture you can experience at the Royal Theater in Copenhagen vastly differs from the more down-to-earth culture at the local "halbal" (a party in a small town), with different social constructions and ex-

pectations. There is an argument to be made that the halbal participants are likely the same at the Royal Theater, as it would not be uncommon in Denmark. However, the crux of the problem is that both are cultural events, which can be encompassed equally by the term 'culture'. It all depends on the point of view and scope of the person perceiving the culture; the observer's language and stance shape the term culture to fit the narrative. To better conceptualize the culture term in regards to this thesis, I will draw upon the ideas of Lars Bo Henriksen and translate the word into another language. Translating words into another language provides a way of understanding the term in new ways (Henriksen 2016). The Japanese language's use of characters to describe concepts presents a striking contrast to Western languages, making it a prime prospect for conceptualizing the term.

The character for culture in Japan is called (和) and is pronounced wa. The concept of wa means *to imagine an atmosphere in which a group of people can comfortably and amiably coexist. The word also carries connotations of maintaining harmony and getting along with each other.* The character is also part of the word heiwa(平和), which means "peace" (Japan.Gov 2014). The concept of culture, meaning peaceful coexistence, offers a new perspective on how the term 'culture' has become part of the common language. When the term 'culture' is used in any context, it implies that a social construction exists in which people can coexist peacefully with one another. Any actor's use of the term precedes their observation or annotation of a liminal space where something can or should be thriving in collaboration with others. This conceptualization of the culture term establishes the understanding of the term as used in the context of this thesis. Where there might be a difference between the culture of the royal theater, the local football club, school, or halbal, they are all communities coexisting peacefully as part of a larger cultural context.

2.0.2 State funded culture

In Denmark, as in many other countries, there is a Ministry of Culture that serves to maintain and invest in cultural endeavors within the country. The Culture Ministry functions as the advisory board to the elected Culture Minister, consisting of the Copenhagen department, 20 federal institutions, and an advisory division. Federal institutions include museums, schools, theaters, libraries, and conservatories. These are spread around Denmark and focus on acting out in their respective fields (Kulturministeriet 2025). Beyond the official institutions are boards, advisory committees, appointed officials, and other bodies that serve various areas, such as Zoos, Radio, and similar cultural activities (ibid.). Therefore, the Ministry is helping, overseeing, and funding Danish culture through the intricate web of its organizational structure. The complexity of the Ministry inadvertently makes the task of understanding what the Danish government funds and supports blurry. The board of an advisory body may fund a committee that oversees a cultural institution that runs a bi-weekly dance club, making it rather complicated to comprehend cultural spending. An example of this complexity is the previously mentioned advisory division in the Ministry, called the Agency for Culture and Palaces (Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen, SLKS).

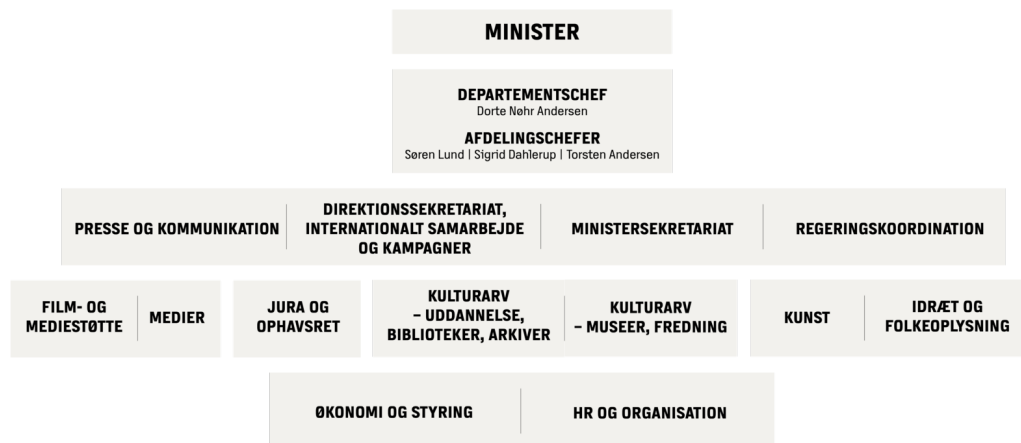


Fig. 2.1: A illustration taken from the website of the Ministry of Culture, which displays their organizational structure(Kulturministeriet 2025)

This agency functions as an advisor and acts upon achieving cultural policy goals. SLKS also manages the allocation of funds to individuals, organizations, and institutions(SLKS 2025). Another task of SLKS is maintaining governmental palaces and castles, gardens, and cultural properties through renovations, restoration, and maintenance. In the 2023 yearly report, SLKS spent 531.1 million DKK on its operations(SLKS 2023). SLKS spent another 289.9 million DKK on maintaining properties. SLKS spent 9.2295 billion DKK on administrative expenses, including theaters, schools, and DR (ibid.). The report details the spending of SLKS, which includes many institutions and organizations; however, it is unclear how these institutions and organizations utilize this support. Other unknowns exist, such as who supports these cultural activities and opportunities and why. Why SLKS supports these projects can be found in the numerous actors within SLKS and in the documents, as well as in the many years of existing and previous deals. The point of all this is that the complexity of the Ministry of Culture and the need to understand any facet of state-funded culture require interaction between multiple levels and actors. How much of the cultural activities in Denmark are supported by governmental bodies?

2.0.3 What is a culture region?

In Denmark, Culture Regions are administrative divisions established by the Ministry of Culture and managed by SLKS. Culture regions promote and organize cultural activities and policies nationwide. These regions ensure that cultural development is balanced and accessible to all citizens, regardless of their geographic location. In the 2023 report of SLKS, culture regions are included in other administrative expenses, and they account for 36 million DKK (SLKS 2023).

Culture regions are formed through a cultural agreement, an optional agreement that one or more municipalities can sign, thereby establishing a culture region. The partici-

Hoved-konto-nr.	Hovedkontonavn	Bevil- lings- type	Udg./ Indt.	Bevilling (FL + TB)	Regn- skab 2023	Akkum. videre- førsel ultimo 2023
21.11.36	Tilskud til Kulturregioner	Reser- vation	Udg. Indt.	36,2 20,1	36,2 20,1	3,5

Fig. 2.2: A screenshot from the 2023 yearly report of the spending of SLKS showing culture regions spending and earnings (SLKS 2023).

pating municipalities, such as the Aarhus and Randers, would then draft and create said agreement in unison. While the culture regions' possible aims and goals are in the municipalities' hands, the Ministry of Culture must also approve the deal. Currently, there are 12 culture regions in Denmark:

- Kulturregion Bornholm
- Kulturregion Fyn
- Kulturregion Kulturmetropolen
- Kulturregion Kulturring Østjylland
- Kulturregion Midt- og Vestjylland
- Kulturregion Midt- og Vestsjælland
- Kulturregion Nordjylland
- Kulturregion Storstrøm
- Kulturregion Sønderjylland-Schleswig
- Kulturregion Trekantområdet
- Kulturregion Østjysk Vækstbånd
- Kulturregion Aarhus

From 2021 to 2024, all the culture regions had to engage the younger generations in culture and art in some capacity (Slots- og kulturstyrelsen 2023). The usual composition of an agreement typically breaks down into three focus areas. These focus areas then become the main objectives of the culture region during that period, where each focus area gets assigned a specific financial capacity to carry out these goals through a fund structure, where local artists and entrepreneurs in the municipality can apply to bring cultural projects funded by the culture region (ibid.). While the foundation of the culture

regions is the agreements, which usually span over four years, the available funds each year parallel the finance act signed by the Ministry of Finance.

There are more long-term benefits of participating in a culture region, as the culture region requires staffing to carry out the goals. These coordinators and project managers in the culture region become central cultural mediators for everyone involved. Hereby, a new platform to expand the cultural reach of state-funded culture within and outside municipalities. Municipalities' bureaucracy, boundaries, and capabilities restrict them in multiple ways. Municipalities, as an entity, are lawfully and economically limited in spending their allocated capital within their borders, which means that justifying financial support for a cultural project that occurs outside of its boundaries is a challenging proposition. The local infrastructure also limits what is possible within the municipality. Suppose a municipality wants to support a project that, for example, requires a theater that can accommodate 500 students. However, there are no theaters in that municipality capable of completing that task. Still, the neighboring municipality does have a theater large enough it would be a hassle to support the trip. All of this is negated by having a culture region, as they do not work within the confines of the municipalities but within the confines of the cultural agreement.

Culture regions function as an entity between different layers of government and society, collaborating with culture locally, which means they are in direct contact with influential local actors. Whether through projects or mutual interest in locally growing cultures, the secretariat of culture regions continuously fosters and nurtures connections. When new focus areas or funds open, they have ways of reaching the target audience to apply for funding. The financial capacity of a culture region is not solely derived from SLKS, as private foundations and the Danish Regions are typically also involved in the culture region. They provide expertise and economic support for culture regions, becoming a part of the cultural agreement. Important note: a culture region is not the same as a region; they are two separate entities, even if all the municipalities in a region are part of the same culture region. A culture region's secretariat must navigate all these governmental municipalities, Regions, and SLKS. They must adapt to each other's decisions and relay that information to the other actors. Beyond serving as the middleman for a culture region, the secretariat is also responsible for preserving and maintaining the cultural agreement. When a period of focus areas has ended, the secretariat will begin planning the next period by drafting a new cultural agreement. If a new cultural agreement is signed, the culture region will continue, which is why there are culture regions that are more than 20 years old.

2.0.4 Kulturkanten

The culture region in Northern Jutland is Kulturkanten, which encapsulates eleven municipalities: Aalborg, Brønderslev, Hjørring, Mariagerfjord, Thisted, Morsø, Læsø, Rebild, Frederikshavn, Vesthimmerlands, and Jammerbugt. The importance of the municipalities lies in the collective ownership of the culture region itself. The politicians elected in the municipalities that are part of the political steering group decide what the funds will focus on. This political steering group consists of one elected official from each municipality and two elected officials from Northern Jutland. Between 2021 and 2024, there were three different focus areas: Lære At Være (LAV), Sund med Kultur (SmK), and Nordjyske Fortællinger (NF). The allocation of capital budgets for the three focus areas is made politically. Hereafter, the employees of Kulturkanten act as facilitators in distributing the funds to achieve the goals of the focus areas.

LAV(Lære At Være)

The focus area of LAV revolved around the younger generations, who were cultivating their curiosity and cultural inspirations. Schools, kindergartens, local hobby clubs, libraries, and other locations where the younger generations are present were the targeted audience of this fund. LAV reached these different locations by dividing them into smaller funds: Børnenes møde med kunsten (BMMK), Unges møde med kunsten(UMMK), and IVÆRK. BMMK was a fund for the youngest children, aged 0-12, with primary applicants being schools and daycares. Projects hired artists to instruct or teach the kids to be creative or expand their cultural horizons. These small-scale projects were happening at schools, the local library, or the park. Hence, there were a large amount of these projects. An example of a BMMK project would be getting a professional instructor at a local school to help create a school play. UMMK works similarly for youth aged 12 and above. Since they are a bit older, local associations, theaters, and educational institutions also apply to this focus area. Many of the UMMK projects required a participatory approach, where the youth actively created something themselves with the help of a professional artist. IVÆRK focuses on young adults and supports events, camps, networking, and experimental projects. These projects do not necessarily require a professional to be attached to the project, as they are centered around the participants. Hence, the spending was allocated for venues, supplies, and other expenses.

SmK(Sund med Kultur)

In attempting to introduce culture to a new field, the focus area of SMK was a continuation of a previous study that demonstrated the positive impact of engaging in more cultural activities on people's health. Therefore, SmK, as a focus area, supported projects that collaborated within the healthcare sector. There were two separate funds, one for multi-year projects and another for smaller projects, with differing criteria to uphold. SmK encouraged projects to be experimental. Therefore, many projects were ambitious as the field was mostly unexplored. Thus, the primary goals were to reach new audiences and create markets for future collaborations between artists and the healthcare sector. SmK supported projects that worked with people with illnesses or nursing homes, where artists created and facilitated activities or performances. These creations were related to the participants' problems, making them part of their lives.

NF(Nordjyske Fortællinger)

Nordjyske fortællinger supported projects that aimed to tell stories from Northern Jutland. Since all municipalities in Northern Jutland participate in Kulturkanten, the fund reflected on this by supporting projects that would tell these stories, specifically projects centered around local folktales or history. Also, some projects wanted to weave new stories about the people living there now. One of the cornerstones of this fund was to bring stories across municipality borders and to create long-term relationships and connections between these municipalities. NF projects were undertaken in collaboration on a grander scale with museums or artists, resulting in a kind of performance or exhibition that traveled around Northern Jutland.

2.0.5 Future funds

While these focus areas ended in 2024, they remain prevalent due to the events that occurred at the end of the year, as fundamental changes were taking place in culture regions, a side effect of another ongoing change. The Danish government reorganized by creating three new Ministry positions: Europaminister, Grøn trepartsminister, and minister for samfundssikkerhed og beredskab(Rue Honoré 2024). These changes created a ripple effect throughout the government; one such change was the healthcare reform, which led to the reform of healthcare and culture departments. This reform meant that, in unison with the healthcare reform, the region's contribution to the cultural sector was being eliminated from the budget. Therefore, all the regions' cultural work will be transferred to the local municipalities to handle instead (Thora Lykkegaard 2024). These changes were not the only cultural shifts in 2024, as different regions of culture were affected differently. Culture regions created focus areas with the prospect of being active for four years. Therefore, the cultural agreement signed by municipalities obligated them during that period. The signing period would be changed in the future, and the cultural agreement would need to

be signed annually by the municipality rather than every four years. Complicating things for culture regions, as they now have to draft new contracts every year. Significantly reducing the time and ambitions of the projects that apply for the funds (Heider Nielsen, Andreas 2025). The reason for these changes was that they would substantially reduce the amount of work that SLKS has to perform regarding documenting spending by the culture regions. The logic was that cutting off the time SLKS had to report the expenditure would result in less bureaucracy overall. However, the caveat was that it meant less bureaucracy for SLKS and moving their tasks to be done by culture regions and municipalities (ibid.). Therefore, in 2025, Kulturkanten decided to continue the previous focus areas in a smaller fund that incorporated these three focus areas while adjusting to these changes (Kulturkanten 2025).

2.0.6 Institutionalized legitimacy

Kulturkanten, and any culture region for that matter, is an institution, as Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen describes in *Institutionel teori*. An institution represents continuity and stability for a group of individuals to live by, thereby preserving the institution (ibid). For institutions, legitimacy has become the most crucial resource in modern society; if an institution is considered legitimate, it is worth it, reliable, and attractive. Therefore, other resources will automatically flood into the institution's capacity. There are different ways to obtain legitimacy; Strandgaard presents three forms of legitimacy: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive. Pragmatic legitimacy is a calculated collective benefit for adjacent actors. Moral legitimacy, on the other hand, disregards the benefit but considers whether the activity is the right thing to do. Cognitive legitimacy refers to the institutions that perform the taken-for-granted tasks, where the functions performed become taken for granted by others. However, knowing that the institution will accomplish the task gives legitimacy to the institution (ibid). Therefore, legitimacy revolves around justifying actions and decisions as they occur. But also that the choices made are not isolated from the social framework in which the institution operates (Strandgaard Pedersen 2014).

Kulturkanten is no different; it must demonstrate its legitimacy. Mainly when fundamental changes, such as the detachment of SLKS, occur while maintaining the culture region, this means that instead of justifying their actions to a higher governmental entity, Kulturkanten now has to demonstrate legitimacy to the municipalities, region, and other actors involved with Kulturkanten. However, this presents new challenges, as transitioning from justifying one entity to multiple entities necessitates understanding the institutional structures within which they operate.

Institutions have one of three structures: cognitive, normative, and regulative, which gives social interactions stability and purpose. Through cultures, routines, and structures, actors maintain institutions at various judicial levels. In a practical sense, all three cognitive, normative, and regulative structures exist in complex institutions; however, depending on the perspective of the beholder, their importance and relevance differ. W. Richard Scott refers to these as the Three Pillars of Institutions (W. Scott 2008).

The regulative pillar constrains and regularizes behavior; Scott compares it to the rules of competitive team sports games. There are formally written rules to the game and unwritten codes of conduct. For example, players can only use their feet in a football game to control the ball. Within the confines of those rules, the game is played. One of the key features of the regulative pillar is the concept of punishment, where violation of the regulations ascertains a need for punishment. In the case of football, free kicks, penalties, yellow cards, and red cards are ways of punishing behavior that is not in line with the game's rules. However, while punishment is a core part of the regulative, the opposite is also true. To support and empower parties that follow the rules. Institutions operating at a regulative level usually function as neutral third-party actors to punish or support parties within that regulative framework—for example, the umpire in a football game (ibid.).

The normative pillar emphasizes norms and values; hereby, the societal norms and values become the goals of institutions to encourage and constrain social behavior. *Norms specify how things should be done; they define legitimate means to pursue valued ends*(ibid.); this precedes a societal expectation that actors should behave within the framework of the norms. These expectations represent external pressures on how an actor should perform their role. For example, a person appointed to represent a football association carries a role to fulfill. The members expect the club to carry out tasks on their behalf, maintaining the fields, equipment, and infrastructure. The members empower the representative to carry out this duty, enabling social actions to work in the institution's best interest. Within the normative pillar, violating or not conforming to the norms is meant to incite strong feelings in the offender. Inciting feelings of shame or disgrace for violating while also giving pride and honor to the exemplary behavior. Suppose the representative of the football association fails in their given task. In that case, the normative institutional structure gives them a feeling of letting their community down and pride if done correctly. Alongside societal norms, normative institutions establish standards as guiding principles for what constitutes norms. In the case of the football association, collaboration with other football associations regarding the standards of the fields, equipment, and infrastructure both enforces and uplifts the norms of maintaining a football association.

The cultural-cognitive pillar stems from an anthropological standpoint, where the focus lies on the cultural-cognitive elements of institutions; *"the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made"*(ibid.). The individuals within institutions represent the cultural environment around them, and their actions shape our perceptions of activities. Continuous interactions both within the institution and with the world around it maintain and transform these meanings. The football coach on the field, teaching the players new techniques, play styles, or exercises, shapes the culture inside the football association. However, the culture does not become attached to the coach but to the whole team itself. It creates a framework that the team operates upon, and they become institutionalized. However, the concepts and meanings of that framework are constantly contested; the framework and culture are perceived differently by people, hence the constant transformation. There is an element to the cultural-cognitive

pillar about compliance, where the culture considers other behaviors inside that culture inconceivable. Where routines emerge as "the way we do things," they permeate roles for certain actors within the culture who perform specific actions. These roles, their actions, and the perceived concept of what these roles entail create a preconceived notion of what will happen in any scenario. People who align themselves with the cultural framework feel competent and connected, whereas those who oppose or question the framework are considered clueless or crazy. For example, shunning a player within the football team who does not follow the strategies practiced for not performing their task.

The presentation of the structures sets in perspective the significant differences that can exist in how institutions and organizations operate. This is also the case for Kulturkanten. How do you justify and operate within a network where all three structures are present?

2.0.7 The internal communication network

During an internship in the fall of 2024, I discovered that the extensive organizational network Kulturkanten operates within required further investigation(Heider Nielsen, Andreas 2025). The actors in this network and their functions are rather complicated, but how actors outside of Kulturkanten relate and communicate is also important to consider. To elaborate on the organizational structure of Kulturkanten, I discussed it with a coordinator of Kulturkanten.

Firstly, there is the secretariat, which is the employees of Kulturkanten itself. This actor is the most connected in the network, which is natural since the network is viewed from their perspective. The arrows between every actor are the connections visible to the secretariat.

The culture consultants are employees in the municipalities and regional departments of Northern Jutland. Culture consultants are individuals who work with culture daily, whether they are employed in libraries or serve as culture coordinators in municipalities. They will perform most of the scaffolding work, including setting up focus areas, and will be able to make small decisions.

The project groups(PG) are responsible for setting up and administering focus areas. They perform the nitty gritty work to create functioning funds. They decide and propose what constitutes a good application, what criteria are essential, and which project should get funding. It is the culture consultants from the municipalities who sit in these project groups; therefore, it is people out in the field and within the cultural sphere who perform this duty.

Under the secretariat, there are actors (aktører) who are the project applicants for the funds in Kulturkanten. These actors are a heterogeneous group that spans from artists to institutional leaders. The applicant's background differs depending on the target audience of the funds. The actors are the ones "on the ground"; they are the end-users of the culture region.

Then, there is the administrative steering group (ADM), which comprises managers,

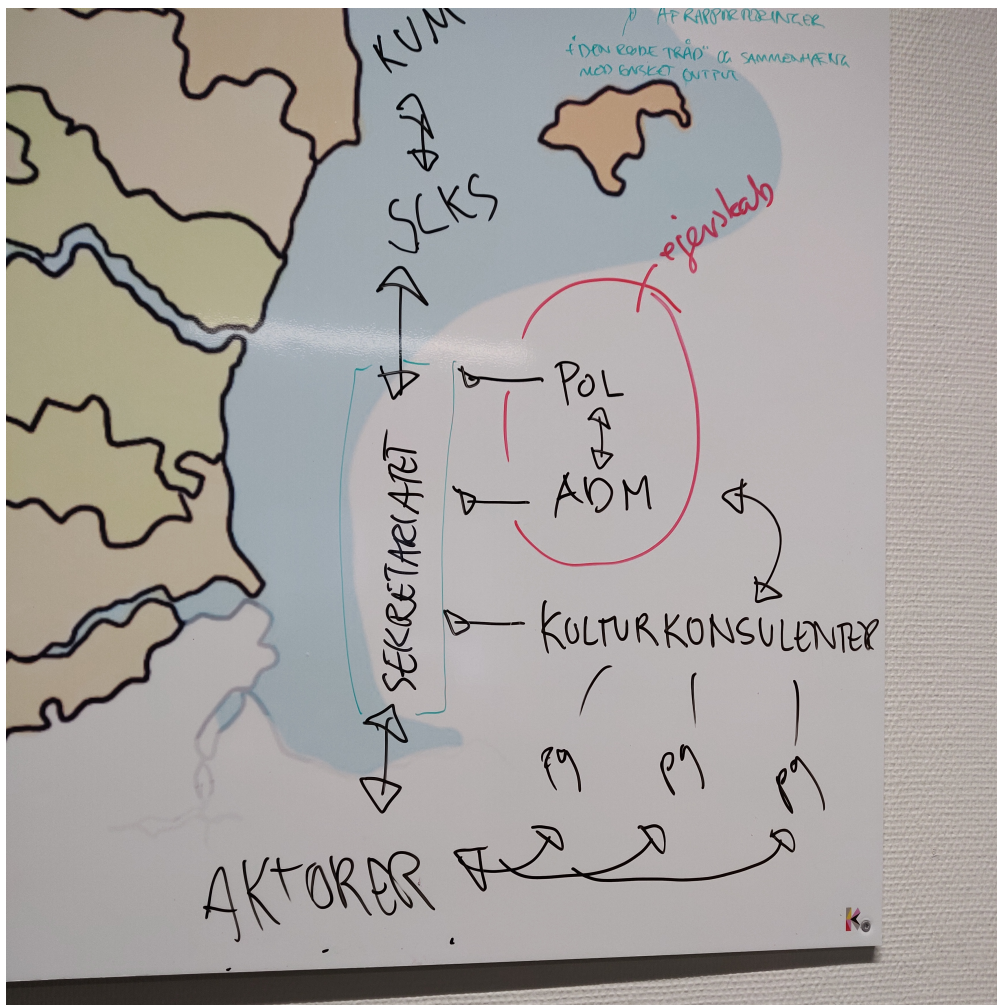


Fig. 2.3: Picture taken in the office of Kulturkanten in Aalborg, the secretariat drew the illustration.

usually heads of cultural departments in Northern Jutland. They are the people who make most of the decisions regarding the Kulturkanten but are also in constant communication with the political steering group. They play a part in creating ownership around culture regions, as they, in collaboration with the political branch, have the final say in the allocation of funds.

The political steering group is more interchangeable, as it comprises politically elected officials. However, they are the ones with the final say in any decision. However, their participation in the daily management of the culture regions is minimal. Their main objective is to set the directive of the culture region, which is decided upon early in the focus areas set each year.

Above the secretariat is SLKS, which sets the framework of the cultural agreement. They are the gateway to the Ministry of Culture and the decisions made on a national level; however, with the recent changes to culture regions, their influence on the regions is minimal. Before the changes, SLKS played a significant role in establishing the criteria for

the focus areas. They helped determine whether the application had to co-fund its projects or target the audience of the focus areas. SLKS and the Ministry of Culture have removed themselves from making these decisions, and now the rest of the network makes these decisions. The other significant change is that creating new cultural regions is no longer possible, which means that the current culture regions must figure out how to survive without the Ministry's guiding hand.

2.0.8 Changes to responsibility

The distancing of the Ministry and SLKS from culture regions has left a power vacuum that the network of culture regions must step up to fill. The interconnections between many actors and stakeholders become an obstacle for culture regions, rather than reacting and forming the regions in response to the instructions of SLKS, where unity among actors was achieved through collective opposition to the Ministry. Culture regions are entering uncharted waters, where the various actors are like fish separated from their schools, and the water is murky, so finding each other requires new ways of working together. The possible breakdowns of culture regions and the region's budget for culture omens a less connected cultural life in Denmark, where municipalities stand alone to ensure state-funded cultural activities inside their borders. Kulturkanten is a prime example of a long-standing culture region that faces these problems, and navigating through the fundamental changes requires both the hindsight of what worked and understanding the framework from which the actors involved operate.

2.0.9 Summarizing the field

In Denmark, state-funded culture has become deeply entrenched within the government, with particular structures and institutions serving as the leading actors in funding and nurturing Danish culture. With the peaceful coexistence understanding of the culture term, Denmark's state-funded culture is a spiderweb that branches out to many institutions and directorates, which manage different cultural areas. One of these institutions is the culture region, which has existed for a long time under the management of SLKS. These culture regions have the functionality of working beyond borders between regions and municipalities; they function as a collective fund that collaborates among municipalities that have agreed and signed a cultural agreement. However, in 2024, significant changes occurred in how culture regions operate, whereas previously, SLKS played a considerable role in setting the unified agenda for all culture regions every four years. In the future, the culture regions will have to manage setting an agenda every year, and then SLKS will provide the funding. Kulturkanten, the culture region in Northern Jutland, has to navigate these changes while maintaining cultural agreement. The changes have made this task harder since the whole culture region collapses if one municipality does not agree to the agreement. Therefore, Kulturkanten must legitimize itself in new ways, which is a tall task when many different actors collaborate to create the culture regions. These actors come from

diverse backgrounds, both institutionally and in terms of governmental positions. How they perceive Kulturkanten differs, and this becomes a problem since the management of Kulturkanten now has to be done internally by the actors in the local network. However, there has been no conversation about who decides what in the network, where the power vacuum left by SLKS throws a wrench into the collaboration between the culture consultants, administrative group, and political group. Without a proper understanding of every actor group, the culture region will collapse internally, and there is a necessity for agreement on how Kulturkanten should function going forward and, thereby, what will legitimize Kulturkanten for the actors in the network.

Chapter 3

Problem statement

With every actor's changing responsibility in Kulturkanten, each actor's role in the manifestation of the culture region shifts. The dynamic of the network becomes unclear, and the collaboration between these actors is vital for the survival of Kulturkanten. The power vacuum left by SLKS has rippling implications for the entire network, which, if left unaddressed, could have unknown consequences for Kulturkanten. Therefore, how will the power vacuum affect every actor's role in legitimizing kulturkanten?

Chapter 4

Method and theory

Before delving into the field of culture regions, it is essential to consider the methods used, as they impact both the field and the empirical data available for analysis. When focusing on specific actors and their roles within the Kulturkanten network, investigating the field as a case was appropriate. I have employed ethnographic methods to gather empirical data and the details of how and why will be outlined in the following chapter.

4.0.1 Getting access to the field

To provide context for my entry into this field, I will outline my path to Kulturkanten. As part of the Techno-Anthropology master's program, there is the possibility of completing an internship and a semester project related to that internship in the third semester. I applied and was accepted as an intern for Kulturkanten during the latter half of 2024, where I was tasked with sorting and creating meaning from years of projects under the 2021-2024 cultural agreement in Kulturkanten. I reviewed hundreds of project applications and evaluations, organizing them into usable spreadsheets, visualizations, and analyses. This required an immense amount of manual labor. However, it provided me with insight into the types of projects Kulturkanten funds and how Kulturkanten operates. When I was an intern, the changes to how culture regions drafted cultural agreements and how they would work going forward were still in their infancy. Therefore, I was present there while it was happening, observing how the Ministry handled it, who was involved, and how the different culture regions worked together. I also attended meetings surrounding the topic and prepared documents to discuss it. This has resulted in me getting a good grasp of the Kulturkanten network or any culture region. As part of my internship, I was responsible for creating the closing celebration, where Kulturkanten organized a full day of activities showcasing the achievements of Kulturkanten over the last four years, focusing on specific areas. I observed and learned how they communicated with the other actor groups at Kulturkanten, as well as the difficulties associated with working with multiple different actors. Here stems the ideas of this master thesis: when there are so many changes happening and with this complex network, there is a need for further investigations. Cul-

minating in an agreement between me and Kulturkanten to collaborate on my master's thesis, I was employed as a student assistant to facilitate my access to the system and field.

With my employment at Kulturkanten, I had straightforward access to the field. I am there frequently, participating in and listening to the meetings that are happening. Sometimes, I am an active part of the meetings. Other times, I listen to the conversation. When I wanted interviews, I could send emails from the municipality with an official email address. In my communication with people, both in conversations and when presenting, I was very clear about stating that I was writing a master's thesis. This usually sparked interest or further discussion, where people were eager to share their opinions or ideas. As a student assistant, I was never questioned about my presence at the meetings, making my data collection easier. There were complications in getting some interviews from certain actor groups, which will be explored later.

4.0.2 Positioning

The secretariat of Kulturkanten consists of four people, including me. The municipality provides an official office in Aalborg, where the coordinator of Kulturkanten, Soffia, sits. I sit on the desk opposite her in a small office room with a closable door. The office is one of many small offices situated between weaving corridors; the Department of Healthcare and Culture occupies the entire floor. Some people sitting in that space are part of the network, either as members of the administrative group or as culture consultants. The others are adjacent co-workers who work within the sphere of culture in some regard. However, while the employees of Aalborg municipality are the co-workers of Kulturkanten, there is an important distinction here: Kulturkanten is a separate entity from Aalborg. Kulturkanten works for all municipalities but is located in Aalborg out of convenience rather than necessity. There is another office of Kulturkanten situated in Vesthimmerlands municipality, where the other two employees of Kulturkanten are present. Marie Louise works as a project leader on specific funds regarding children in some capacity. Therefore, Marie Louise was the head of LAV and managed IVÆRK, among other things. With her sits Emilie, who acts as a SoMe manager and boots on the ground with adolescent teens. Although I have never visited the Jammerbugt office, the collaboration between the offices is essential, as they are not two separate entities but rather work together to complete the same tasks. Hence, there was constant communication back and forth with phone calls, meetings, and emails. It gives Kulturkanten the outward perception of not being some institution from Aalborg but a regionally covering conglomerate.

While these are the actual employees of Kulturkanten, many people work with the culture region. Their work is somewhat invisible to me as an ethnographer, as they have become a cogwheel in the machine that has done that work for years. The people in the municipalities and the region of Northern Jutland manage the economic, legal, and technical aspects, including websites and other related matters. I have never met these people and their work for Kulturkanten. However, this reveals that the roots of Kulturkanten run

deep and can be endlessly explored.

This brings me to the position of a techno-anthropologist collecting my empirical data. My employment at Kulturkanten provides a unique position for me as a researcher. I am present at the moment; therefore, I am continuously absorbing information and impressions of what is happening around me. I am living and breathing Kulturkanten, shaping and manifesting the empirical data I have collected. All the tacit knowledge associated with Kulturkanten, including why, what, how, and who, had become part of the framework and empirical data through my work with Kulturkanten since August 2024, when I started as an intern. Regarding the biases, I might have become nullified or negligible as I have become part of the field. This might raise the question of whether I have "gone native," but that lacks the scope of what my unique position contributes. My experiences and knowledge of the field can not be detached from me or replicated by anyone else. I was there when fundamental changes to cultural regions were made, which will forever change how they work. I have captured a moment between the old and new culture regions that can not and will not occur again.

4.0.3 Representation

As a techno-anthropologist, I am responsible for considering how I present and represent the field. When I perform fieldwork, I am invited into the world of my participants. All the empirical data I have collected requires me to treat that data respectfully, avoiding taking things out of context, properly handling the data, and interpreting it to fit my narrative. How I present myself in the field also becomes part of my responsibility, as when I apply the knowledge I have gathered in the field to other areas of the fieldwork, such as how I utilize that knowledge and where I obtained it. All of the fieldwork was conducted in Danish, which means that any empirical data used has been translated into English. Another aspect of representation is the reciprocity I give back to the field; when my field provides me with empirical knowledge, it is not without expectation; they expect something in return. My reciprocity to this Kulturkanten and all its actors is my work and sharing the understanding of my findings with them. Since I work at Kulturkanten and live in Northern Jutland, I am also contributing to the cultural development of the region for myself. The reciprocity of this study will continue after its completion through active discussion on how to address the power vacuum. It may also apply to other culture regions in different formats.

4.0.4 Field notes

One of the methods used for gathering empirical data was field notes. I took numerous field notes during the project, recording details from various meetings and encounters. A significant amount of empirical data collection in this field occurs spontaneously; many quick meetings or phone calls can arise unexpectedly, with long-term effects, making field notes essential for documenting these events. My field notes were written down as headnotes and jotting fieldnotes and later expanded upon after the fieldwork (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). During the fieldwork, several planned meetings happened where I was present. An example was the new focus area workshop. This was the first meeting of the culture consultants attached to the new fund. I had a dual role during this fieldwork, serving as both the rapporteur of the workshop and an ethnographic observer. This resulted in a more complicated process of writing out the field notes afterward, as I created two separate versions. One version of the jotting notes was more tailored toward work and usable in that context, and my ethnographic field notes contained everything without filtering out my opinions and observations. There were many other meetings during fieldwork, similar to that event, with the administrative, political, and cultural consultants. I could write down field notes during the meetings, as it is common practice to take notes at these meetings. Therefore, my scribbling did not interfere with or disturb the field, making me blend in more. The field notes I wrote focused on their communication and what they discussed; therefore, the surroundings or scenery were not actively recorded when writing headnotes, partly due to the number of online meetings.

4.0.5 Interviews

As I needed extensive information from various actors, I used interviews to gather qualitative data centered on my informants' points of view. I conducted four interviews during data collection with two culture consultants: one from the administrative group and one from the political group. Three of the interviews took place online, and one was in person. The interviews were semi-structured, as this approach would help me build up their point of view through prepared questions, allowing the interview to go off on tangents that were important to the actor. The whole point was to gain their perspective and see if that is important to the actor (Spradley 1979). The prepared questions evolved to gather more information from previous interviews by focusing on the actors' communications. An example of a term that became central in all the interviews was "ejerskab" (ownership), which resonated with all the people I interviewed in their way. Other central terms were legitimacy and communication (Brinkmann and Taggaard 2015).

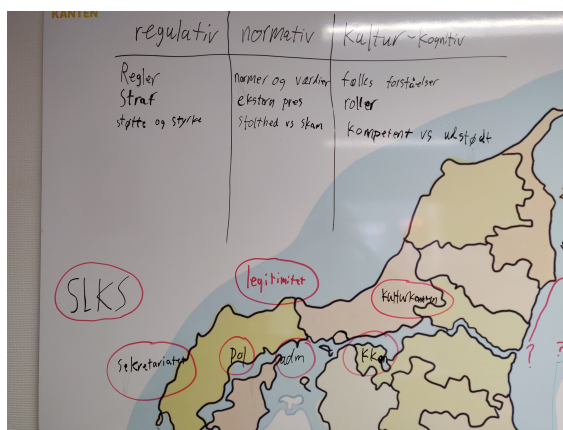
A total of six interviews were planned. However, individuals in the administrative and political groups were harder to contact than expected. One of the principles of getting informants was to get a geographical spread of their home municipality. Interviewing only people from one or two municipalities would not be honest with the nature of Kulturkanten. Kulturkanten is a regional-wide entity, where every municipality struggles with dif-

ferent things, so getting geographical spread was necessary. However, this brought along the struggle of coordinating the last two interviews, as I was either declined or never got a response.

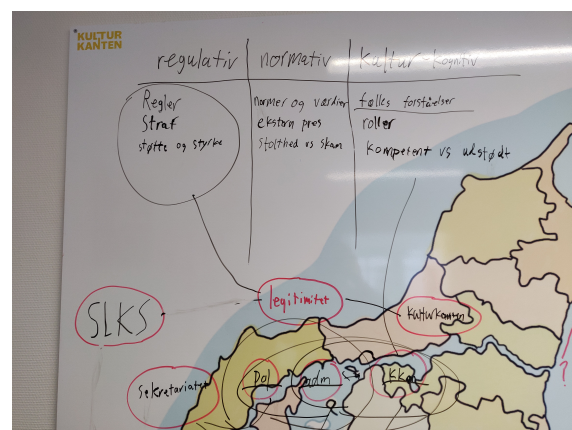
All interviews were voice-recorded and later transcribed with a light correction attitude, meaning that repeating words, speech errors, or filler sounds like "hm," "uh," and so on were not transcribed. This was done to make it easier to read and to translate into usable quotes in the project report more quickly. The transcription was performed in Danish using the available automatic transcription tools in Microsoft Teams or GoodTape from Zetland to facilitate the transcription process (Zetland 2019). While the interviews did not contain sensitive information, both services are limited by GDPR rules, as GoodTape quickly deletes the recordings and transcriptions from their databases. Microsoft Teams were used within the Aalborg Municipality online safety network, which is constantly being monitored and probed by employees at the municipality.

4.0.6 Workshop

In early May, a small workshop was held locally in Aalborg, where Soffia and the local director of healthcare and culture at Aalborg municipality were present. Here, I presented some of the findings from my analysis to them, using figures prepared on a whiteboard. I explained the figures to them while standing beside the whiteboard. I used the figures as a way of relaying the information to them. Where I could draw lines and explain the intricacies of my analysis. This made the workshop interactive for them, as they could also draw and point to the figures I had made, which they did. It made the scenario feel like a brainstorming session, where we discussed what the analysis meant for Kulturkanten. The details of the analysis can be found in the analysis chapter, and the workshop results will be further discussed in the discussion chapter.



(a) Picture taken before the workshop



(b) Picture taken after the workshop

Fig. 4.1: Pictures taken at Kulturkanten Aalborgs office showing the before and after of the workshop.

4.0.7 Analytic strategy

To begin the analysis of the collected empirical data, I will employ Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, as outlined in *Qualitative Research in Psychology* (Braun and Clarke 2006). Thematic analysis is a method that can be used to identify and unfold themes by recognizing patterns and thereby organizing my empirical data into an analysis built upon these themes. Since all of my empirical data are qualitative, they fit within the scope of thematic analysis and provide the stepping stones to create the analysis.

When "coding" data, there is always a question of how you have approached the coding process, either inductive or deductive. Finding themes inductively makes the themes more connected to the empirical data; however, it can result in themes that are limited by the confines of the empirical data (ibid., 83-84). On the other hand, working deductively while coding establishes a theoretical and analytical framework on top of the empirical, making the themes more tailored towards a specific analysis and excluding others (ibid., 84). The coding process in this project has been deductive, as the concepts of communication, the actor-network, and terms such as "ownership," "power," and "legitimacy" have been central to the collection of empirical data from the beginning of the thesis.

Braun and Clarke have created a six-phase process for doing a thematic analysis. The explanation behind these six phases will be while showing the results of the coding process.

The first step is familiarization, where the goal is to familiarize oneself with the empirical data. After reading it multiple times, patterns should become apparent after a few readings, leading to the second step of Braun and Clarke (ibid., p. 87).

The second step, generating initial codes, is creating categories and noting your empirical data. In my empirical data, I noticed how every actor commented on how they wished they knew more about the projects, meetings, or decisions happening at Kulturkanten. Another example was the numerous positive comments about Kulturkanten or the desire for Kulturkanten to succeed, which I noted as I read through the empirical data. Since I conducted the coding deductively, terms relevant to concepts such as "ownership" or institutionalized theory were also noted. These initial codes made themes visible, leading to the third step.

The third step is the analytical part, as I began searching for themes. Through the notation, six themes became apparent as major themes in the empirical data (Braun and Clarke 2006, 89):

- Politically driven
- Distance
- Ownership
- Network
- Communication

- Commitment

The *"politically driven"* theme referred to the amount of conversation in the interviews and the field notes, which centered around the political group or their decisions. *"Distance"* theme was intended to symbolize both the distance between the actors in the network and the distance to the projects occurring in Kulturkanten. The *"Ownership"* theme explored the different kinds of ownership each actor feels and what makes them feel ownership over Kulturkanten. To cover all the statements about the network, the *"network"* theme represents all the ways the network operates and activates all the different actors, both human and non-human. *"Communication"* theme was exactly about communication, how every actor communicates and why, and through what means? The *"Commitment"* theme explored how actors commit themselves to Kulturkanten and when they express their commitment to the culture region. With the themes in place and an understanding of what those themes mean, the fourth phase of thematic analysis can begin. Reviewing the themes, I re-examined the empirical data, rereading it and color-coding sections by outlining each theme with its assigned color (Braun and Clarke 2006, 91-92). Politically driven was red, and the network was yellow(see 4.2). Through color coding, an overview

Smalltalk før mødet, de mødes tit. Det kan høres, da de snakker om noget de snakkede om i sidste uge. Det viser, at Kulturkanten fylder på en eller anden måde i deres liv. Eller at de mødes tit i andre kontekster

Orienteringsmøde.

Forventningsafstemning, de startede mødet med at forventningsafstemme hvad der skulle ske med kulturkanten, men også hvad de vil have ud af mødet

Økonomiskiften i 2027, men 2026 er det samme. Det betyder bare, at de ikke skal udtænke den dybe tallerken de næste to år

Støtte kultur mødet på Mors, de vil fortsat støtte kultur mødet

Næste møde 21. marts, så de ikke ender i en tangent. De vil gerne gøre møderne kortere

Politisk tilfredshed med Kulturkanten – "De er glade for det vi laver"

Ikke ønske om at starte forfra (bygge kulturkanten op fra bunden igen) fra formandskabet. Det vil sige, at de vil beholde sådan det fungerer nu

Fig. 4.2: Example of the color coding done in the thematic analysis.

of the relevance of each theme will emerge. The number of times a color was used to indicate the theme's relevance. Meanwhile, the themes are continuously shaped through the process, and the theme could change or encompass more empirical data. After the color coding, I ended up with the reviewed and revised themes.

- Power structures
- Distance
- Ownership
- Network

- Communicational gateways
- Expertise and commitments

These revised themes have a few changes to them: "*politically driven*" has been changed to "*power structures*" when anything political was present in the empirical data, as it referred to the amount of power they possessed in the decisions. However, there were instances of decisions made by other actor groups that entailed a power structure. "*Distance*" remained the same, as the term "distance" encapsulated what was prevalent in the empirical data. The same went for "*ownership*" and "*network*", which made sense since they were terms derived from the field and its theories. "*Communication*" became "*communicational gateways*" as the empirical data regarding how they communicated indicated more about the actor's possible ways of communicating. *Commitments* added more unto it, as commitments usually meant commitments in terms of working hours or expertise from the participating actors. Therefore, it became *expertise and commitments*, since committing to the culture region meant committing resources from the municipality or the region.

The last two phases of thematic analysis are "Defining and naming themes" and "Producing the report," which is the ongoing process of creating the study and report based on the thematic analysis.

4.1 Theory

4.1.1 Research method

The choice of method has a significant impact on any research conducted. When approaching a new field, the choice of method should be well-considered and grounded in that field. In the case of Kulturskanten and culture regions, my work permeates a specific type of research. My approach follows the ideas of "Aktørsmetoden," which, in essence, means that I adopted the actor perspective. Aktørsmetoden, as a method, focuses on studying actors and organizations by emphasizing the real humans, changes, and processes involved. This means being present and participating in the real world, as how can you study the world you have never met or interacted with it (Nørreklit et al. 1987). Therefore, aktørsmetoden is both a theory and a method; when I am present at Kulturskanten, my presence, empirical data, and work unravel the existing social construction. The social world of the political, administrative, culture consultants, and secretariat built up the organizational structure that is their externalization that I have focused on in my ethnographic work. While not all the premises of aktørsmetoden were adopted in this thesis, it is based on the ideas of aktørsmetode for the choice of methods. Being part of the field during significant changes, such as in culture regions, brings no better insight into that world. Hence, I became a part of the field, and the subsequent analysis brought meaningful insights and changes to Kulturskanten and the network. Which, in itself, justifies the choice of methods and theory. However, more on that later.

Case study

All studies are designed to convey or display some truth, whether that truth is the actual truth or a well-crafted lie, which puts any study under scrutiny for validity—a means of determining if the study was conducted correctly and adhered to the methods and theories used. The investigation I conducted is a case study, which raises a question about the validity of this thesis. Case studies have always been under heavy critique as a way of researching; however, Flyvbjerg tackles this issue in his publication *Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research* (Flyvbjerg 2006). Herein, he describes five misunderstandings about case studies, which I will elaborate on and place in the context of this thesis, thereby clarifying the validity of my research.

Misunderstanding 1: General, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge. In many sciences, making knowledge independent of context has become the norm, aiming to make it as generalizable as possible. Where the result of a study should be possible to reproduce somewhere else, whether it is an experiment in a lab or a mathematic equation. The misunderstanding lies in the perception that knowledge is more valuable than context-dependent knowledge. In the case of Kulturkanten, the knowledge I am unfolding cannot be reproduced or studied again in the same way. This is not bad, as I am capturing a moment that will not happen again and using that moment to expand the knowledge around culture regions (Flyvbjerg 2006, 222).

Misunderstanding 2: One cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case; therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development. The goal of this thesis is not to generate generalizable knowledge; it aims to create an understanding of how the network of Kulturkanten operates and how it navigates the changes occurring in culture regions. If the study I am conducting would yield a perfect solution that addresses all of Kulturkanten's problems and the issues of every culture region, that would be ideal. It is naive and disingenuous to assume that would happen in the field I am studying. Instead, the study aims to stay true to the case and field, thereby providing insights into how things could change in collaboration with the actors present in the field (ibid., 227-228).

Misunderstanding 3: The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses; that is, in the first stage of a total research process, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building. This is a gross misunderstanding of what kind of knowledge case studies unravel; while hypotheses based on cases are more rooted in the field, the end goal of case studies is not to make some grand theory or method. The end goal of case studies, for example, is to create knowledge that is applied at Kulturkanten and perhaps other culture regions. Therefore, knowledge that is context-dependent and should remain so (ibid., 229-233).

Misunderstanding 4: The case study contains a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions. When I write a method and theory chapter in this master thesis, where I describe my access to the field, positioning, collection methods, and theoretical ideas around the field. I insert myself into the field by describing what I

am doing and how I am doing it. My biases are part of the empirical data and can not and should not be detached from my work. By acknowledging my role in the work done, I can move beyond addressing my bias to addressing the problems in the field (ibid., 234-237). *Misunderstanding 5: It is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories based on specific case studies.* Flyvbjerg expands upon this issue, that while theories and propositions are present and used in case studies, it is not the project's goal to answer or prove those propositions or theories. However, theories are meant to enhance the validity and reliability of case studies, thereby strengthening the narrative being told. Explaining the field, methods, and theories is to create an understandable and coherent narrative. Through the narrative I am telling about Kulturkanten, I aim to create a common understanding of the issues and problems, thereby facilitating a shared platform to move forward productively or differently (Flyvbjerg 2006, 237-241).

Ethnographic validity

Besides the validity of a case study, most of my fieldwork has been conducted ethnographically. Roger Sanjek, in his chapter "On Ethnographic Validity," describes how ethnographers must always make choices, and the theoretical reasons behind these choices are what bring validity to the methods (Sanjek 1990). Therefore, Sanjek presents three canons of ethnographic validity, which, if executed, ensures the validity of the empirical data and work. He calls them theoretical candor, ethnographer's path, and fieldnote evidence; I will expand on these canons and explain the projects that achieved them. Theoretical candor entails striving for as much transparency as possible in the choices made during fieldwork. Without this transparency, the legitimacy of empirical data can be scrutinized; therefore, the ethnographer or techno-anthropologist needs to explain the choices made in positioning, representation, methods, and theory. Furthermore, how the empirical data has been handled and worked upon is vital to disclose both during fieldwork and after, for example, in this report, to ensure the study's validity. This means showing up well-prepared for fieldwork and acting according to the field and the analytical strategy used. Most of these things are described at length in the chapters (4.0.1), (4.0.2), (4.0.5), (4.0.4), (4.0.7). By addressing these choices in the report and applying these methods and theories in the field, I actively strive to demonstrate my theoretical candor (ibid., 395-398).

The ethnographer's path refers to how we present the field and its actors while explaining my access and position within the field. The point is that by describing the field from my perspective, not only do I position myself, but I also gain transparency. Sanjek explains that the importance of the ethnographer's path goes beyond its size and range; it is the measuring stick of the ethnographer's validity, where the interpretive power of ethnography should be incorporated in the writings (ibid., 400).

Fieldnote evidence is relatively straightforward in that any analysis done in the study should have empirical data as the primary source of evidence for any analytical point. Hence, the analysis hinges on the fact that the empirical data I have collected has validity, which I ensure by following Sanjek's three cannons (ibid., 400-402).

4.1.2 Actor-network theory

The network has been used frequently throughout the fieldwork, where the term network stems from the ideas of Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law, during the 1970s and 80s developed the ideas behind actor-network theory (ANT), where networks are seen as dynamic, in which heterogeneous actors exist (Olesen and Kroustrup 2007). Actors are not only humans but also everything that exists, including machines, animals, concepts, and ideas. All of these things are actors, constituting the perceived world. However, any connection or network is filled with a sort of power struggle, where actors can quickly become obscured, disregarded, or overpowered, especially non-human actors, whose roles can be forgotten or hidden. An example could be a poet writing a poem, where in that simple statement, there are many different actors other than the poet. There is the pencil, a piece of paper, words, the ideas behind the words, the poet's hands, where the poem is written, and this could continue on and on. The point is that the action happening involves many different actors that make whatever happens happen. Hence, Latour, Callon, and Law developed the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to bridge the divide between human and non-human actors, focusing on the roles of these actors within the network (ibid., p. 63).

Within ANT, this is referred to as generalized symmetry, where every actor has equal importance when laying out the network. Since power structures are not considered in the networks, ANT presents other ways of evaluating the connection between actors. One idea is the concept of translation in ANT, which refers to the process by which actors link together or collaborate to enhance their position in the network. This is achieved by actors selecting a "spokesperson"; in this context, they become spokespersons for other actors within the network. Naturally, the more actors that link together in this way, the more interlinked they become within the network; however, they also have more sway in what happens within the network. A classic example is democracy and elected officials; these officials become the spokesperson for their voters, political party, country, and so on. The point of calling it translation is that the spokesperson becomes the translator of the many actors to the rest of the network, but also the other way around. Every time a spokesperson acts upon the wishes of the other actors, the spokesperson strengthens (Olesen and Kroustrup 2007, p. 78). When a spokesperson becomes established, they become what ANT calls an obligatory passage point (OPP), where actors who have elected a spokesperson must go through that actor to interact with the rest of the network.

Another term from ANT often correlated with translation is inscription apparatus, which can be defined as an apparatus that transforms information or material substance into something interpretable. An example could be a thermometer, which translates the temperature of an object into a readable number. An inscription apparatus can also be humans or institutions that perform a specific action. This could be an economic department that handles budgets or a language interpreter (ibid., 69). At Kulturkanten, several translations are happening between the different actor groups, where several are inscription apparatuses. However, the entire translation process can become second nature or taken

for granted, including how it is done, why, and the way it becomes obscured or hidden. This is referred to as a black box in ANT, where complex systems become esoteric (Olesen and Kroustrup 2007, p. 82). These black boxes are a necessary evil, as they simplify the interaction between actors and create scenarios of misconduct and the rug-pulling of actors, or these black boxes become lost to time or forgotten until the network disintegrates. Kulturkantens network, as described (2.0.7), comprises many different actors and unknowns surrounding their interplay, for which a theory like ANT is well-suited to elucidating this complex network. As already seen in (2.0.7), there are ideas about who interacts with whom in the network, but without establishing theoretical terms for these connections. There is no way to decipher what was happening within the Kulturkanten and how the changes in culture regions affected those connections. All that was known was that SLKS had disappeared from the network, which meant a power vacuum within the network had to be filled by other actors.

Chapter 5

Analyse

5.0.1 The operationalization of culture regions

"That's right, and that means that I try to be active about what's happening at Kulturkanten, and I also have a very fundamental attitude that I believe that we can do more when we're together than separately, and that's why I'm very positive about the Kulturkanten. Because it provides us with opportunities in North Jutland to work with art, culture, and the community, which we can't do as a small municipality. And if I have to tease Aalborg a little, I think they can't do it either. Even though they're big, they actually can't do it without us smaller municipalities, so that's why there's some cohesion or binding community around it[Kulturkanten]" (ADM:8.0.1)

When I began working at Kulturkanten, one of the things that took me a long time to understand was how culture regions operated. I read through most of the documents and agreements I could access but did not fully understand them. Reflecting on this, the language used to discuss anything related to culture regions was filled with esoteric terms, and there was no handbook to explain what those terms meant. Everything I know about Kulturkanten, culture regions, and cultural agreements was gradually absorbed during my time there through overhearing conversations, attending meetings, analyzing document contents, and conducting fieldwork. It requires time, effort, and participation to learn the processes of Kulturkanten, and I am aware that there are still aspects of Kulturkanten that I do not fully understand. But why is it essential that it is hard to comprehend Kulturkanten? It stems from the exact reason why the network of Kulturkanten is critical: "cohesion," as stated by the members of the administrative group. Cohesion among all the different actors is the main glue that holds culture regions together.

Then, of course, I also have a task on my home turf[municipality], which is about communicating with my management, both administratively and politically, concerning how we would like the cultural agreement to develop, what principles should form the basis for a new focus area that we just talked about not so long ago(CC2:8.0.4).

Cohesion requires a common understanding: how do we communicate effectively? Who has what role? Who decides what? Therefore, when I was new at Kulturkanten, I had to figure out the answers to these questions, as the answers seemed to be the cohesion between all the actors. However, after my fieldwork, it became clear that cohesion does not stem from a well-oiled machine, where the organizational structure enables the culture regions to function effectively. In every meeting, interview, email, and conversation during my fieldwork with the actor groups, at least one element of these questions was involved. A pattern emerged when the political, administrative, or culture consultants interacted with Kulturkanten; it was to discuss these questions. While this inherently makes a lot of sense, since these actor groups' jobs are not to manage and maintain Kulturkanten on a daily basis, they are meant to set the agenda for Kulturkanten. When I started as an intern in late 2024, it was during the wrapping up of the old focus areas, which meant that these actor groups were not involved, as the agenda had been completed. Therefore, during the 2025 fieldwork, when the agenda for the new focus area had to be created, the entire network machine was activated again. Herein, it became apparent how delicate the cultural agreement is, where every actor, both inside and outside their groups, was engaged in a power struggle to set the agenda (Fieldnotes:8.0.5).

Where it seemed like there was no cohesion at all, things still appeared to move forward in creating a new focus area. The debacle made me realize there was no real or official organizational structure. A group of actors is part of the Kulturkanten, who have become so entrenched in the structure and processes that their participation has become the norm for how the culture region operates, where the bigger picture of how the network operates has become second nature to everyone inside it. Therefore, from the perspective of someone outside Kulturkanten or new to the network, it can quickly be lost in the operations, as there is no clear explanation, hence my difficulty in understanding how Kulturkanten operates. However, since the operationalization of Kulturkanten has become second nature to the actor groups, I do not think anyone besides the people at the secretariat can explain the process by which focus areas become active funds that support real projects in the culture region. They are all part of the network, where they perform their tasks as they have always done, no more or no less. This makes my position unique; I am part of the secretariat. My fieldwork has been about absorbing how things are done, who does what, and who makes the decisions. I have brought in actor-network theory to explore how these various actors interacted with one another.

5.0.2 The power vacuum

A critical aspect of actor-network theory is the extent to which it explores the network; theoretically, the network can continue indefinitely. Within the scope of the problem statement, I focused on Kulturkanten, specifically on its administrative branches. While culture regions exist to fund local artists, entrepreneurs, institutions, and communities, I have excluded applicants from my focus and empirical data because they are detached from the choices being made in shaping the focus areas and the changes occurring within culture regions. Although applicants' participation occurs after the agenda has been finalized, it should still be acknowledged that they are an essential part of Kulturkanten. If no one applied for the funds, there would be no need for Kulturkanten. It is through the initiative of these individuals that culture can flourish in Northern Jutland, where culture regions are merely a means for the Danish state to ensure that these applicants can undertake the projects they desire. However, if the culture regions collapsed internally, the applicants have little to no influence other than a plea for Kulturkanten to survive. Hence their exclusion from the network analysis. Another actor that is of great importance to the network but will not be further explored from the empirical data is SLKS and the Ministry of Culture. SLKS plays a significant role in the changing culture of regions with its departure from the network, leaving a power vacuum behind. Before the changes, SLKS was a central part of the network, which was rooted in the directory they made for cultural agreements. For example, the 2021-2024 agreement required a primary focus on younger generations, and collaboration was necessary with local cultural institutions, educational establishments, and other cultural regions. On top of that, there needed to be three focus areas during that period (Slots- og kulturstyrelsen 2023). Under these premises, could there be a cultural agreement, which Kulturkanten did with their focus areas of LAV, SmK, and NF (2.0.4). The cultural agreement would contain the municipalities, the focus areas, and the budget (Slots- og kulturstyrelsen 2021). Remember that the entire network of political, administrative, secretariat, and culture consultants would have been involved in making this agreement.

After making the cultural agreement, SLKS would continue to oversee its completion by regularly communicating with the Kulturkanten secretariat and monitoring the budget. With ANT terms and identifying the different actors in the play, when SLKS sets these requirements down, they are not randomly made; they are decisions made by the Ministry of Culture, meaning they are politically made. Therefore, SLKS becomes an OPP that translates political ideas into a framework municipalities can use. The requirements and the signed cultural agreement become an inscription apparatus for SLKS, which helps them set the boundaries of their involvement in the culture regions. SLKS does not actively manage the culture region; they were supervisors checking if the culture regions follow the rules. Hence, the "requirements" and the "signed cultural agreement" serve as reference points that SLKS uses to make their checks. The communication between SLKS and the secretariat was rooted in the "cultural agreement" and "the requirements" framework.

It then becomes the secretariat's job to translate the wishes of SLKS into action in the culture region, whether through activating and notifying the whole Kulturkanten network or simply adjusting internally at the secretariat. The point is how involved SLKS was in everything happening in culture regions.

As a result, SLKS was an actor who was far away, somewhere in Copenhagen. The Ministry and advisory framework had to be followed to make cultural agreements, which, in turn, meant it was possible to obtain extra funding for cultural activities through that framework. Their appeasement and requirements were the only obstacles to accessing more funding, a common adversary that the whole Kulturkantens network faced together. Herein, lies the problem of the power vacuum; with SLKS gone from the network, there are no common adversary and the political, administrative, or culture consultants have not realized that yet, or nobody spoke openly about it during my fieldwork(fieldnotes:8.0.5). Metaphorically, SLKS was the evil king who had been slain, and the survivors of the battle had not yet realized that someone has to take the throne. I excluded SLKS from the ANT analysis and ethnographic work because they are not relevant to Kulturkanten's future operations.

5.0.3 Kulturkanten actor-network

With the network defined within Kulturkanten's operating body, the identification and connections of all the actors involved can begin. I will explore the network in the context of the focus area established for spring 2025. The process begins with a meeting between the administrative group and the secretariat, where they initiate the entire network. Before this meeting, the political group had internally decided that the focus area for 2025 should not change structurally from the 2021-2024 focus areas, and they wanted to continue being a culture region (Fieldnotes:8.0.5). These decisions form the framework within which the administrative group will work and determine the next steps for the focus area. At this meeting, the administrative group agreed that there would only be one focus area, incorporating the previous focus areas of LAV, SmK, and NF. Furthermore, the culture consultants have been given the green light to make decisions around the structure and focus of the focus area, as the projects will be a minor size. At this meeting, the budget for the focus area is officially set in stone, most likely decided by the political group beforehand, and projects will be able to apply up to 50.000 kr(fieldnotes8.0.5).

Here is the first connection between the administrative group and the political group; it is evident that these actors communicate frequently. The administrative group usually relays decisions made to the secretariat, as is, for example, happening at this meeting. They are translating the decisions of the political group into new decisions at the meeting; hence, the meeting, and by extension, the administrative group, functions as an inscription apparatus for the political group. The political group knows that by making these decisions, the administrative group will lead the process of creating a new focus area forward. This is where the secretariat comes into play, as their work starts here. Since most broad

decisions have been made, they must translate that into functional focus areas by hammering out the more intricate details. However, they are not doing this alone, as a project group consisting of local culture consultants has been assigned. They will participate in a workshop meeting with the secretariat, where the focus area will be further developed. Before this meeting, the secretariat creates documents that outline the decisions already made and establishes a framework within these documents for the culture consultants to work within.

These documents are translations prepared by the secretariat of the decisions made by the political and administrative groups. Therefore, when the culture consultants attend the workshop, they can finalize the focus area through these documents. At this meeting, the culture consultants determine the purpose of the focus area, the themes that must be present in the projects, the target audience for the applicants, whether the themes are more important than geographic spread, the criteria the projects should fulfill, and when these projects should take place. After the meeting, the secretariat will use these decisions to finalize and open an application form for projects to apply for funding. By translating the culture consultants' decisions into an application form, the secretariat becomes the inscription apparatus for the culture consultants. However, this is not where the work within the network ends; there is an application window that opens after the application forms are submitted. After the application window has closed, the project group reconvenes to determine which applicants should receive funding (fieldnotes:8.0.5). Hereafter, there would be a comprehensive evaluation of the focus area, moving backward through the secretariat, project group, administrative, and political groups, which I covered extensively in my internship project. In short, my internship project centered around the mismatch between the qualitative data that Kulturkanten generates and the quantitative data that people far away from the projects want to know, which created scenarios where qualitative data had to be fitted into quantitative data and the struggles associated with performing that task(Heider Nielsen, Andreas 2025).

Besides that point, this process clarified the spring 2025 focus area and the roles of the different actors in completing that task. All the actors in the workflow are part of a descending responsibility chain; the political group makes decisions and delegates them to the administrative group to continue. The administrative group then makes decisions and delegates the culture consultants to complete the remaining work. In the middle of the workflow are documents, decisions, meetings, responsibilities, and the secretariat, which serves as the glue that holds everything together. These human and non-human actors are translators, inscription apparatuses, and OPPs, who have become part of an integrated machine where the political, administrative, and culture consultants are setting in motion many different black boxes, resulting in a functional culture region. However, the further up the chain you are, the bigger the blackbox becomes. For the political group, they set in motion the administrative group, and then a focus area fund was created. The administrative group sets the culture consultants in motion, creating a focus area fund. The culture consultants set the secretariat in motion, and then they can decide which projects

should be funded. The different actor groups provide different inputs into the black box, naturally allowing them to understand how the network functions differently. This process is not unknown to the actors, as described by someone from the political group:

I think that we have confidence that when we have said our piece, it is good when we also get it presented later, including who has applied and what the projects are. And so I can look at that; it's terrific. But I am not out there to see what kind of performance they are making or check if it is what we thought it was. I believe you should give some responsibility to those responsible for that area (POL:8.0.2).

This is only half the truth about network operation; while the network operated as in the example this time, this will likely not be the case next time. As the decisions made along the way shape how the network operates, it all depends on who gets what responsibility; a straightforward decision that could change is the amount of funding applicants can apply for. If we said that applicants can apply for 250.000 kr for their project, then who decides what projects should be funded changes. For example, in the SmK focus area for 2021-2024, projects were on a larger scale, which meant that the political group decided on the projects. This shifts things around, as the political group would not do the same work as the culture consultants, they would need to be presented the projects in some capacity. It shifts the network operationally through the secretariat, project group, or the applicants. Why this is a problem now, and not before, is related to the changes happening. The change for cultural agreements is to be made yearly instead of every four years, and the network will have to adapt to different operational structures more frequently. This will not be devastating to the actor groups, as they will undoubtedly be able to adapt to different operational structures; however, the problem lies in the network's sustainability. Culture regions are, in essence, flexible; they are rooted in fleeting agreements that change from agreement to agreement. The governmental instability surrounding the actors participating can hinder progress; municipalities, elected officials, regions, and employees can change from one day to the next. Some issues that were identified by the culture consultants and the administrative group were how interested or enthusiastic their elected officials were influenced, how much they cared to maintain culture regions, or how changes locally affected the amount of time they could spend on the culture regions (ADM:8.0.1, CC1:8.0.3, CC2:8.0.4).

It's often when new people come in. I've almost always been part of the culture region. When new people come in, during the first couple of meetings, these people's thought process is, "We have to get everything to Frederikshavn," for example. And then, after two sessions, they usually become a part of the fellowship and realize that's actually not how it works (POL:8.0.2).

What will happen when an elected official does not care? When employees get replaced at the municipality with little time or interest in Kulturkanten? Or does some significant change occur in the municipalities that make culture regions a liability? All it takes is one

municipality to drop out, and Kulturkanten will dissolve. If Kulturkanten and municipalities are unstable, it can be overwhelming. When cultural agreements spanned four years, the actor groups had more time to adjust or learn what Kulturkanten did. The negotiations and creation of focus areas were typically two years after the municipal elections, which made the instability more manageable (ADM:8.0.1).

Since new politicians would have time to understand cultural regions based on the previous cultural agreement and then be able to create their focus areas in the coming four years, now that the grace period has disappeared and everything has become fragile in regards to creating lasting collaboration between the different municipalities, all the instability and constant changes will in the end compound and suffocate the culture regions out of existence, which has already happened for other culture regions in 2025. Therefore, for Kulturkanten's continued existence, there needs to be a serious discussion about setting ground rules and creating a consistent framework that will not be constantly changed every time a new fund needs to be opened. This must be done by understanding the processes set in motion by specific actions and who decides where the example of the actor-network I have unveiled could be a way of understanding the process.

5.0.4 Ownership, communication, and distance between the actor groups

With the network's operation explored and laid out, I want to delve deeper into the communication between some of the actors' groups and what Kulturkanten does beyond the funds for Northern Jutland. Suppose you zoomed out of the network and removed the idea of generalized symmetry from the actor-network analysis. In that case, it will quickly become apparent that culture regions are the clashing and collaboration between many different power structures. Most of these are politically driven, with a top-down structure, where the politician makes most of the decisions or decides that others make them. This should not be seen as a bad thing as it gives more legitimacy to Kulturkanten and provides a basic hierarchical structure. When questions arise, they can always go up the decision ladder. Every actor group acknowledges that this structure exists, as does the secretariat (ADM:8.0.1, CC1:8.0.3, CC2:8.0.4, POL:8.0.2).

Being politically driven and part of this network has not gone unnoticed among the actor groups; ownership was a term I heard for the first time in the field and became a central concept in all of my fieldwork. The word makes sense, as Kulturkanten covers a large geographical area, with many municipalities being part of the culture region. For the culture region to function effectively, every municipality must have a sense of ownership. If a municipality feels left out or overlooked, what is the point of being part of the culture region and not just keeping its share of the funding? Ownership as a concept and term in culture regions is at the epicenter of all discussions surrounding culture regions; every meeting with any actor group has the agenda of giving ownership over the culture region. Participating and being allowed to have a say in the decisions made gives a sense of own-

ership. The feeling of ownership is essential, not just on a political level but also for the administrative group and culture consultants. It comes in many different variations and varies on the actor group. For example, for the political group:

Yes, I think we broadly have ownership; when we approve the cultural agreement and the areas of focus, I have a lot of ownership over those. But I don't feel I have ownership over who is doing it - the project themselves. I don't feel like I know who is there. Well, those are the different groups that are doing the projects, the artists; I don't have ownership over them(POL:8.0.2)

Their ownership lies in their decisions and the creation of the cultural agreement, where everything after seems to have more distance from them. For the administrative group, the ownership stems more from the years of experience with Kulturkanten:

Now that I think about it, I've been involved for many years. So I think there's a difference in how many years you've seen. Still, I've worked in Kulturkanten since 2014, so I have been there for a long time, so I would say that I have a lot of ownership over Kulturkanten[...] It's just a bit funny because what I can actually say is that the ownership was greater, when we were given these somewhat binding tasks in the municipalities and thus also had closer cooperation with Kulturkanten(ADM:8.0.1).

The administrative group's ownership increases with the number of binding tasks the municipality has to complete, as exemplified by the case she gave, centered on finding a space for some land art. She had to activate her local municipality to find that space, which displays the administrative group's mediating role. Its overall task in the culture region is to connect the staff of each municipality and the culture regions. Where for the culture consultants, the ownership is of the project groups they are a part of:

I was part of the project group for NF and knew a great deal about it. And I knew there were two other initiatives. Something about culture and health, and something about teachers, so it was LAV, children and young people. I didn't have the same feeling about what was happening in the two initiatives. Specifically, the one called SmK. So now that I've reflected on it, could we do something more to engage someone like myself in the other focus areas, giving me more ownership? My ownership of NF was considerable. However, not so much with SmK or LAV. But that was because I was also sitting down with my fingers in the dough there[NF](CC2:8.0.4)

For the culture consultants, ownership is attached to the work they have done in specific focus areas. However, they can quickly feel distant from other focus areas if there are multiple focus areas. They work closely with the applicants, knowing which projects are being funded, and hold more frequent meetings with Kulturkanten. These statements

indicate that the varying feelings of ownership are based on the tasks they perform within the network. Having different kinds of ownership also means that when changes are happening, they perceive them differently, as the changes also affect them differently. This leads to frustration among the actor groups since they are aware changes affect them differently:

We know what our politicians think, I hope. I also expect the others, my colleagues, to do the same, don't they? And I also expect the others to know what their administrative leadership thinks. But what do we think as opinion soldiers, as ordinary cultural consultants? What value does it have for me?(CC2:8.0.4).

Another example is the frustration uttered previously by the politician of having little ownership of the projects happening. This leads to animosity between the actor groups, as they feel the other groups neglect or keep them out of the loop. It has become a game of influence, a game of power, where they tug and pull for more to say in the decisions made:

However, you are absolutely right about the power game because it is indeed a power game. That is because of our cultural consultants; they want to make all the decisions, and we also want to do that politically. You have to find a balance because I am also completely aware that I sometimes set political goals, even though I have no idea who is best at what. I have to listen to their professional input, but everyone always seems to have an opinion. Sometimes, when we decide something that goes against the administrative steering group's position, that does not go down well either. That's how it is, of course; you're absolutely right about that power game. I also think there's a power game further down because the administrative steering group decides, and the cultural consultants down there decide. Or is it Kulturkanten that decides(POL:8.0.2).

Balancing the power between the actor groups is essential, as their ownership over Kulturkanten is rooted in their influence on what happens. If one actor group tips the power balance too far, it will diminish the ownership of other actor groups.

Who talks to who?

One aspect I have not covered yet is the municipalities themselves. The eleven municipalities in Kulturkanten have one politician and one local director in the administrative group. They can also have one culture consultant, which depends on whether they are part of the project groups for the focus area. In a year with more than one focus area, all municipalities will most likely have at least one culture consultant attached. These actors serve as representatives of their municipality, and most of them have offices located in the same area or close to each other. This means that they communicate with each other often about Kulturkanten:

My leadership, both politically and administratively. We discuss what agendas and positions we want to bring into the cultural agreement. So, we have a common platform to stand upon(CC2:8.0.4).

Therefore, these co-workers are also the closest to discussing or informing each other about what is happening in the other actor groups. Hence, the collaboration between the actor groups locally is limited to mostly small conversations happening in the office spaces or emails:

The people close to Kulturkanten, with whom I communicate, as well as those on the political level. I always welcome our committee chair. We have some discussions. We don't have physical meetings about the agenda, but we usually discuss it beforehand because she has to attend a Kulturkanten meeting(ADM:8.0.1).

Here is where the distance term comes in: if the only communication between actor groups is happening locally in the municipalities, how informed are the different actor groups about what is happening in other actor groups beyond their own? Again, the question about enthusiasm and interest plays a role, as the less committed actors will not ask their colleagues locally about what is happening at Kulturkanten. I would analyze this as rooted in how the actor groups communicate; I asked all actors with whom they communicate and how. All of them responded with their respective actor groups and the secretariat, and all communication was conducted purely through meetings and emails. This makes all communication formal and by the book. As identified in the actor-network analysis, all communication occurs at these meetings, where decisions are made and information is shared. However, this results in the distance occurring, but in a networking sense and geographical sense, since there are no real meetings between the different actor's groups (ADM:8.0.1, POL:8.0.2, CC1:8.0.3, CC2:8.0.4). There might be emails sent between the actor groups. I have no empirical data that suggests otherwise, but these emails are mostly likely sent by the secretariat instead of directly from the actor group. With no formal occasions where these actors meet, a distance arises between the actor groups, as they are disconnected from each other outside of the local municipality and the secretariat. Hence, when things change, or decisions are made, they occur within one of the actor groups, and the actor groups first learn of them after they have happened, been decided upon, or been communicated by the secretariat. The processes are distant and far away, and the lack of communication is to blame. While I cannot say that communication between the actor groups is vital to the success of Kulturkanten, being aware of the lack of communication is essential, as all actor groups are crucial to a functioning culture region. And again, if one actor group makes too many decisions and another has minimal impact, the ownership shifts heavily to one side. With a lesser sense of ownership, the culture region becomes more fragile. This also compounds with the other side of distance, the geographical distance between the municipalities. Mariagerfjord municipality and Hjørring municipality are far away from each other, but that should not matter in the context of the culture

region, where it is necessary to let go of thinking as a municipality but rather as a culture region:

Before Kulturkanten was almost entirely focused on setting up projects, we had to fight for it to come to our municipality. We have gained a deeper understanding of each other by discussing which events fit best in Aalborg, Hjørring, or elsewhere, and then there are smaller events. Yes, that is fine; they fit into Jammerbugt(POL:8.0.2).

Knowing and understanding how they communicate within the network will enable Kulturkanten to better implement or react to changes so that nobody is left behind and everyone is well-informed, where the distance between them, both geographically and role-wise, becomes negligible. Setting clear and concise communications gateways or planning meetings between actor groups could be the way forward.

5.0.5 Other benefits that Kulturkanten provides

Kulturkanten is not limited to creating fund initiatives; having a culture region provides other benefits for the participating municipalities. At the core of Kulturkanten, the people employed at the secretariat (excluding me) are well-connected to the local culture. They have worked for years, building expertise in facilitating these funds throughout Northern Jutland and building connections to cultural actors. The applicants, the employees, institutions, collectives, and many more have worked with Kulturkanten. This has made the secretariat a knowledge hub that can be called upon to help, and it's part of their functionality to do so. During my fieldwork, I was invited to the "culture consultant meeting," a quarterly meeting with all the culture consultants in the region(Fieldnotes:8.0.5). This whole meeting is orchestrated and financed through Kulturkanten. When they meet, they meet at new locations, such as museums, theaters, or other institutions. In the case of the meeting, I attended a music house called Aars Music House. At this meeting, the culture consultants can experience something outside their municipality and see the cultural infrastructure in the region. This event lasts for a few hours, and its purpose is to share with other culture consultants what is happening in their municipality, both the good and the bad. For the culture consultants, the people are their closest colleagues, there are at most only two culture consultants in any of the municipalities. It can be hard to get advice or directions to their work in their local offices(Fieldnotes:8.0.5). These meetings only occur because of the culture region, which is a huge benefit, and it brings together all the expertise in the region to advance culture in Northern Jutland. This showcases the pull culture regions possess as they work beyond borders and operate outside standard parameters. However, this benefit is often unspoken or hidden beneath a thick layer of the status quo. What they provide seems to have been forgotten beyond the funds; the cultural agreement binds the region together. Municipalities' commitment to Kulturkanten is evident in the work hours and expertise invested in attending meetings, creating focus areas, and overall

being part of the culture region (CC1:8.0.3, ADM:8.0.1, POL:8.0.2). Let's look at this narrative using the terms from the analysis. Through the commitment of work hours, you get ownership, minimize the distance, and strengthen the communication between the actor groups. Ultimately, it provides more value than was otherwise possible with those work hours in fostering culture among the people of Northern Jutland.

5.0.6 Understanding legitimacy

With all the previous analyses, a knot needs to be tied to bring it all together and determine the point of this analysis. I will refer back to the chapter about institutionalized legitimacy (2.0.6) from the perspective of the three pillars and how these actor groups fit into the institutional pillars. The power vacuum left behind by SLKS will change institutionally the dynamic of the culture region. Institutionally, SLKS established a regulatory structure, setting up rules and constraints in culture regions according to their demands, for example, from 2021 to 2024. Culture regions that signed the cultural agreement were empowered by gaining extra funds for their cultural budget. SLKS acted as a third-party actor, overseeing the culture region's spending and verifying that their rules were being followed. The punishment for not following the agreement would be dissolving the culture region and pulling the funds. Herein, the legitimacy of the culture region was established, as SLKS had approved the cultural agreement and the rules they set were followed, thereby giving legitimacy to Kulturkanten's existence. It is an entity born out of governmental initiatives, and the collaboration between the municipalities, regions, SLKS, and the Ministry was continuously reaffirmed by SLKS monitoring. This has all changed for culture regions; there is no more monitoring or guidelines to follow. The funding allocated to culture regions has been guaranteed, regardless of whether a cultural agreement is in place, and the continued existence of these regions relies on the willingness of municipalities to participate in their culture regions. This is the center of the power vacuum, so what legitimizes Kulturkanten? The culture regions have become sandboxes for the municipalities to shape the culture region, and the actor groups are the ones playing in the sandbox. How do the different actor groups perceive the institutional structure, and what gives legitimacy to Kulturkanten?

If we start with the political group, their position in the network overall aligns with what SLKS did. The political group is very similar to SLKS because it is also politically driven. They are a group distant from the projects themselves, where their purpose in the network is managing the network and who decides what. They set ground rules for the operation and occasionally check in on what Kulturkanten is doing. However, by being part of the Kulturkanten network, the political group has not actively worked with a regulative structure, as analysis suggests their communication is more aligned with a cultural-cognitive structure. Every actor group has specific roles in performing Kulturkanten, which has become ingrained in their workflow. There are established routines for how things are done: the political sets the agenda, the administrative group acts on that

agenda, and the project groups carry it out. All communication between actor groups primarily occurs through the secretariat; everyone in the network shares a common understanding of who is responsible for what and what they should do. It has become the assembly line for cultural agreements, and it functions in this way in most culture regions. This assembling line exacerbates the power vacuum, as the actor groups have begun to realize that they can change how the network operates with no restrictions on what is possible. Where instances of acting outside of "how we do things" have begun happening. During a political group meeting, radical changes to the Kulturkantens secretariat's workflow were decided upon without involving other actor groups (Fieldnotes:8.0.5). These decisions seemed out of place and were made from a position of ignorance, from the perspective of the secretariat, which is understandable in light of the cultural-cognitive pillar. Actors who opposed the framework were regarded as clueless or crazy, which, from the secretariat's point of view, was true. Then, what is the goal of the political group, since the actor group is actively trying to change the fundamental structure? Is the political group trying to replace SLKS in the power vacuum and diverting their responsibilities to other actor groups? It is clear that the ideas on how Kulturkanten should legitimize itself are in contention; the political group is actively moving from the cultural-cognitive towards other ideas of legitimizing the culture region. That direction seems unclear, and there is a serious need to discuss what that should be with all actor groups. This can not just be done blindly; hence, why there has to be a common understanding of how the network functions now and what is vital for each actor group, where the terms discussed in this analysis, like ownership, distance, power structures, and roles are central for every actor part of the Kulturkanten network.

Chapter 6

Discussion

There is a discussion about the implications of my analysis: Are the cultural regions truly under threat? Before diving into how the analysis affected Kulturkanten, I want to discuss the field. In the field, the idea of Kulturkanten disappearing or dissolving is not something the actor groups consider. The actor groups themselves have no doubts that Kulturkanten will continue to exist for many years to come; while I can not say whether this stance comes from ignorance or optimism, it all comes back to your point of view.

Through my own experiences and the people around me, the secretariat's experience gives us a bigger picture of the whole situation. We are part of every process, black box, and conversation, both outside and inside Kulturkanten. We hear about the troubles in other culture regions, we hear the debates internally within every actor group, we implement the ideas behind every decision made, and we are the ones who are primarily at stake employment-wise. The fight to make Kulturkanten work is of higher priority for us than for the rest of the actor group. For most of the actor groups, it is a secondary task, and for many of them, it is a minor task. If Kulturkanten were dissolved tomorrow, I do not doubt that every actor group would be disappointed and unhappy. Herein lies the difference in my attitude, analyzing it as a matter of survival versus how they are not even considering a finality to Kulturkanten.

The point of this analysis and the master's thesis is not to be a doomsayer, but it seems that culture regions are moving in that direction; hence, the wording of 'survival' in my problem statement. Every analytical point, including distance, ownership, actor-network, communication, and legitimacy, is volatile within the culture region, and any one of these points can be what breaks the camel's back. The power vacuum throws the status quo into disarray, and the status quo seems to be the way every actor group still understands the collaboration. What occurs in a year when new focus areas that do not build upon previous focus areas must be established? Can they even cooperate within the actor groups to reach a decision that everyone agrees with? Every municipality is different, and no higher-up actor decides what they should focus on anymore. Kulturkantens network needs to establish a new operational framework to streamline the process of creating new cultural agreements. Therefore, Kulturkanten has much at stake and needs to consider its next

steps. Without addressing the power vacuum, it will persist and ultimately backfire in the face of every actor group, most likely resulting in the dissolution of the culture region.

Part of the partnership for my master's thesis with Kulturkanten was to investigate the whole network's communication, where my reciprocity with Kulturkanten was to improve communication. So, in early May, I arranged a workshop with Soffia and told her to invite whoever she thought would benefit from the knowledge of my analysis. She told me that she and Aalborg's member of the administrative group had planned on having small meetings to invite people from the administrative group one by one to discuss the future of Kulturkanten. Therefore, it would be ideal for her and the administrative group member from Aalborg to have my analysis insights before these meetings. For this workshop, I prepared a whiteboard in the Aalborg office, where I would present my analysis (see 6.1). On the whiteboard, I wrote the three pillars of institutions, with legitimacy in the middle, and listed all relevant actors.

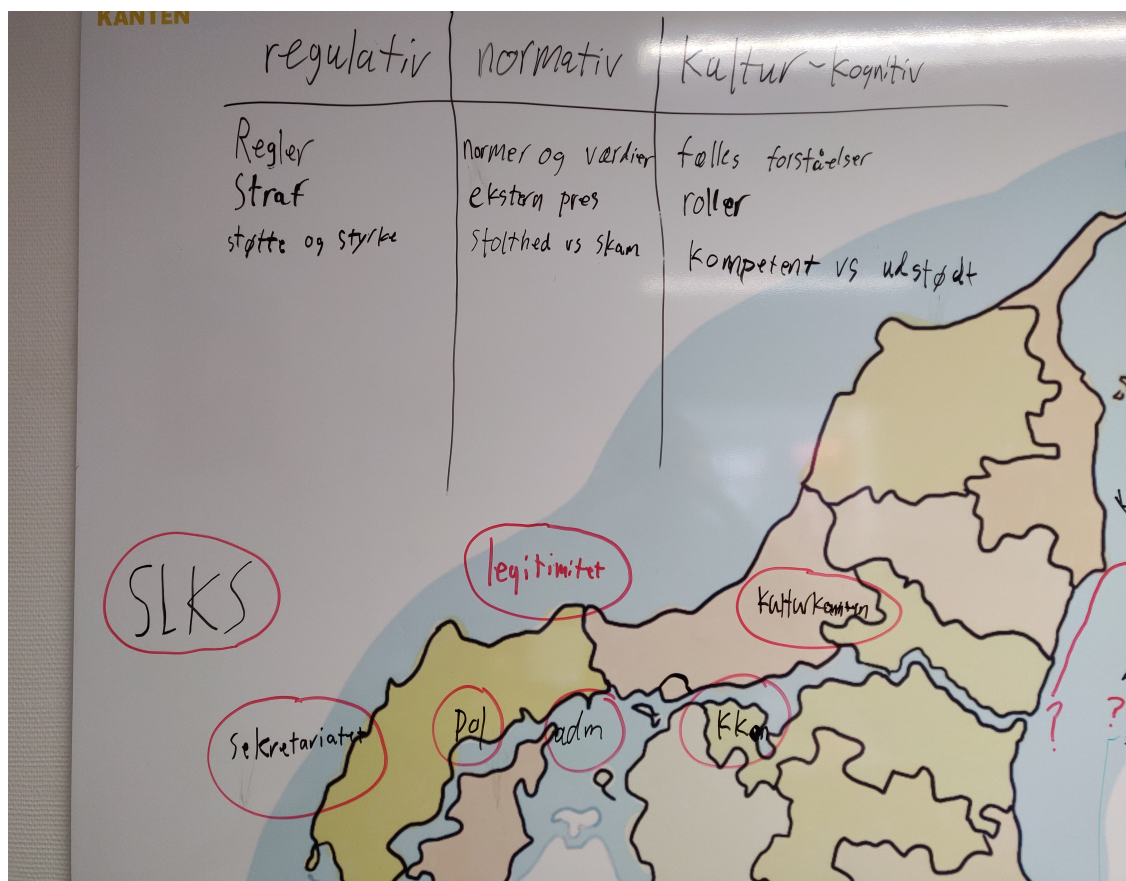


Fig. 6.1: Picture taken before the workshop

I explained the three pillars in a similar manner to the football analogy from the problem analysis. Afterward, I began drawing connections by showing that SLKS had this regulative structure on cultural agreements, and it was through this structure that Kulturkanten gained legitimacy. The blurred line between legitimacy and SLKS in the aftermath figure

(see 6.2) was intended to convey that this structure was disappearing and would create a power vacuum.

With the power vacuum established, I delved into the various actor groups by examining how they interconnected with the rest of the network. Expanding on the ideas of distance, ownership, and how they communicated and did not communicate simultaneously provides the context for how the network has internally operated with a cultural-cognitive structure while conforming to the SLKS regulatory structure. Then I turned it around on them and asked, *Who and how can the power vacuum be filled by any other actor alone?*. If, for example, the political group adopts the position of SLKS in the network, how can they work both relatively and culturally cognitively simultaneously?

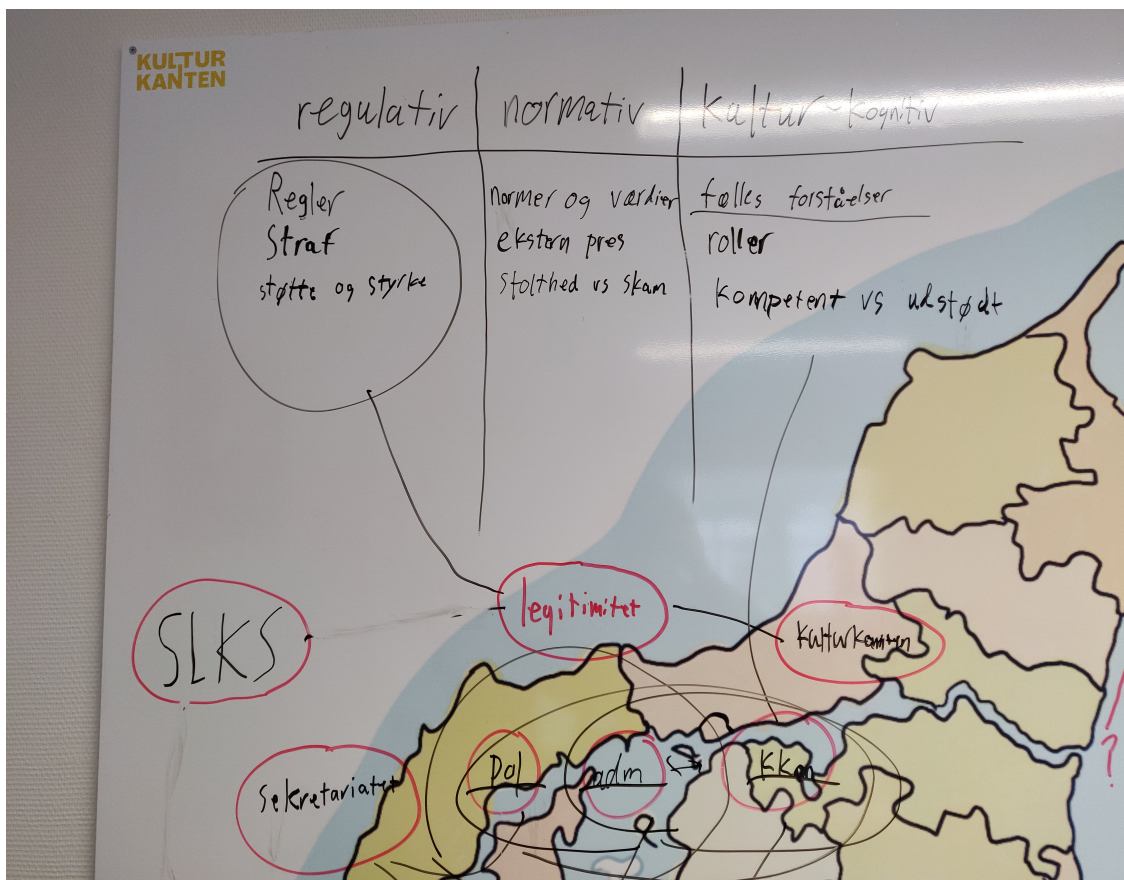


Fig. 6.2: Picture taken after the workshop

We began discussing the power vacuum and how they knew they had much more control over the culture region, but it had never been framed as a power vacuum before. It was enlightening for them to see their network in a new way, where the discussion led to how they would communicate in the future. The workshop continued with going back and forth between the different analysis points and discussing what they meant in practice. The whiteboard became the object that led the discussions forward, and participants explored what could be done. The workshop ended after a long discussion. My next task was to write an article that condensed all this knowledge into a shareable document for

the various actor groups and/or other culture regions. Some days after the workshops, changes were already being made to how meetings were conducted. In the future, meetings will be held with multiple actor groups, including administrative groups and culture consultants. These would occur in person, similar to culture consultant meetings at the Aars Music House. Showing that the effects of the changes are still ongoing and new things happen every week.

Problem statement discussion

(Problem statement): With every actor's changing responsibility in Kulturkanten, each actor's role in the manifestation of the culture region shifts. The dynamic of the network becomes unclear, and the collaboration between these actors is vital for the survival of Kulturkanten. The power vacuum left by SLKS has rippling implications for the entire network, which, if left unaddressed, could have unknown consequences for Kulturkanten. Therefore, how will the power vacuum affect every actor's role in legitimizing kulturkanten?

Beyond the discussion surrounding the extreme wording of 'survival' in the problem statement, the problem statement implies an uncovering of a future scenario related to the power vacuum effect; however, the changes have already had an impact. There is an ongoing conundrum in studying something that is happening in the present, which is why the framing of this project aims toward a future scenario. Things can change daily in the field, especially with something as politically heavy as Kulturkanten. This thesis may become outdated in a month, but that is the reality of institutions; they change rapidly in response to societal shifts. I hope the case I am presenting here will steer Kulturkanten in a better direction, even if it means the knowledge created will become outdated. There is a possibility that my findings could be the end of Kulturkanten if and when the actor groups and municipalities meet the complexity of the culture region, leading them to believe it is not worth continuing the culture region; however, I doubt that would be the result. My presence in the field and at Kulturkanten has already affected the culture region; by asking questions, completing work tasks, being at the meetings, and doing interviews, I have actively brought my thoughts into the field, and it has morphed the field into something different, which in the end is my contribution and reciprocity to Kulturkanten.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Kulturkanten, as an institution, is complex; the collaboration of municipalities and their respective actor groups creates a network that operates formally through meetings and emails. The departure of SLKS from the network reveals a power vacuum that affects the position of every actor within the network. As their ownership of the Kulturkanten shifts, the distance between the actor groups creates difficulties in communicating and understanding each other. It is concluded that the actor groups, including the political group, administrative group, and culture consultants, must collaborate in new ways in the future. The way of legitimizing has moved from being a regulative structure performed by SLKS to no structure at all. Furthermore, there must be a power balance between the different actor groups, as the operational role of every actor cannot be compromised without disrupting the cohesion of Kulturkanten. Therefore, Kulturkanten's network of actors needs a new framework to accommodate the changes while also building upon its institutional structure to legitimize the existence of the Northern Jutlandic culture region.

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Chapter 8

Appendix

The following is a list of the appendix.

8.0.1 Interview administrative group member

See attached file.

8.0.2 Interview political group member

See attached file.

8.0.3 Interview culture consultant 1

See attached file.

8.0.4 Interview culture consultant 2

See attached file.

8.0.5 Fieldnotes

See attached file.