

A stylized world map where the landmasses are white and the oceans are black. The Nordic region, including Scandinavia and Iceland, is highlighted in a vibrant orange color. The text is overlaid on the map.

SPOTLIGHT ON A REGION

Knowledge on the Nordics

Nicola Witcombe, Norbert Götz & Mary Hilson (eds.)

ISSUES OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY / SAMTIDSHISTORISKA FRÅGOR 51

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Cover Image: Gudrun Frost-Søgaard
Cover: Jonathan Robson
Graphic form: Per Lindblom & Jonathan Robson
Printed by E-Print, Stockholm 2026

Issues of Contemporary History /
Samtidshistoriska frågor nr 51
ISSN: 2004-8858
ISBN: 978-91-89615-51-9

FOREWORD

Highlights from nordics.info

This book provides research-based information and critical analysis on the Nordic region. It is written for a non-academic audience without specialist knowledge of the Nordic countries, but researchers, students and experts may also find it useful.

Articles on Nordic society, history and culture

The 40 articles included were selected from over 400 published on the research dissemination platform nordics.info between 2019 and 2025.

We have included topics which span the geography of the Nordic region as well as disciplines across Nordic society, history and culture. We chose articles that are relevant to contemporary debates, are multidimensional or have attracted particular attention. We also chose contributions from authors at different stages of their academic careers and from across the Nordic region. Unfortunately, we could not include all of the articles that fit these criteria, but those in this volume and many others can still be found at www.nordics.info. There are also 72 podcasts and 26 films available and this book's title is taken from nordics.info's podcast channel Knowledge on the Nordics.

Unless otherwise specified, none of the articles in this volume has been significantly revised since publication online, although authors have been given the opportunity to update or provide a postscript. This means that the articles were accurate at the date of their publication on nordics.info and this date is stated at the top of each. Authors are responsible for the content of their articles. Given the broad range of subjects and authors included in this volume, it is inevitable that different interpretations of research may be presented.

Reimagining Norden in an Evolving World and nordics.info's partners

Nordics.info was developed as part of the Nordic university hub Reimagining Norden in an Evolving World (ReNEW), funded by NordForsk from 2018 to

2025 (project no. 86036). Led by the Centre for Nordic Studies at Helsinki University, the ReNEW hub involved humanities and social sciences at Oslo University, Södertörn University, the University of Iceland, Copenhagen Business School, and Aarhus University where nordics.info was based.

Under the leadership of editor Nicola Witcombe, nordics.info also succeeded in publishing articles by a wide variety of authors from other universities, research groups and institutions, some of which are included here. For example, 14 of the articles in this volume are from The New Nordic Lexicon, a part of nordics.info aimed at 16–30-year-olds, which amounts to 50 online articles in both English and a Nordic language as well as a range of films and podcasts. It was kindly supported by the A.P. Møller Foundation (*A.P. Møller og Hustru Chastine Mc-Kinney Møllers Fond til almene Formaal*).

Research dissemination

nordics.info was inspired by the website danmarkshistorien.dk, which was run by the Department of History and Classical Studies at Aarhus University until 2025. Other inspirations for this volume included norgeshistorie.no at the Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History at Oslo University and Södertörn University's Issues of Contemporary History publication series. These research dissemination initiatives, like this volume, are significant because they explicate complex issues in an understandable way. They are impartial and reliable as they are underpinned by academic standards and academic freedom. Being freely accessible, they strengthen open access and the free flow of information, helping academics to step into the public arena and counteract false information. Each article includes suggestions for further reading.

We are exceptionally grateful to the contributors to this volume, as well as those to nordics.info and the New Nordic Lexicon, for the insights into key issues and debates they have given us as well as for their time and support. We would also like to thank Mette Frisk Jensen and Anne Sørensen from danmarkshistorien.dk for their help and support, and Per Lindblom and Jonathan Robson of Södertörn University Library for their assistance with producing this book. While activities for ReNEW stopped formally in 2024 and for nordics.info in March 2025, research, outreach and networks conceived during their lifetime remain in place and, we hope, will be useful well into the future.

Nicola Witcombe, Norbert Götz and Mary Hilson

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The Legal Basis of Åland's Demilitarisation and Neutralisation

Hasan Akintug

The Nordic Region

25 February 2019 by Mary Hilson

Summary

The Nordic region, or Norden, is usually defined as consisting of the five sovereign states Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, plus the three autonomous territories connected to these states: the Faroe Islands and Greenland (Denmark) and Åland (Finland). These states are widely considered to form a distinctive region by virtue of their strong historical ties and the tradition of mutual co-operation across national boundaries.

The terms “Scandinavian” and “Nordic”

The terms Scandinavia and Scandinavian are often used as synonyms for Norden and Nordic in English. In the Scandinavian languages, the term “Scandinavia” usually refers just to Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and does not include Finland or Iceland. Although the term Scandinavia is still used to refer to the whole region in English, Nordic is becoming increasingly common.

A flexible concept

The concept of the Nordic region is a flexible one. Its meanings and geographical boundaries are not fixed but have changed over time and will doubtless do so again. The term may be grounded in joint politics and history, it may invoke a particular genre of literature or art, and it has also been used as a branding exercise, attempting to present as unified countries which are in fact quite different.

The boundaries of Norden have sometimes stretched beyond the core of the region. For example, there have been important historical connections between Norden and parts of the British Isles, which were widely debated in the context of the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence. At other times, Norden might have included territories on the southern or eastern shore of the Baltic, for example during the period of Estonian independence after 1918

and again during the 1990s, when the disappearance of the iron curtain triggered interest in the idea of the Baltic Sea region.

One of the paradoxes of the concept of the Nordic region is that its coherence has often seemed more self-evident to those outside the region than to those within it. Observers abroad have often found it easier to notice similarities between the Nordic states, whereas from an internal perspective the differences may seem more important. Moreover, attitudes to the idea of “Nordicness” may also vary across the region. Schemes for greater unity often met with more enthusiasm in Sweden and Denmark than they did in Norway, for example, while Finland and Iceland seem more frequently to deviate from Nordic norms, however these are conceived. At the same time, the idea of Norden may be met with indifference, but it rarely seems to provoke hostility. Being Nordic or Scandinavian often tends to be an extra layer of identity that complements but is not in conflict with national identities.

What makes the Nordic region Nordic?

While important differences should not be overlooked, it is not surprising that there are similarities between the Nordic states given the closely entangled histories of these countries. In particular, the following can be considered:

Nordic language and culture: It is generally accepted that the three Scandinavian languages (Danish, Norwegian and Swedish) are very closely related and, in their written forms at least, mutually comprehensible. This does not apply to Icelandic and Faroese, which are part of the same language group but sufficiently distinctive not to be comprehensible to speakers of the other languages, nor to Finnish or the Sámi or Inuit languages, which are part of different language groups.

Under the influence of national romanticism and the emerging academic discipline of philology during the nineteenth century, some groups saw these connections as grounds for the establishment of a Scandinavian state consisting of Denmark (including Iceland), Norway and Sweden, a so-called “pan-nationalism” that had parallels with movements for the unification of Italy and Germany. The aspiration to create a united Scandinavian or Nordic state was ultimately not successful, but the notion of a shared Scandinavian culture continues to find some support, stimulated by institutions such as the Nordic Council’s prizes for literature, music and film.

From the late nineteenth century notions of the Nordic or Scandinavian “brother peoples” were also supported by racialist theories popular at the time, which in their more extreme versions came to associate the Nordic

region with a distinctive – and sometimes allegedly superior – Aryan Nordic “race”. Such ideas were rejected after the Second World War.

Nordic co-operation: Although aspirations to establish a pan-Scandinavian state faded from the 1860s, they were succeeded by what historian Ruth Hemstad has described as an “Indian summer” of inter-state co-operation. This started with co-operation between voluntary organisations, including networks of academics and experts, sports and leisure organisations, and political groups such as the labour movement. From the mid-twentieth century it also encompassed official co-operation between the Nordic governments. The foundation of the Nordic Council in 1952 led to the establishment of a common Nordic labour market and passport and social security unions, preceding similar developments in the European Union by many decades. These arrangements also facilitated migration between the Nordic countries, most notably from Finland to Sweden during the 1960s.

The development of Nordic co-operation has not always proceeded smoothly. More ambitious schemes for economic or defence co-operation ended in failure, while in 2016 mobility within the region was severely challenged by the re-imposition of border controls. At the same time Nordic co-operation has lately been extended into new fields, for example defence and security policy. Representatives of Nordic governments and other organisations often seem to have found it easiest to co-operate outside the region. There is a long tradition of Nordic bloc politics in institutions such as the United Nations and its predecessor the League of Nations for example.

The Nordic model: The idea of a distinctive Nordic model of politics and social policy was discussed by social scientists from the 1970s, but has its roots in earlier international interest in the region from at least the 1930s. Definitions of the model vary. It may refer to the comprehensive and universal Nordic welfare states, and the high taxes necessary to support them, but also to the preference for consensual decision-making in politics, or the centralised structures for resolving conflict in the labour market.

From the 2000s, the term “Nordic model” came to be used to refer to the introduction of market reforms and flexibility in the public sector, for example in *The Economist’s* special report on the region in February 2013. The concept has never been entirely neutral: for some foreign politicians and commentators, the Nordic countries served as positive role models and inspiration for policy-making, while for others they were dystopian warnings for how not to run a society. Nonetheless, there has been widespread consensus that, despite important differences across the region, there were enduring similarities in the social, political and economic structures of the Nordic countries that warranted considering them as a distinctive cluster.

History of the Nordic region

After the demise of the Kalmar Union in the early sixteenth century, there has not been any single state entity encompassing the entire Nordic region. During the early modern period, the region was dominated by two large composite states – Sweden and Denmark – which rivalled each other for control over the Baltic Sea. The Danish realm consisted of Jutland and the neighbouring islands, Norway, the duchies of Schleswig and Holsten, and Iceland and the Faroe Islands; while the Swedish realm included, at its furthest extent, all of what is now Finland as well as territories bordering the southern shores of the Baltic Sea. Both states also acquired for a time modest colonial holdings in the Caribbean and, in the case of Denmark, also in India, West Africa and from the 1720s Greenland.

The integration of the early modern kingdoms had important legacies for the later development of the Nordic region, not least in the form of similarities in the administrative and judicial systems of the five Nordic states. The contours of a modern Nordic region based on five nation states began to take shape during the European wars of the period 1789–1815.

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The Nordic Languages and the Myth of Mutual Intelligibility

7 December 2021 by Mariève Chouinard

Summary

There is a common notion outside the Nordic countries that Nordic people can all understand one another's languages, or at least the Danes, Swedes and Norwegians can. However, this impression of linguistic unity is not accurate as there are in fact many other languages that co-exist in the Nordic countries. Mutual intelligibility is not even straightforward between speakers of Danish, Swedish and Norwegian, as it depends on factors like accent and dialect as well as the degree of exposure to the other languages. Perpetuating the image of mutual intelligibility and giving priority to some of the larger national languages can lead linguistic minorities to go unrecognised or be disadvantaged.

Is there a "Scandinavian" language?

There is undeniably some degree of mutual intelligibility in the Nordics, as the three Scandinavian languages are part of the same language family, the North Germanic branch of the Indo-European family. "Scandinavian" was – and still is – often used when Danish, Norwegian and Swedish people communicate with one another. They primarily speak their own language, perhaps replacing some words, phrases, or pronouncing things slightly differently, depending on to whom they are talking. In a paper published in 2012, Maisa Martin discusses whether *skandinaviska*, a Danish, Norwegian and Swedish hybrid-language, exists. At meetings of the Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers and in their documentation, "Scandinavian" can refer to Danish, Norwegian or Swedish, while the other Nordic languages (most significantly Finnish and Icelandic) are seen as different.

There is also a degree of intelligibility between some of the sign languages and between Finnish and Kven (Norway) or Meänkieli (Sweden) – two officially recognised minority languages treated as Finnish dialects. Finnish, Kven and Meänkieli are all part of the Finnic branch of the Uralic language

family, together with various Sámi languages, Estonian, Ingrian and Karelian. The presence of this language family in the Nordic region illustrates that assuming all speakers of Nordic languages can understand each other is not accurate. Diagram 1 schematically presents the actual situation, although, like all pictorial representations, it oversimplifies some real-world aspects for pedagogical reasons, including the presence of over 200 other non-Nordic languages that can also be found in the region.

The variety of languages in the Nordic region

A considerable variety of languages can be found in the Nordics, belonging to four main language families: Indo-European, Uralic, Eskimo-Aleut and Sign Languages. In all cases (apart from the sign languages), a “language family” refers to a set of languages that can be demonstrated to be descendants of a common ancestor. The sign languages are grouped together for convenience in this instance as they are complex in different ways.

The four language families are further divided into subfamilies (e.g. Finno-Ugric) or genera – groups with similar characteristics. Genera may also have sub-genera. Languages have linguistic features that make them similar or dissimilar to one another, and those features allow them to be categorised into different language families, like the branches of a tree. The classification of languages according to their structural features is a branch of linguistics called linguistic typology. Following this type of tree structure, the languages most likely to be mutually intelligible are those with the greatest proximity because they have more linguistic features in common. Thus, speakers of Danish, Swedish and Norwegian can understand one another more easily than they can understand German or Dutch speakers – two other Germanic languages from a different branch – and they cannot understand Finnish, an unrelated language. In fact, it would be fair to say that Finnish is as close to the Scandinavian languages as it is to Japanese. Greenlandic is also completely different from Danish, although the languages have certainly influenced each other (e.g. loanwords) because both languages have co-existed for many years in Greenland.

Another aspect of linguistic variation is that around 200 non-Nordic languages are spoken in the Nordic countries, including diverse immigrant languages belonging to either the same or other language families and genera. Examples include Somali (Afro-Asiatic; Low East Cushitic), Arabic (Afro-Asiatic; Semitic), Polish (Indo-European; Slavic), and many more.

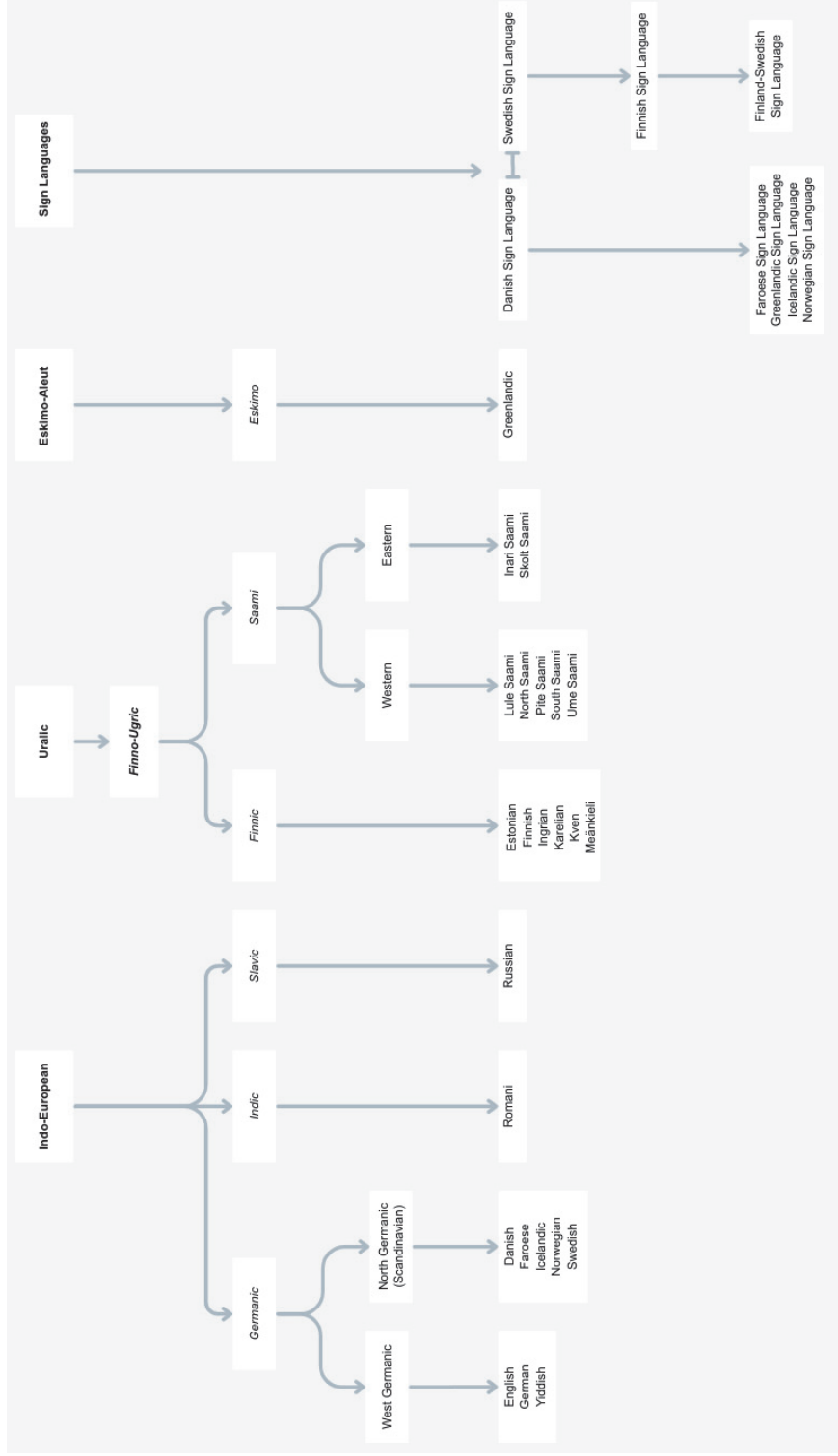


Diagram 1: Linguistic Taxonomy in the Nordic Countries (The author's work based on various sources.)

Understanding one another is not straightforward

The fact that two languages are from the same genus or sub-genus does not mean that they are automatically mutually intelligible. Despite sharing many linguistic features, the Sámi languages, all of them Uralic languages, are mutually unintelligible. The same goes for Faroese and Icelandic – two insular Germanic languages – even though they share a similar orthographic system. An exception to this general rule of mutual intelligibility across genera and families are the sign languages. This is because there is no established typology of sign languages due to a lack of knowledge and research in the area to date.

Still, even among some of the Nordic languages with the most similar linguistic structure, many studies have shown asymmetric mutual intelligibility. For example, Charlotte Gooskens, a linguist who studies inter-Scandinavian communication in relation to mainly Norwegian, Danish and Swedish, found that Norwegian speakers are better at understanding their Scandinavian conversation partners than the speakers of the other two languages. Gooskens also found that Danes understand Swedish better than the other way round, despite the fact that Danish and Swedish are practically mutually intelligible on a written level. In part, this could be attributed to the fact that the pronunciation of Swedish is more closely related to its written form than is the case for Danish. Written Danish is closer to Swedish than the spoken form.

Dialects also influence the mutual intelligibility of a language when spoken. It is difficult for people unfamiliar with specific dialects to decipher what is being said. For instance, the traditional Danish dialect from the island of Bornholm is challenging to comprehend for other Scandinavians, even to some who have Danish as their mother tongue.

Exposure to other languages

At school, most children are exposed to one or more Nordic languages that are not their mother tongue. Examples include Swedish speakers throughout Finland learning Finnish and vice versa; most schools in Greenland are bilingual Greenlandic-Danish; and, for political and historical reasons, the learning of Danish is prevalent in the Faroe Islands and Iceland. Since 1982, the Helsinki Treaty (originally from 1962 and the founding document of Nordic cooperation) has included a provision that states:

Educational provision in the schools of each of the Nordic countries shall include an appropriate measure of instruction in the languages, cultures and general social conditions of the other Nordic countries, including the Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands. (Article 8).

The geographical proximity of different linguistic groups also leads to greater language contact and understanding. Individuals living close to language borders are more likely to be in contact with the neighbouring language and consequently learn to speak or understand it. Sámi people tend to find the neighbouring Sámi dialects more intelligible because of their level of exposure. Similarly, individuals might understand a language better because they have been exposed to it through media broadcasting. In the Nordic countries, the use of subtitles in foreign films and television programmes also allows for exposure. Finally, attitudes towards the language, like a feeling of unity, may lead to concrete initiatives, such as the 1981 Nordic Language Convention, the 2006 Declaration on Nordic Language Policy, or the use of *skandinaviska*. This may increase mutual intelligibility or at least the will to be mutually intelligible. Nevertheless, the belief that all speakers of the Nordic languages can understand each other is a myth.

The political dimension of the myth

There have been historical, social and cultural reasons for people in the Nordic countries to seek to understand one another for at least the last two centuries. However, measures taken by the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers since the 1960s have made mutual intelligibility a political issue. Nordic co-operation is, to a certain extent, founded on mutual intelligibility of language, as well as mutual social, cultural and political norms. The Helsinki Treaty, first signed in 1962, envisaged the strengthening of social and cultural ties. In 1981, the Nordic Language Convention's goal was to allow Nordic people to use their mother tongue when dealing with official bodies across the Nordic countries. However, the convention does not cover all mother tongues but only Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish. In 2006, a non-binding Declaration on Nordic Language Policy built on this foundation, arguably with more recognition for a greater number of languages and multilingualism. The message is clear: mutual intelligibility is crucial to Nordic co-operation.

But does mutual intelligibility have to be based on a Nordic language? According to a 2021 Nordic Council of Ministers survey, 95 per cent of young people in the Nordic countries say that English is “easy to understand”, whereas young people in Finland, Greenland and Iceland find Danish, Swedish and Norwegian “difficult to understand”. In this context, it has been

argued that the use of English could make the linguistic situation more equal for everyone. Since the Nordic languages are perceived as a key element of Nordic identity, the linguistic battle for Nordic co-operation can potentially be seen as a battle against English.

In another context, the Nordic governments, as well as the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, have taken initiatives towards equality and the inclusion of minority groups as well as their languages. In October 2021, the Finnish government initiated a Truth and Reconciliation Commission with the purpose of acknowledging past and present discriminative acts against the Sámi and their consequences. The initiative was also in order to raise awareness of the Sámi indigenous community in Finland, reinforcing their right to maintain their language and culture. Despite these sorts of measures, multilingualism and the use of languages other than one's mother tongue remain necessary in order to function in various contexts of Nordic society, particularly for linguistic minorities. Speakers of minority languages (e.g. Sámi), dialects (e.g. *bornholmsk*), urban vernaculars (e.g. those associated with neighbourhoods with many immigrants), and speakers of older or newer immigrant languages (e.g. Somali) have to adapt.

On the one side, there is a variety of political reasons for perpetuating the myth that all speakers of Nordic languages understand one another. On the other, there is political will to ensure that speakers of minority languages are also included in the political, cultural and social life of the Nordics. While some political initiatives tend to focus on Danish, Swedish and Norwegian in the name of unity and co-operation, people with other linguistic preferences have to be more linguistically flexible – often at the expense of fully expressing themselves and making themselves heard. Mutual intelligibility can be used as a symbol of a big, happy family when looking at the Nordics from the outside, but this is an image which rather hides the reality of language in the Nordics – a reality which is in fact much richer and more interesting.

This article was translated into Danish for www.lingoblog.dk and can be read under the link <https://www.lingoblog.dk/er-de-nordiske-sprog-gensidigt-forsta-aelige-2/>.

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Scandinavianism in the Nineteenth Century

2 September 2024 by Ruth Hemstad

Summary

The aim of nineteenth century Scandinavianism was to create closer political and cultural connections between Denmark, Sweden and Norway – and often Finland as well. The foundation for the growth of a Scandinavian approach was laid by the restructuring of the Nordic region after the Napoleonic wars. In Denmark and Sweden, a union of Scandinavian nations was more likely to be seen as an extension of their own national projects. Norway was focused on its own autonomy, as was Finland, although to a lesser extent given its relationship with Russia. When its neighbours did not come to Denmark's aid during the First and Second Schleswig War, political Scandinavianism was considered to be over. However, important cross-border cooperation persisted in the form of professional and cultural networks and associations.

The rise of nationalism and pan-nationalism in the nineteenth century

Pan-national ideas in the Nordic region began to blossom in the 1840s at a time when national and pan-national sentiments were on the rise outside the Nordic region as well. Efforts were being made to unify German and Italian-speaking peoples, and pan-Slavism too was based on mobilisation grounded in a common language or family of languages. These pan-national groups sought to attain a sufficient size to be able to assert themselves against external threats. Culture and politics were closely linked in Scandinavianism, as in most other (pan-)national movements of the time, and each of these strands had its unique historical context; cultural cooperation could in fact provide the foundation for a political association in the long term.

From the very beginning, the political vision of Scandinavianism encompassed different viewpoints. For the mainly Danish and Swedish supporters of the mid-nineteenth century, it centred around a union of Scandinavian nations – a confederation of sorts – or a military alliance at the very least. A

“Kingdom of Scandinavia” never materialised, however, and this is one of the reasons why Scandinavianism as a phenomenon is relatively unknown, while nation-state narratives remain strong. However, not acknowledging the significance of Scandinavianism in the nineteenth century – as both a political and cultural movement – would mean overlooking important currents in both national and Nordic history.

In the twenty-first century, “Scandinavia” usually refers to Denmark, Norway and Sweden, but it is also used to include the two other Nordic countries, Finland and Iceland. Scandinavianist – and later Nordic – visions have varied over time and context, but they have largely concerned the three Scandinavian countries from 1840 to the end of the nineteenth century, and from then on expanded to include Finland and, from the 1920s, Iceland.

Changing borders as fertile ground for new thinking

Prior to the early nineteenth century, the Scandinavian realms of Denmark-Norway and Sweden (with Finland) had little contact with one another or were at war. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, the map of the Nordic region had to be redrawn because the two realms – which had often been at odds with each other – were reshaped. Firstly, in 1809, Sweden lost Finland to Russia and Finland was no longer part of Sweden after 600 years. This saw the beginning of Finland as a state and a nation, with at least some national autonomy as a Russian Grand Duchy. Secondly, in 1814, the Danish King lost Norway to the Swedish King and Norway was no longer part of the Danish composite state after 434 years. The Danish-Norwegian union was dissolved following aggression from Sweden, which was supported by the Great Powers. Norway was forced to enter into a personal union with Sweden, but was allowed its own constitution and a large degree of autonomy.

Denmark and Sweden had thus been greatly reduced and Norway, and to some extent Finland, had become countries more or less in their own right. This altered the structure of the Nordic region and laid the foundation for the gradual growth of a Scandinavian approach and greater cooperation – as well as for Scandinavianism.

The path from adversaries to allies

Supporters of Scandinavianism sought to emphasise the importance of brotherhood between the countries instead of the earlier adversarial relationships. But developments external to the Nordic countries were equally – if not more – important than internal ones. Principally, the development of possible threats from Prussia and Russia was decisive for relations between the Scandinavian countries and there is no doubt that external pressure

contributed to internal collaboration. At the time, many argued that small states had to band together to survive in a world of great powers, although the threat was not felt as acutely in Norway.

After 1814, Norway was still a young country and it continued to have an uneasy relationship with Denmark, which was still culturally dominant, and with the far more established Sweden, with which Norway was now in union. This dampened support for close cooperation with these two countries and for Scandinavianism in Norway. Norway was busy building its own nation, and did not welcome new external ties. Nor did Scandinavianism play a major role in Finland, for similar reasons as well as due to Russian restrictions, although some Scandinavian activists had a Finnish background.

For Sweden and Denmark, Scandinavianism could more easily be seen as an extension of their own national projects. Carl Johan, who was the Swedish-Norwegian king from 1818 until his death in 1844, maintained the policy and borders from 1814, with the Scandinavian peninsula considered a “natural” unit. The broader Scandinavian ideas of the 1840s, however, found some resonance in Swedish anti-Russian, liberal circles. Seen from both a Danish and a Swedish perspective, the image of the external enemy clearly had a mobilising effect.

With Oscar I, and not least with Karl XV from 1859, the idea of a Scandinavian union found its way into the Swedish-Norwegian royal ranks. This was partly because of the Swedish desire for reunification with Finland, and partly because of the possibility of expanding the Norwegian-Swedish union into a larger Scandinavian union. Karl XV went to great lengths to promise military support to Denmark prior to the Second Schleswig War in 1864. However, the majority in the Swedish and Norwegian governments was more reticent about this type of Scandinavian political project, particularly if they did not receive support from other great powers. In fact, the developments in Denmark and the complicated Schleswig issue deeply challenged the continuation of Scandinavianism.

Scandinavian brotherhood put to the test

In Denmark, Scandinavianism began as both a national and liberal movement in what was still an absolute monarchy (until 1848/9). The politicisation of the movement was closely linked to the growing conflict in and about the Danish-German borderland. Historically, the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein in the south of the country had a looser connection to the Danish Kingdom. While Holstein (and Lauenburg) was German and part of the German Confederation from 1815, Schleswig was an old Danish fiefdom with a Danish-speaking population in its northern part, but with an increasing

German-language influence. Different languages and affiliations had not been a decisive problem in a Europe without clearly defined nation states, but, as the nation state became increasingly important, the chance of conflict along linguistic lines grew.

The dispute regarding these territories escalated from 1842 and ultimately led to two wars between Denmark and Prussia, from 1848 to 1851 and in 1864. The hope that their Nordic neighbours would come to Denmark's aid was not realised, with only a handful of volunteer soldiers signing up for service – around 400 in the First and a slightly greater number in the Second Schleswig War. When Denmark lost the war and all the territories of the Duchies in 1864, Scandinavianism was quickly declared “dead and buried”.

Scandinavian currents quietly persist

In fact, Scandinavianism was not dead and buried, and ideas of cooperation lived on and grew through an increased focus on cultural, practical and professional cooperation and transnational contacts between a variety of professions, scholars and other groups. It was found that Scandinavianism could actually complement the growing national focus, rather than compete with it. The vision of closer ties was based on the common Nordic, not least Old Norse, history, similar languages and cultural community – and it was on this foundation that Scandinavianism was built and even enjoyed a quiet, more practically-oriented renaissance after 1864. This is exemplified by a variety of transnational associations, meetings and networks that became important in the development of Nordic civil society across national borders in the nineteenth century. Not all of these purported to be “Scandinavianist”, nor did they consistently have representatives from Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland (and Iceland), but in practice they facilitated an increasingly closer web of Nordic collaboration. Examples of cross-border networks included:

- Meetings of natural scientists from across Scandinavia, which started in 1839.
- The first major Scandinavian student meeting that took place in 1843.
- From the 1850s and 1860s, meetings regarding each nation's economy took place as well as those between, church ministers, missionaries and booksellers, for example.
- Scandinavian associations abroad were also formed, such as the oldest still-functioning association in Rome, which started in 1860.

- Cross-border civil society cooperation really took off after 1870 with meetings of jurists, teachers and a whole series of other meetings and common Nordic associations, also as part of the emerging Nordic labour movement.

Neo-Scandinavianism followed by a “Nordic ice age”

At the end of the nineteenth century, Scandinavianism enjoyed renewed support in the face of external threats and internal conflict. These included reports of Germans using force against the Danish population in Schleswig, the increasing Russification of Finland, and growing tensions in the personal union between Norway and Sweden. Finland became more important in the Scandinavianist constellation, and there was clearer Nordic – rather than Scandinavian – rhetoric, with increasing reference to the Nordic region and Nordic associations.

In 1905, however, Norway unilaterally pulled out of its personal union with Sweden and sent Nordic cooperation into crisis. This led to a so-called “Nordic winter”, and meetings of all sorts were cancelled, boycotted or postponed and associations dissolved. Nordic cooperation became once again politicised and Scandinavianism became discredited, particularly in Sweden.

The First World War revitalised Nordic cooperation once again, and resulted in closer cooperation, which went on to involve increasingly broader parts of society in each country. The ambiguous nineteenth century project of Scandinavianism was succeeded by a culturally and practically oriented Nordism, strictly based on respect of each Nordic country’s sovereignty. Although Scandinavianism had very mixed fortunes throughout the nineteenth century and has suffered a reputation for being unrealistic, its development should not be overlooked. Scandinavianism has contributed significantly to the construction of the Nordic region as a mental notion and as a framework for collaboration across borders.

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History of Iceland, 1840–2019

11 September 2019 by Agnes Arnórsdóttir

Summary

Iceland became increasingly independent from Denmark throughout the nineteenth century, but it was not until 1904 that home rule was introduced. In 1918, Iceland became a sovereign state in personal union with Denmark. On 17 June 1944 the country was finally declared an independent republic following a referendum – although Denmark did not repeal the personal union until 1950. Iceland was able to reclaim much of its cultural heritage from Danish institutions, and fisheries and power production led to economic growth in the post-war era into the beginning of the twenty-first century. However, the severe economic downturn in 2008 led to austerity measures.

Iceland's growing independence in the nineteenth century

In 1843 the Danish king issued a royal decree to restore the medieval institution of the Althing, the Icelandic Parliament or *Alþingi Íslendinga*. In the summer of 1845, the elected Althing met for the first time in Reykjavík and, over the following decades, the Althing was held for several weeks biannually with representatives from all over Iceland. Initially, the Althing had no legislative power; it was only an advisory body to the Danish king on Icelandic financial and legal matters. The restoration of the Althing was a response to the growing demand emerging in the 1830s across Europe for national sovereignty and independence. This coincided with a movement of Icelandic students in Copenhagen calling for Iceland to be more independent. This call was reinforced in 1849 when absolute monarchy ended in Denmark. However, in 1851 the Althing rejected a proposal from the Danish state for an Icelandic constitution.

The Icelandic nationalist movement was led by Jón Sigurðsson (1811–1879). He came to Copenhagen in 1833 to study and he lived there for the rest of his life. In addition to his political work, he was affiliated to the Arnamagnean Collection at the University of Copenhagen in order to be able to investigate and publish Icelandic manuscripts. His significance in the

struggle for independence remains strong in Icelandic collective memory and Iceland's national day is celebrated every year on his birthday, 17 June.

In 1871, the Danish parliament adopted a new law on Iceland's constitutional status. The Danish government subsequently gave Iceland its own constitution with effect from 1 August 1874. Iceland had successfully increased its autonomy, but executive power remained in Danish hands. The Constitutional Act of 1874 still forms the basis of the current Icelandic constitution to a large extent. In Icelandic history, 1874 was an important milestone as it marked 1000 years of Nordic settlement in the country. Christian IX (born 1818, king 1863–1906) visited the country, the first Danish king to do so. He was welcomed sailing into Reykjavík aboard the frigate *Jylland*, but the demand for increased independence remained pertinent. Also in 1874, a Ministry for Iceland was established headed by the Danish Minister of Justice. A Danish governor still sat as the highest royal authority in Iceland. This changed in 1904 when the call for more independence was met; a system of home rule was introduced which was based in Reykjavík and an Icelander was appointed Minister of Iceland.

Icelandic society and home rule, 1904–1918

Iceland experienced major societal changes during the nineteenth century. Due to the large population growth, the country could barely feed its population through the traditional means of agriculture and fishery. Change was particularly drastic in the second half of the nineteenth century as demographic pressure led many inhabitants to emigrate to North America, while cities and villages along the coast in Iceland began to grow. In the twentieth century, engines began to be used on fishing boats and this new technology quickly replaced the old open rowing boats. Increased prosperity followed, with urbanisation taking off at full speed, and it proved necessary to adjust the political system to the needs of a modern society.

Both women and workers received full civil rights in the first decades of the twentieth century. However, at that time Iceland was still regarded as an integral part of the Danish kingdom. In 1908, Icelandic voters rejected an accord reached between the Althing and the Danish parliament regarding the status of their country. It took Icelandic and Danish parliamentarians a decade to resolve this crisis and, in November 1918, a Danish-Icelandic law was finally passed in both parliaments which came into force on 1 December 1918. Iceland became a free and sovereign state in personal union with Denmark.

The personal union between Iceland and Denmark, 1918–1944

On 30 November 1918, the Danish parliament passed the Act of Union (*Forbundsloven*) which recognised Iceland as an independent, sovereign state in personal union with Denmark. The main elements of the union were the joint monarchy and Denmark's responsibility for Iceland's foreign affairs and coast guard. Section 18 of the Act of Union contained a provision that, after the end of 1940, both parties could require that a revision of the Act be negotiated. If the negotiations did not lead to a new agreement within three years, both parties had the right, subject to more specific provisions, to abolish the union unilaterally.

In 1940 Denmark was occupied by the German Reich and Britain occupied Iceland. The following year, American soldiers replaced the British by agreement with the Icelandic home rule administration. Iceland did not participate directly in the Second World War, yet the war had a great impact on the country's population and political conditions. Iceland entered into a defence agreement with the United States and US forces undertook to defend the country. The agreement with the Americans proved to be of great significance in the following decades; geopolitically the American sphere of influence now included Iceland.

With the German occupation of Denmark in 1940, Denmark was prevented from fulfilling its obligations under the 1918 Act of Union, which is why the Althing decided that, for the time being, the Icelandic government would exercise the authority of the king and take over foreign affairs. In 1944, Iceland unilaterally settled the issue of its constitutional status and claimed full independence as negotiations with Denmark could not be conducted because of the war. The Danish government sought to maintain the union, but not if opposed by Iceland. From an Icelandic point of view, the personal union was never considered to be more than a temporary scheme supposed to last for 25 years. The Althing decided on 16 June 1944 to abolish the 1918 Act and the following day the Constitution of the Republic of Iceland was officially declared.

The Republic of Iceland

On 17 June 1944, Iceland was declared a fully-fledged republic at Þingvellir in the southwest of the country. The establishment of the Republic of Iceland as a country had been accepted almost unanimously by a referendum. The participation rate in the referendum was 98 per cent of those entitled to vote, of whom 99.5 per cent supported separation and 95 per cent voted in favour of founding a republic. Sveinn Björnsson (1881–1952) was elected as the first president and he declared Iceland an independent nation. Thus began a new

era in Icelandic history. Denmark did not formally recognise Iceland unilaterally repealing the Act of Union until after negotiations on the two countries' mutual relations, eventually repealing the law in 1950.

At the same time as the negotiations with Denmark after the war, Iceland requested the return of the Icelandic manuscripts from the Arnarnaganean Collection and the Danish Royal Library. On behalf of the University of Copenhagen, Árni Magnússon had collected old Icelandic manuscripts that were found on Icelandic farms and in churches during the eighteenth century and this collection formed the basis of the Arnarnaganean Collection. Based on a white paper written by a specially appointed commission and after lengthy and difficult discussions, a solution was reached which Folketinget adopted into law in 1965. It set out that any manuscripts or documents from the collection in question that might be considered part of Icelandic cultural heritage had to be returned to Iceland. The last manuscripts were handed over in June 1997.

Iceland in the post-war period

In the post-war period, Iceland progressed economically as a result of the development of modern sea fisheries and the construction of power plants that utilised geothermal energy and hydropower. In 1946, the country became a member of the United Nations, in 1948 it became a member of the OECD, in 1949, NATO, and in 1952, the Nordic Council. In 1951 the United States established the Keflavík military base near Reykjavík.

The post-war era saw a number of serious political conflicts between Iceland and Britain. Close Western European cooperation did not prevent Iceland from having confrontations with Britain regarding fishing borders near Iceland in the years between 1958 and 1976. These so-called “cod wars” were due to the expansion of Iceland’s fishing zones, but in 1976 the British government was forced to concede to Icelandic demands for exclusive rights to fish within a zone of 200 nautical miles around Iceland.

During the Cold War, Iceland sided strongly with the United States and its Western allies, but the presence of US troops in Iceland from 1951 was a highly controversial political issue within the country for many decades. Membership of the European Union also provoked strong opposition in Iceland, although for many years the country fully collaborated with its neighbours in the Nordic Council and the European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA) and is a part of the European Economic Cooperation Agreement of 1992.

Icelandic society from the 1990s

In 1999, the Constitution of June 1944 was amended as the Althing became a unicameral parliament. The legislative power lies with the Althing and the president jointly. The Althing has 63 members who are elected for a four-year period. The head of the government is the prime minister of Iceland who represents a majority in the Althing and is appointed by the president. The president is the head of state and is elected every four years. From 1980 to 1996, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir (born 1930) was the world's first democratically elected female president.

2008 was a turning point for the Republic of Iceland, which had a population of over 300,000 at that time, and the country's economy and welfare system developed considerably in the years that followed. After considerable financial troubles in the early 1990s resulting from reductions in cod quotas, Iceland experienced annual growth rates of between 4 and 5 per cent from 1996. In 2007–2008, however, an economic downturn began that led to the Icelandic currency, the Króna, being devalued. A severe banking crisis hit in 2008, which led to the largest of the Icelandic banks being taken over by the state. Iceland had to ask for assistance in the form of international loans and growth was significantly curtailed. After the economic collapse, the Social Democrats (*Samfylkingin – jafnaðarflokkur Íslands*) and the Left-Green Party (*Vinstrihreyfingin – grænt framboð*) took over government with Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir (born 1942) as Iceland's first female prime minister. Severe austerity reforms were implemented and unemployment began to fall. In the election in 2013, the government lost power to the two right-wing parties, the Independence Party (*Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn*) and the Progress Party (*Framsóknarflokkurinn*). These two parties subsequently remained in power until 2017 when the Left-Greens forged a coalition across the centre together with the Independence Party and the Progress Party. The head of the Left-Green Party, Katrín Jakobsdóttir (born 1976), became prime minister on 30 November 2017.

In 2019 almost all of Iceland's population lived along the coast, and approximately 93 per cent of the population are city dwellers, of which 60 per cent live in the capital Reykjavík and environs. On 31 March 2019, the population of Iceland was 358,780.

This article was originally published in Danish on danmarkshistorien.dk.

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The Dancing Ban in Finland during the Second World War

17 March 2022 by Seija-Leena Nevala & Marko Tikka

Summary

Dancing was prohibited in Finland in December 1939 soon after the outbreak of the Winter War. With a short exception, this ban lasted until the end of 1944 when the war between the Soviet Union and Finland came to an end. The ban was enforced by police and thousands of people were punished for breaking the law, either for organising or taking part in secret dances – the majority of whom were girls or young women. Society’s approach to dancing and the dancing ban provide a window into Finnish culture and history during these turbulent years.

During the Second World War there were occasional dancing bans in various countries, including Germany and some of its allies, but the ban in Finland was unique. The reasons for the ban were mainly related to concerns about the morality of women. Women were supposed to be the backbone of society on the home front and their sexuality was strictly controlled, especially during wartime. Dancing was seen as a serious threat to the moral status quo and consequently to the well-being of the country at large.

Dancing in Finland at the end of the nineteenth century

Dancing with a partner became popular in Finland at the end of the nineteenth century for all social classes, but it was especially popular among young people. Before that time, people only had a chance to dance at events like weddings or harvest festivals. When different kinds of associations, such as youth or workers’ associations, began to organise social evenings, dancing became both more accessible and more widespread. However, even at these types of events the audience was required to listen to an “enlightening”

programme first, which may have included a speech or a play, and only after that was one hour of dancing allowed.

Young people also organised so-called free and spontaneous dances which took place in all sorts of places: on a bridge, in a meadow, or simply wherever there was flat terrain in the summer. In winter, dances were held in corners of barns, cabins or houses, and that is why they were often called ‘corner dances’. Normally there was an accordion or violin player and even one musician was considered sufficient for a dance. From the very beginning, these spontaneous corner dances were seen as morally reprehensible. Young people were considered as acting outside the realms of what was socially acceptable, as they might be exposed to immorality including alcohol abuse, crime and – worst of all – premarital sexual relations.

Spontaneous corner dances were publicly condemned by many quarters up until the turn of the twentieth century. The Evangelical-Lutheran church and other religious communities were strongly against dancing, and sometimes local dancing bans were imposed. At that time over 96 per cent of the Finnish population belonged to the Evangelical-Lutheran church, so its effect on the community was very strong. The leaders of the temperance movement tried to forbid dancing at their social evenings, and dancing was frowned upon even among intellectuals.

The attitude towards dancing in youth and workers’ associations was ambivalent. “One hour of dancing” attracted people to their social evenings but at the same time there was the suspicion that they only showed up because they wanted to dance and were not interested in the organisers’ messages or being educated. However, the associations needed money and members, and by organising the dances and selling entrance tickets, they got both. In fact, organising dances became a crucial means of earning funds.

Despite all the opposition, the popularity of partner dances kept growing. In the 1920s, balls and dances were organised both in towns and in the countryside. Restaurants and cafés began to organise afternoon dancing events and new kinds of dance styles became popular – even jazz music reached distant Finland. In the countryside, dances were organised in community halls and in the open air in summertime. In spite of persistent opposition to dancing, which continued until the 1930s, it became one of the most popular ways of having fun for people of all social classes before the Second World War.

Touching was not at all common at this time in Finland, but dancing with a partner allowed people to touch and to be physically close, very often with someone they did not know. While this intimacy continued to be seen as morally reprehensible, it also meant that dancing was especially important

for and popular among young people. Moralists on the other hand believed that the easy intimacy of dancing with a partner was a precursor to flirting and sexual relations. Especially young girls and women were thought to be “in danger” as they might be easily excited, something that did not appear appropriate in a time when women were supposed to be sexually passive.

The dancing ban – and whether to obey

Soon after the Soviet Union attacked Finland in the Winter War at the end of November 1939 various kinds of restrictions were introduced, but it was only dancing that was completely prohibited. Dancing was then allowed again during the interim peace from March 1940 to June 1941, but at the beginning of the Continuation War (which lasted from June 1941 to September 1944), restrictions came into force again.

In the public sphere, *not* dancing was equated with showing loyalty to the soldiers on the frontline. It was declared that it was not appropriate for citizens at home to have fun when men were fighting for their lives and it was said to be like “dancing on the soldiers’ graves”. Similar arguments against dancing had previously been made during the Finnish Civil War in 1918. In the Second World War, Finland was a co-belligerent with Germany and dancing was also periodically prohibited there. The attitude to dancing was completely different on the side of the Allies. In the UK, for example, people were encouraged to dance both in public and at home as it was thought that dancing would help people to put up with the harsh conditions.

Finns generally obeyed the dancing ban during the shocking and short Winter War. But, as the “summer war” of 1941 (as it was called in the beginning) ended up continuing for several years, it became increasingly difficult, particularly for young people, to obey the ban. Despite the widespread fear of punishment, people found out about secret dance events by word of mouth. They took place just about anywhere; the old tradition of secret “corner dances” from the turn of the twentieth century flourished again as the war continued. Dancing at dance schools or as part of organised dance courses was actually permitted at this time of the ban and these were thus very popular, although they were also banned when the authorities realised that this was a way to evade the restrictions.

Despite and because of the enormous popularity of secret dances, they were also often raided by police, causing chaos and sometimes serious consequences. At least two people died during such raids. Sometimes local police turned a blind eye, but from 1942 to 1944 several thousand people were prosecuted for dancing. They usually had to pay fines, but at least two women

were sentenced to prison for two months “for continuously breaking the dancing ban”.

Dancing linked with immorality in women

The majority of the people punished were women. A great deal of them were young women or girls aged from 15 to 20. Women were normally in the majority at these secret dances and were more likely to get caught simply because they tended to be slower runners than men. The fines were not necessarily so problematic, but the disgrace and stigmatisation that prosecution caused was often overwhelming and far-reaching. Their names were sometimes published in newspapers and although “everybody” danced secretly during the war, punishment was still considered a disgrace. Ordinary citizens were, in this case, treated like criminals. When carrying out research for our book (*Forbidden Games: History of the Prohibition of Dance in Finland 1888–1948*, *Kielletyt leikit: Tanssin kieltämisen historia Suomessa 1888–1948* (only available in Finnish)), we read a substantial number of historical interviews indicating that most people had in fact danced during the war. We were also able to conduct several interviews in person, but the interviewees were still reticent to talk about their likely punishments. We took the view that this shows the shame and stigma prosecution had caused, having such a response so many years later.

During the war, women were supposed to be the moral fibre of the home front. The Women’s Voluntary Defence Movement, *Lotta Svärd*, was the most influential and biggest women’s organisation in Finland during the Second World War. It had over 200,000 members and it gave indispensable support to the Finnish Army. It also played a crucial role in defining how the wartime Finnish woman should be: patriotic, pure, diligent and – most of all – morally above men. By breaking the dance ban, women were seen as undermining the whole nation’s ability to defend the country. However, it was often soldiers on leave who particularly wanted to organise secret dances, meet friends and the local girls; they of course wanted to have fun and forget about the harsh reality of war, at least for a while.

We argue in our book that the public disapproval of dancing women was strongly related to the societal control of women’s sexuality. Just like at the turn of the twentieth century, dancing was thought to lead to immoral sexual behaviour. During wartime this was seen as especially reprehensible because of the different moral standards for men and women. Despite the changes that the war brought to gender roles, where women attained more responsibility and freedom, women were still supposed to be pure and morally ‘above’ men when it came to sexual desire.

At the same time, the dancing ban did in fact increase certain types of crime, such as illicit trading and physical abuse, and in this regard, there were many commentators who advocated a lifting of the ban. They argued that legal and controlled dances would be much safer and cause less crime. However, dancing remained prohibited until the end of the war.

Dancing after the war

When the dancing ban was lifted after the war in December 1944 (although dancing in restaurants and cafés was not allowed until 1948), it caused a real dancing boom, not only in the following years, but in the decades that followed. The war was lost and in an era of austerity, Finland had widespread shortages, but again free (and legal) dancing was a sort of salve on the wound. Dance pavilions were built around the country and dances were organised all the time and everywhere. People wanted to compensate for the ‘lost years’ and it saw even the Finns – generally well-known for being restrained – having a proper chance of meeting the opposite sex. Dancing still had a slight taste of forbidden fruit for many people for several decades after the war, however, and even up until the 1990s there were still some religious holidays, such as Good Friday, when dancing was not allowed.

This article is based on research by Marko Tikka & Seija-Leena Nevala for their book (which is only available in Finnish), *Kielletyt leikit: Tanssin kieltämisen historia Suomessa 1888–1948* [Forbidden Games: History of the Prohibition of Dance in Finland 1888–1948] (published by Atena Kustannus in 2020).

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Visions of the Öresund Bridge, 1865–2023

1 April 2020 by Francesco Zavatti

Summary

The Öresund bridge between Denmark and Sweden has been key to the realisation of a cross-border region across Sjælland and Skåne, and it also links the Scandinavian peninsula with continental Europe. It was completed in 2000 with the involvement of local, regional and European actors, although its inception reaches back in time to the nineteenth century. A globally renowned icon, it is a symbol of many and sometimes opposing things, including Nordic cooperation, the solving of real or imagined crimes, freedom of movement, and the policing of borders in times of crisis. Nonetheless, it is undeniably a positive image of cross-border relationships.

The *Öresund* bridge in Swedish (or *Øresund* bridge in Danish) is in fact partly a rail and road bridge and partly a tunnel, spanning the Öresund (or “The Sound”) between Denmark and Sweden. The opening of the bridge to traffic in 2000 had a huge social and economic impact on both Denmark and Sweden. The short ride encouraged the flow of manpower, goods and services, with the number of daily commuters growing from 3,291 in 2000 to 18,000 in 2010. The bridge is a tangible product of a vision of the Öresund region, comprising Sjælland and Skåne, as a transnational region with the cross-border cooperation and exchange that this implies. This vision has been pursued since at least the 1960s by local politicians, institutions and entrepreneurs. Realising it, however, has been rather a long and convoluted journey, presenting challenges that still exist today.

The Öresund in the nineteenth century

Prior to the nineteenth century, with the exception of some periods of peace between Denmark and Sweden, the Öresund was most obviously charac-

terised as a militarised border. In 1814 the Peace of Kiel brought the hostilities of the Napoleonic wars to an end, however, and the steamboat *Caledonia* started regular trips between Malmö and Copenhagen in 1828. The first proposals for establishing a fixed link across the Öresund were made during the second half of the nineteenth century. Advancements in technology and investment in educating engineers in the Nordic countries demonstrated that realising such a titanic enterprise was possible, despite the costs being immense and the advantages modest. However, sea transportation won over new technology as it remained the easiest, cheapest and most secure way of travel and communication. The technological wonders of bridges and tunnels, lyricised by engineers and businessmen alike in the nineteenth century, were not sufficient to disregard the expertise in sea navigation which had been developed over centuries.

With the development of railways, the sea (and particularly the Öresund together with the Great and Little Belts, which separate the three main Danish land masses of Sjælland, Fyn and the Jylland peninsula) became an obstacle to ambitions to connect Scandinavia with the continental railway network. The first proposal for establishing a railway tunnel under the Öresund was submitted by Swedish engineer Claes Adelsköld to the King of Sweden Karl XV in 1865. At that time, the Second Schleswig War and the absence of a fixed link from the island of Sjælland to the continent were considered sufficient reasons to turn down the proposal. Other similar projects, such as Rudolph Liljeqvist's underwater railway tunnel between Helsingør and Helsingborg (1889), were also assessed as being too expensive or useless. The steam ferry lines continued to be the preferred means of transport for passengers, goods and railway wagons, all of which were shipped via special ferries on the longer Trelleborg-Sassnitz route.

The car gave new impetuosity to bridge plans

In the twentieth century, the automobile gave new impetus to the development of a rail and road infrastructure in the Nordic region. For example, in 1935, the Little Belt Bridge connecting the Danish island of Fyn with Jutland was inaugurated. It comprised of railway tracks, two carriageways for motor traffic and a pedestrian walkway – and it meant that the continent was one “sound” closer.

Gustaf Evers and Ture Norder, both engineers educated at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, were the first to present a project for a bridge with two car lanes between Helsingør and Helsingborg in 1935. The following year six giants of the Danish and Swedish engineering and construction industries, led by Danish engineer Rudolph Christiani, proposed

two bridges: a combined rail and road bridge which connected Malmö to Copenhagen via the island of Saltholm, and a bridge over the Great Belt. The Swedish and Danish governments turned down the proposal because the infrastructure was too risky in the context of rising international tensions during the second half of the 1930s. The 16 unexploded bombs found in the Öresund during the construction works of the 1990s later proved that their concerns were well grounded. After 1940, further proposals were put forward to neutral Sweden from Nazi-occupied Denmark and turned down for similar reasons.

A post-war vision of Nordic cooperation

At its first meeting in Copenhagen in 1953, the Nordic Council indicated that the construction of the Öresund bridge would be a primary goal, in order to promote intra-Nordic mobility and shorten the distance between the Scandinavian peninsula and the continent. In 1954, the social democratic governments of the two states established a bilateral delegation to verify the technical and economic feasibility of the link. The delegation obtained expertise from a wide range of scholars on traffic forecasts and the geological composition of the seabed, for example. At the same time, bilateral teams of entrepreneurs and politicians based in different cities were competing to promote and advocate their projects for a fixed link in relation to the surrounding region. Their hope was that the region could become the new entry point to the Scandinavian peninsula – with all the opportunities for development this would bring with it. By 1959, nine proposals had been submitted to the Öresund delegation. Despite these bids, it proved difficult to obtain conclusive answers to the delegation's many questions, making it challenging for the politicians to make the final decision to realise the project.

Various groups in society opposed the project. Firstly, farmers from Skåne complained – most vocally in the 1950s – that arable land would slowly disappear with the development of the bridge's associated infrastructure and housing. Secondly, there was a rise in environmental consciousness at the end of the 1960s. Several associations for the protection of the natural environment in Sweden and Denmark lobbied against over-exploitation of land, questioning the consequences that newly built infrastructure, overpopulation and traffic would have on the natural environment, human health and the quality of life around the Öresund. Finally, the debate on the fixed link also created tension between regional and national actors in Sweden. Regional actors in Skåne were reminded on more than one occasion by the national government that a possible fixed link was intended to satisfy the exigencies of international mobility, not only of local traffic. During the 1970s political

parties to the right of centre, which were staunchly opposed to the project, made electoral gains in both countries, and the international oil crisis further prevented consensus. Consequently, from when the delegation was originally established in 1954, it had to restart its assessments again at the beginning of nearly every decade.

The realisation of the vision for the Öresund region in the 1990s

The project was finally ratified in the early 1990s, although the context was challenging even then. The economic crisis in Sweden created an atmosphere of uncertainty regarding the country's access to the EU. These tensions added to the environmental protests against the project, which had been going on since the early 1970s and had contributed to making the Öresund bridge a rather divisive issue.

The vision of the Öresund region's economic potential won out over these concerns, however. The hope of increasing the volume of bilateral trade and of establishing the Öresund as one of the main industrial, cultural and tourist districts in Northern Europe ultimately convinced the political and economic establishment of Skåne and Sjælland to think in terms of regional and cross-border cooperation, rather than in the traditional terms of two separate countries. Filling the gap at the heart of the new region with a fixed link became pivotal to this vision.

The realisation of the project was helped by the European Roundtable of Industrialists (ERT), which had laid the groundwork in the 1980s. It appeared that large European industries could influence the situation where local, regional and national initiatives, at both the private and public level, could not. The ERT lobbied Swedish and Danish politicians and the European Commission, as well as implementing a far-reaching advertising campaign aimed at making the public more receptive to the idea of the need to fill the "missing links" between Europe and Scandinavia with good infrastructure. Part of its wider proposal was the "Scandinavian link", which included the projects for the Öresund bridge, the Hallandsås Tunnel and the Swedish portion of European highway 6. The ERT had sufficient capital and the lobbying and marketing know-how to align regional, national and international interests. The regional entrepreneurs and most local institutions sided firmly with the ERT, joining newly constituted interest groups which supported establishing a fixed link and injecting capital into developing the Öresund region concept.

In 1991, the Danish and Swedish parliaments issued a bilateral agreement on the construction of the Öresund bridge. In 1993, the Öresund Consortium, or *Øresundskonsortiet*, a joint venture between the state companies

Svedab (Sweden) and A/S Øresundsforbindelsen (Denmark), chose a design. It was to be a two-level bridge designed by Danish architect Georg Rotne for ASO Group, also a joint venture between private firms from Britain, France and Denmark. In 1995, the construction work bid was won by Sundlink Contractors HB, a Swedish-German-Danish venture. The costs for the link's construction, covered by a loan of four billion euros from the Danish and Swedish states to *Øresundskonsortiet*, would be repaid from the fees levied for crossing the bridge.

The Öresund bridge as an icon

Not only has the Öresund bridge successfully connected Sweden and Denmark since 2000, but the Danish-Swedish thriller TV-series *The Bridge* (*Bron/Broen*, 2011–18) has turned it into a globally renowned Nordic icon. The bridge's economic, societal and cultural benefits still appear to be clear, particularly compared to other visions for regional projects that have fallen by the wayside, such as the Øresund Committee and the Øresund University. The bridge has led to many new opportunities. For example, in 2005 many Danes moved to Sweden and commuted daily to work in order to escape rising property prices in Denmark. A Danish labour shortage in the mid-2000s led Danish employers to recruit Swedish workers. Even the economic crisis of 2008 did not significantly reduce the number of commuters.

The bridge's real and imagined synergies of cross-bordering are not always positive, however. The increased number of refugees in 2015 was a staunch reminder that the Öresund bridge remained a physical border between two states. Many refugees preferred to apply for asylum in Sweden rather than Denmark, but many of the 163,000 people who passed through Denmark on their way to the Öresund bridge were initially registered there rather than in Sweden (under the so-called Dublin rules which dictate that asylum seekers are registered in the first European country in which they arrive). In September 2015, the Danish government decided to suspend this registration, a decision which outraged the Swedish government and led to an extended period of increased document-checking by Swedish police on trains and buses crossing the Öresund. Since then, the Danish police have sporadically implemented border controls, for example, due to security worries in late 2019, during the Covid-19 crisis in 2020 and because of concerns about criminal gangs in 2023.

Despite challenges such as these, the Öresund Bridge undoubtedly remains a great feat of engineering and cooperation, which also makes a practical difference to people's everyday lives. Its history illuminates intersecting local, regional, national and international cultural and social processes, and

its iconic presence is a reminder of the vision that drove its realisation: a cross-border region which allows freedom of movement not only in the Nordics but also elsewhere.

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The Legal Basis of Åland's Demilitarisation and Neutralisation

1 November 2023 by Hasan Akintug

Summary

The Åland Islands are a Swedish-speaking autonomous territory of Finland. Key historical events have led to the Islands' demilitarisation and neutralisation through international treaties. They became the westernmost point of the Russian Empire in 1809, having earlier been part of the Kingdom of Sweden. After Finland's independence in 1917, a dispute between Finland and Sweden was resolved by the League of Nations. This backdrop and the Islands' location in the Baltic Sea have been of great importance in negotiations concerning Finland's membership of the EU and NATO, with wider ramifications for the region as a whole.

The Åland Islands are one of the three autonomous regions in Norden. They are, population-wise, the smallest of the three, with roughly 30,000 people, compared to 52,000 in the Faroe Islands and 56,000 in Greenland. Geopolitically they are located in the centre of the Baltic Sea region with strong political, cultural and legal ties to Finland and Sweden. The Åland Islands are the only monolingual Swedish-speaking region in Finland and are guaranteed to remain so in public affairs according to international and Finnish constitutional law.

Contemporary perspectives on Åland's status

After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022, Finland and Sweden applied for membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). This brought up the question if and how Åland's demilitarised and neutralised status would be compatible with Finland's membership in a military alliance. Certain circles in Finnish defence policy raised their concern over Åland's status as a potential "military vacuum",

claiming that the lack of military fortifications would constitute a security threat for Finland. The Åland government requested that it should be represented during NATO-Finland negotiations as a part of the Finnish delegation, to ensure that Åland’s demilitarisation and neutralisation would continue even after Finland joined the alliance. Both NATO and Finland accepted the status quo, arguing that the international conventions establishing Åland’s status were still in force. Finland’s Defence Policy Report of 2022 stated that “Finland is obligated to protect Åland’s neutrality [sic]”, something not in conflict with Finland’s obligations under the NATO treaty. Despite the apparent certainty, the following year the Foreign Ministry of Finland initiated a legal study of Åland’s international status pertaining to demilitarisation and neutralisation. But what does it actually mean to be demilitarised and neutralised? And how did Åland become interesting from a security policy perspective? Åland’s international status is a result of several important international treaties which cover a number of key historical milestones in the Nordic region.

Key legal developments pertaining to Åland’s military status	
1856	Demilitarisation Treaty
1921	League of Nations Decisions
1940	Finnish-Soviet Bilateral Treaty
1947	Paris Peace Treaty
1991	Autonomy Act of 1991
1992	Renewal of the Finnish-Soviet Bilateral Treaty
1994–1995	Åland Protocol and the European Union
2009	Lisbon Treaty
2022–2023	Finland’s NATO accession process

1856: The Demilitarisation Treaty

The Åland Islands, alongside mainland Finland, were an integrated part of the Kingdom of Sweden for roughly six centuries. With the Swedish loss of the eastern part of its realm in 1809, the Åland islands became the western-most outpost of the Russian Empire. In other words, Åland became a “loaded pistol directed at Sweden’s heart” (a phrase supposedly used by Napoleon). This meant that Sweden now had a potential hostile power stationed near its

capital, Stockholm. Russia constructed military fortifications on the Åland Islands in the early nineteenth century, most notably the incomplete Bomarsund fortress. However, the outbreak of the Crimean war in 1853 prevented the realisation of the fortification plans when the unfinished fortress was bombarded by British and French forces.

As a result of the war, a treaty was signed in Paris on 30 March 1856 between France, the UK and Russia. This treaty is often referred to as the Convention on the Demilitarisation of the Åland Islands (*Demilitariseringsfördraget* in Swedish), and is fairly short, consisting only of two articles which state that “the Åland Islands shall not be fortified, and ...no military or naval establishments shall be maintained or created there”.

Dispute between Finland and Sweden and neutralisation

As a result of the struggle of the Åland Movement (a group of Ålandic activists advocating for an annexation of the islands by Sweden, called *Ålandsrörelsen*) between 1917 and 1921, the Åland Islands once again became the subject of a wider international question. As a result, the territorial dispute between Finland and Sweden was brought before the newly established League of Nations in 1921 by the United Kingdom.

After long deliberations and considerations of all factors deemed relevant by the League, they finally issued a decision on 24 June 1921. This decision included a recognition that the Åland Islands belonged to Finland, provided that Finland would commit to addressing the cultural anxieties of the Swedish-speaking Ålanders, and that Sweden's security concerns would be addressed with a separate convention regarding the neutralisation of the islands. The Convention on the Non-fortification and Neutralisation of the Åland Islands was signed by nine states (Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Britain, Italy, Poland, Sweden) in October 1921. In this treaty, Finland not only undertook to maintain the conditions demanded by the 1856 Demilitarisation Treaty, but also to uphold a regime designed to keep the islands outside of any theatre of war. Notably, the Soviet Union was not a signatory power of this treaty as it was not then a member of the League of Nations.

Neutralisation can be set apart from a country being “neutral” or “neutrality” generally as the latter two terms tend to refer to a policy of non-alignment and non-engagement with war activities and imply a certain amount of agency. It is more accurate to say that the territory of Åland was “neutralised” so as to create an international obligation to keep the territory outside a theatre of war according to customary and treaty-based law. This has not been considered a hindrance to Finland's membership of NATO nor has

NATO membership affected the validity of Åland's demilitarised and neutralised status. It is interesting that the Finnish government used the concept of "neutrality" in their 2022 documents, despite clearly referring to neutralisation as defined above.

Åland's potentially strategic location during the Second World War

After a failed Swedish-Finnish attempt to remilitarise the Islands in 1938, Åland became once again a matter of international politics as a part of the Second World War. Finland fought against the Soviet Union in the so-called Winter War and after Finland had been defeated, a treaty regarding Åland's status was signed between Finland and the USSR on 11 October 1940. This bilateral treaty reaffirmed the non-fortification and demilitarised status of the Islands' territory and, perhaps more importantly, allowed the Soviet Union to establish and maintain a consulate in Åland's capital Mariehamn, with the intention of supervising the application of this treaty.

The status of Åland was subsequently revisited after the conclusion of the Second World War. Article 5 of Part II (political clauses) of the Paris Peace Treaty in 1947 notes that "[t]he Åland Islands shall remain demilitarised in accordance with the situation as presently existing". Additionally, Part II (Military, Naval and Air Clauses) allowed "allied or associated powers" the right to notify Finland about which pre-war bilateral treaties with Finland they wanted to maintain. As a result, the Soviet Union notified Finland of its desire to maintain the bilateral treaty dating back to 1940 regarding the demilitarisation of the Åland Islands.

Åland's status in the post-Cold War era

The Cold War period proved to be an era of remarkable stability for the military status of the Åland Islands. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the increased impetus for regional integration in Europe, the relevance of Åland's demilitarised and neutralised status was – or increasingly became – questioned by some military circles in Finland. Nevertheless, in 1992, the Russian Federation and Finland signed a treaty confirming the continued validity of the 1940 treaty in the post-Soviet era, meaning that the bilateral (Finnish-Russian) dimension of the regime governing the demilitarisation and neutralisation of Åland would continue. Russia was able to maintain a consular presence on the islands accordingly.

Åland and the European Union

According to Åland's Autonomy Act of 1991, Åland has a right to reject the application of international treaties on Åland's territory that contravene Åland's legislative competences. Finland applied for membership of the European Communities in March 1992, following Sweden's decision in October of the previous year. The approval of the Parliament of Åland was necessary for Finland to ensure the application of Community Law on the territory of Åland. This meant that Finland had to consider seriously the positions of the Åland government and parliament, which were not identical with those of Finland. This resulted in a separate protocol attached to Finland's accession treaty to the European Union, known as the Åland protocol (protocol no. 2, dated 1994). The preamble reads: "Taking into consideration the special status that the Åland islands enjoy under international law, the Treaties of which the European Union is founded shall apply to the Åland islands with the following derogations...". The two derogations allowed the Åland Islands to:

1. Maintain regulations regarding the application of regional citizenship (*hembygdsrätten*). This placed certain restrictions on non-residents of Åland (in practice Finnish speakers with no prior connection to Åland) regarding land ownership and eligibility for political office.
2. Be exempt from the tax harmonisation process in the EU. This issue was primarily about allowing the sale of tax-free merchandise on ferries to and from Åland, a major business factor on the Islands.

These two derogations made the Åland government ultimately adopt a position favourable to EU membership, something that has proved elusive for Greenland and the Faroe Islands which have been critical towards the EU's fisheries policies.

The international legal status of Åland was once again brought up in the discussions regarding the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, heralded as a new 'constitution' for the EU. The reasons why Åland's opinion carried political weight were the same as in 1994: the provisions of the Autonomy Act for Åland and Finland's political concerns regarding the application of the Lisbon Treaty on the entirety of its territory. In Part Seven (General and Final Provision) of this new treaty, the provisions of the so-called Åland Protocol were declared to be valid in the new European legal order just as they had been before.

The legal status of the Åland Islands as an autonomous region has had far-reaching consequences for the Nordic region at large. The Åland Islands were

demilitarised and neutralised as a result of complex power politics in the previous centuries. They have remained so through significant historical shifts in the region, as a result of mutual political will on all relevant sides to keep the islands demilitarised and neutralised. In a political context where emotions run high, the Åland Islands are an important case study in the continued value in rules-based international order despite heightened tensions elsewhere.

Postscript: During Finland's NATO negotiations Åland was not considered a problem; the US-Finnish Defence Cooperation Agreement also states that US troops shall respect Åland's status while conducting activities in Finland. The legal status of Åland's demilitarisation and neutralisation is now also entrenched in a bilateral US-Finland treaty as well.

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Scandinavia's Three Kings' Meeting in the Shadow of the First World War

30 September 2021 by Alexandre Kubala

Summary

In December 1914 the kings of Denmark, Norway and Sweden met to find a common position. The First World War was raging and pressure was mounting on the three neutral Scandinavian kingdoms to choose a side in the conflict. On the surface, the meeting in Malmö was a success – the three countries were united in their neutrality. Tensions bubbled behind the scenes, however, due to differing perspectives on Nordic cooperation and the wider geopolitics of Europe.

Joining forces in the face of international pressure

At the beginning of the First World War, the belligerent countries pressurised the Scandinavian nations to choose a side. Sweden shared a border with the Russian Empire, and Denmark with Germany. During the war, these countries were also important trade intermediaries for German imports, as buying goods from the Nordic countries allowed Germany to circumvent the blockade imposed by the United Kingdom and France. The German U-boat campaign against British ships meant that the Öresund strait between Denmark and Sweden was of great importance to both sides, placing the region at the heart of the Northern front of the First World War.

Despite their absence at the Three Kings' Meeting, the influence of the Great Powers was strong. The British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey explicitly asked the British journalists in Malmö to avoid making remarks that could offend the Scandinavians. The British Foreign Office was particularly concerned that its ally Norway would form stronger ties with Stockholm, which could lead to a weakening in the country's pro-British foreign policy. The Central Powers were also not to be outdone. Kaiser Wilhelm II gave a message to the Swedish queen, who was visiting Berlin at the same time as

the Three Kings' Meeting took place, to try to persuade her husband Gustaf V to join Germany's side.

With each of the Scandinavian states facing international pressure, this meeting was crucial. The coming together of the three kings, national figures who could embody each state on the international stage, held important symbolism. The meeting was meant as a way of showing – loud and clear – the three countries' solidarity in neutrality.

A balancing act between world powers

The meeting was also a balancing act between the two sides in the First World War as the three Scandinavian states did not want to appear to be too close to either side. This was precisely the international policy which had been conducted since 1909 by C. T. Zahle (1866–1946), the Danish prime minister (or the “Council President of Denmark” as the post was officially referred to then). His intention had been to dampen the traditional anti-German feeling that was often part of Danish patriotism at the time, a feeling which stemmed particularly from the Danish defeat in the Second Schleswig War against Prussia in 1864. Zahle's approach was cautious and accommodating in an attempt to avoid a potential conflict with the powerful German army. The Swedish king, Gustaf V, was seen as pro-German, partly because his wife Victoria of Baden was the first cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Organising the Three Kings' Meeting was a way for the Swedish king to silence rumours about his germanophilia.

Intra-Nordic tensions between Sweden and Norway

The Malmö meeting was the first time King Gustaf V of Sweden and his Norwegian counterpart had met, which was significant as Norway had become independent from Sweden only ten years earlier. In 1905, Norway unilaterally dissolved its personal union with Sweden, which had begun in 1814, becoming fully independent after a referendum. Norway's independence came about for many reasons, but one key disagreement with Sweden was its refusal to allow Norway's previous king (Oscar II, 1829–1907) to represent Norway abroad autonomously. This meant that, in 1914, the Swedish King was mindful of the conciliation that was necessary with the Norwegian royal family.

The relationship between the two countries in the early 1910s was not warm. The separation between them just a few years before had marked the end of Sweden's self-conception as a political and military power in Europe, an understanding which went back to the seventeenth century. The Swedes' pride had also been affected by the 1905 split and the two countries did not

enter into a non-aggression pact until 8 August 1914, finally ending the Norwegian perception of Sweden as a potential enemy. For its part, the young Norway was seeking to impose itself on the Nordic stage.

Considering the global geopolitical context more important than national divisions, the Swedish king initiated the Three Kings' Meeting in order to extend the hand of friendship to Haakon VII. When the Norwegian king received the Swedish proposal, he immediately informed the British Foreign Office, expressing his doubts and fears about a multilateral meeting that could create more friction than traditional bilateral negotiations. This response demonstrates the climate of distrust between the two Nordic powers at the time.

Sweden's agenda-setting

By organising the meeting, Gustaf V intended to show the world that Sweden was a pillar of peace, neutrality and solidarity. In making his counterparts come to him, he made Sweden the symbolic centre of the Nordic region. Following the dissolution of the personal union with Norway, the meeting was part of Sweden's realignment as a peaceful power.

The choice of location was also an attempt to be as neutral as possible. In order to circumvent a Norwegian veto if the meeting was held in Stockholm (the former "imperial" capital), Gustaf V organised the meeting in Malmö, a smaller city near the Danish border. This was of symbolic value to the Danes as the city was – and still is – influenced by Danish culture and history. The way the meeting was organised was also intended to reduce intra-regional tensions. All the events (patriotic songs, concerts, a church service etc) were to be perfectly balanced between the three countries to avoid hurting any national pride and to put the emphasis on common traits and factors of unity rather than on differences.

In Malmö, the three kings appeared together to show that the divisions of the past were at an end and they were united solemnly for peace in the region. It was a ceremonial embodiment of unity and solidarity, of their fraternal and peaceful relations, aimed at a transnational and Nordic audience.

Diverging points of view despite outward unity

Despite the united front presented at the meeting, the Nordic region in 1914 was far from homogeneous.

Royal family ties: In spite of the foreign policy of its Prime Minister, Denmark still harboured strong anti-German feeling. This had particularly intensified after the Second Schleswig War in 1864, when Denmark lost a third of its territory to Prussia and Austria. Support for the Triple Entente

ran in the family of the Danish and Norwegian kings: Christian X was the cousin of the Russian czar Nicholas II and the British King George V, and brother of the Norwegian King Haakon VII, whose wife, Maud of Wales, was the sister of George V. On the other side, King Gustaf V of Sweden had married a German princess, Victoria of Baden, who was cousin to the Kaiser.

Economic and political interests: Norway was particularly close to Britain due to the importance of its maritime trade, which meant that Norway was referred to as the United Kingdom's "neutral ally" at this time. On the other hand, in 1914 Norway was a young nation, having only been independent since 1905, which understandably had an influence on the national discourse. Many Norwegian people believed that they shared the same ethnic roots as German people, so Norway was reluctant to enter into a fight with Germany in case it would be divisive on the domestic front. Neutrality was not only a question of foreign interests for Norway, but also a way of maintaining unity among its people.

Sweden's pro-German faction: Sweden was politically divided, too. While the liberals and the working class were largely against a Swedish intervention in the First World War, the conservatives, especially those close to the king, were in fear of Russia and led a powerful Germanophile faction. In fact, the Swedish delegation at the Three Kings' Meeting, which accompanied the king, were clearly in favour of supporting Germany.

Despite appearances, therefore, it was not easy to find consensus at the meeting in Malmö. That it was achieved at all was partly due to the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Knut Wallenberg (1853 – 1938), who managed to neutralise the Swedish faction supporting Germany. By choosing neutrality, Gustaf V also secured support for the monarchy among Sweden's largely pacifist domestic working class.

Was the Three Kings' Meeting a success?

The Three Kings' Meeting prevented the Scandinavian region being drawn into the First World War to some extent. It presented a peaceful and neutral region – largely under the leadership of Sweden – to a Europe which was violent and chaotic. Gustaf V's initiative was clearly an exercise in public relations. It was a way of promoting Swedish "soft power" and of getting the diplomatic leadership of the region back after decades of division.

While the Malmö encounter can be said to be the first time Scandinavian neutrality was truly asserted and became known on the world stage, this approach did not come out of nowhere. It emerged at the end of the nineteenth century in reaction to the Russification of Finland and the Germanisation of southern Schleswig. Frightened by Russian and German aggression

and aware of their limited capacity for resistance, the idea of neutrality found favour in the Scandinavian countries. Neutrality was seen not only as a legal right of every sovereign country, but also as a pragmatic response to the geopolitics of the time.

While neutrality was important to the Nordic countries beforehand, the Three Kings' Meeting was crucial to its later evolution as a key cornerstone of the Nordic community, from both a formal and an ideological point of view. The meeting signified cooperation among states and it was followed by another meeting in the Norwegian capital in 1917 and, in 1939, the Danish king used a similar approach after the beginning of the Second World War. The Malmö meeting had introduced a new form of collaboration between the Nordic countries and, according to Ruth Hemstad, the Three Kings' Meeting was the starting point of twentieth century interstate Nordic cooperation.

The Three Kings' Meeting could also be said to have given new impetus to Scandinavianism, an ideology that supported varying degrees of cooperation among the Scandinavian states which had begun in the nineteenth century. Before the Three Kings' Meeting, cooperation was rather fragmented and was made up of different kinds of regional associations and professional communities, especially student ones, but it lacked a unifying dimension. The Malmö meeting offered Scandinavianism an overarching and formal solidarity. Furthermore, the Three Kings' Meeting showed a cooperation that was characterised by the importance of peace. It can even be said that the meeting heralded the beginning of the rhetoric of peace and its central role in conceptions of Nordic identity.

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The Nordic Countries during and immediately after the Second World War

8 March 2024 by Rosanna Farbøl & Niels Wium Olesen

Summary

The five Nordic states experienced the Second World War very differently. Whereas Sweden remained neutral, Norway and Denmark were both under German occupation. Iceland had no military and was occupied first by the UK and then the US. Finland experienced two periods of war against the Soviet Union and was aligned with Nazi Germany from 1941 to 1944, its proximity to the Soviet Union greatly influencing Finland's approach to international relations for decades to come. The experiences of all of the five Nordic countries during the Second World War and their different geopolitical positions had a major impact on the choices they made during the Cold War.

The Nordic countries came out of the Second World War having had very different experiences and relating to the rest of the world in very different ways. They found themselves in a geopolitical situation that had completely changed. Germany was defeated and split into two. The Soviet Union and the United States were the foremost military and economic powers in the world, opposing each other in the dispute over ideology and security policy that we know as the Cold War.

Iceland

Iceland became independent in 1918 but remained in a personal union under the Danish crown. Due to its location in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, the country immediately acquired strategic importance with the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. Iceland had been declared neutral but had

no military with which to assert its neutrality. While Germany quickly gained the upper hand militarily on the European continent during 1940–41, Britain aspired to maritime domination. However, Germany also had a powerful navy, including its much-feared submarines. This led to a pre-emptive British occupation of Iceland in May 1940 without any shot being fired, but the Icelandic government protested against the violation of its neutrality. In July 1941 the United States took over the occupation of Iceland, by agreement with Britain but without consulting the Icelandic government. The United States founded the Keflavík air base on the western side of the island.

Iceland declared itself a republic in 1944, severing its formal ties to Denmark and Danish royal power. Iceland joined the United Nations in 1946 and NATO in 1949. It still lacked a military, but was defended by US forces, which only left the island in 2006. The US presence continued to be contentious in Icelandic domestic politics throughout the Cold War.

Norway

When Norway was attacked by Germany on 9 April 1940, Oslo was immediately lost to German forces at the same time as a Norwegian Nazi government seized power in the capital and claimed control over the entire country. The legally elected government, the royal family and the armed forces withdrew north while military combat against the invading forces continued until June 1940. The government and the king then fled to London where a government-in-exile was established. After that, there was no significant military activity in southern Norway under German occupation. A Norwegian resistance movement emerged, but it never acquired a military strength similar to its Danish equivalent. Northern Norway was also occupied by Germany and was frequently exposed to Soviet bombardment throughout the war. The German troops in Norway surrendered without a battle on 8 May 1945. After this, the government-in-exile returned from London to take over legitimate control of Norway, and the country became a founding member of the United Nations Organisation in June 1945.

Denmark

Denmark's fate during the Second World War was significantly different from Norway's. The country was also invaded by Germany on 9 April 1940, but capitulated the same day, after which Germany became the occupying power. The Danish government and authorities entered ongoing negotiations with the occupying power in order to make the occupation proceed with the least inconvenience to the Danish population, while at the same time meeting Germany's security requirements. Although Denmark retained

much of its domestic independence, it was in reality subject to Germany's military will. A resistance movement emerged in 1942, which grew larger towards the end of the war. This aggravated the deterioration of conditions under occupation, especially from 29 August 1943 when the Danish government resigned, thus breaking off cooperation with the occupying power. Denmark was liberated by British troops on 5 May 1945. This happened without any fighting, except on Bornholm where the Soviet Union occupied the island after several major aerial bombardments. The Red Army left Bornholm in April 1946. Denmark was admitted among the founding members of the UN in 1945.

Sweden

Sweden remained neutral throughout the Second World War. Despite a very strong military, the country was under considerable pressure to cooperate economically with Germany, especially in terms of maintaining exports of high-quality iron ore, and it also had to make military concessions in the form of transporting German troops on the Swedish railway. This seriously tarnished the country's alleged neutrality and its international reputation. In the final years of the war, Sweden pursued a less accommodating policy towards Germany, while relations with Britain and the United States were strengthened. Sweden became a member of the United Nations in 1946. This was a year after Norway and Denmark, as Sweden did not belong to the circle of Allied countries that were invited to the 1945 UN Charter conference in San Francisco.

Finland

Finland was at war with the Soviet Union from 1939 to 1940 and again from 1941 to 1944. On the first occasion, the Winter War, the Soviet Union invaded, with the result that Finland had to cede territory despite a heroic struggle. The second period of hostilities was triggered by a Finnish initiative and this led to Finland fighting side by side with Nazi Germany to regain the lost territory in what became known as the Continuation War. However, the Soviet Union fought back, and peace was reached on the Soviet Union's terms with the cession of land and demands for Finnish neutrality being met. Finland was effectively treated as a defeated country by the Soviet Union. In 1948, the two countries signed the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (also known by its Finnish acronym as the YYA Treaty). Under this treaty Finland was, on the one hand, obliged to resist armed attacks on the Soviet Union through Finnish territory by "Germany and its allies" (in effect the USA and its allies). On the other hand, Finland

was granted the right to remain a liberal democracy. Throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union's shadow weighed on Finland, which, despite its status as a Western democracy, was forced into cooperation with the Soviet Union. It was a symptom of this situation that Finland was the only Nordic country not to receive aid under the Marshall Plan; the Soviet Union simply would not allow it.

A Scandinavian attempt to join forces

In light of the considerable security tensions that arose in 1946 and 1947 between the Soviet Union on the one hand and the Western allies the USA, the UK and France on the other, Norway, Denmark and Sweden began discussions about the formation of a Scandinavian defence alliance in 1948. The Scandinavian countries sought above all to protect themselves from the threat of the communist Soviet Union, but there was also a concern that Germany's military strength would be restored (which never transpired). Denmark and Norway had endured the traumatic experience of occupation. They had weak military forces, unlike Sweden which was also a producer of weapons. However, negotiations failed in February 1949 when the parties were unable to agree. Norway looked to the United States and United Kingdom to guarantee its protection. Sweden wanted a detached alliance that would position itself as a neutral bloc between the great powers. Denmark wished to improve its security situation as much as possible and was therefore amenable to both the Norwegian and Swedish vision. Eventually, Norway withdrew from the negotiations and joined the newly founded Atlantic Alliance (later NATO) in February 1949. After short – but from the Danish side rather desperate – negotiations about a two-sided alliance in which the Swedish government was not really interested, Denmark followed the same path as Norway a few weeks later. Sweden then maintained its neutral status until it applied for admission to NATO in 2023.

Different positions influenced the Nordic countries' actions

The negotiations for a potential Scandinavian defence alliance were characterised by the different preferences of each country, which stemmed from their experiences during the Second World War and their disparate geopolitical positions at the time. Norway had established good relations with both Britain and the United States through its government-in-exile in London. With its location on the Atlantic coast and its large merchant fleet, Norway was generally more orientated towards the west. At the same time, the need for military protection against the Soviet Union could not be ignored, especially on the northern border. Denmark was heavily influenced

by the trauma it had experienced during German occupation, where the country's vulnerable geography without natural defences had been made so abundantly clear; it meant the adoption of an approach that was almost fatalistic, based on the assumption that nothing could be done against an attack from a greater power apart from forming an alliance. However, the country's exposed position at the mouth of the Baltic Sea – the Soviet Union's western route to the oceans of the world – meant that Denmark's inclination for a confrontation with its large neighbour to the east was not so great after all. This echoed the vulnerability it had felt towards Germany since at least 1871, leading to the prudence in its relations with its neighbour to the south. In the 1940s Denmark's inclination followed the same logic: necessary adaptation to the nearest great power. Therefore, the Swedish vision of a free-standing alliance – a kind of neutral alliance – had a certain value during the negotiations, but when Norway became a member of the Atlantic Alliance and Sweden was uninterested in a two-sided federation, Denmark also decided to join the Atlantic Alliance. Sweden, on the other hand, maintained its neutrality, opting for a tradition that had existed since the beginning of the nineteenth century. After the end of the Cold War, it became apparent that Sweden had not been quite as neutral as it had wished to appear. Secret agreements had been concluded with the United States and NATO for support in the event of an open dispute with the countries of the Warsaw Pact.

Three Nordic countries – Iceland, Norway and Denmark – opted for further cooperation within NATO, while two countries – Sweden and Finland – opted for a policy of neutrality. In all five cases it was the countries' positions and experiences during the Second World War and geopolitical conditions that determined the choices made in relation to alliance relations and positioning during the Cold War.

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Heritage Languages in and from the Nordic Region

12 May 2022 by Eeva Sippola & Elizabeth Peterson

Summary

It can be challenging to maintain the language and identity associated with heritage languages in the Nordic countries, as well as maintaining Nordic languages outside the Nordic region. Official policies and economic opportunities, together with the cultural pressure to assimilate, can create a language shift away from heritage languages towards more dominant ones. Even if the language is no longer the main form of communication, heritage languages can be retained in some way through the use of certain words and customs. Research into heritage languages is a developing field that can help maintain linguistic and cultural heritage.

Heritage languages are non-dominant languages, often with little prestige, and their speakers also speak the dominant language of the country they live in. Their speakers maintain some form of distinct cultural identity or a connection to the roots of a community. Heritage languages are often associated with immigrant groups, although they can also be spoken by groups that are not new to the territories where they are used. For example, Spanish is a typical heritage language that arrived in the Nordic countries with refugees fleeing the Latin American authoritarian governments in the 1970s. Kven, on the other hand, is a language spoken in Finnish-speaking areas in northern Norway, that originally resulted from internal migration within the Nordic region. Similarly, the Sámi languages can be seen as heritage languages if their communities have shifted to using another language which is more dominant in the larger society.

Defining heritage languages

The term “heritage language” first appeared officially in the 1970s, in the name of an educational programme for minority language children in Canada. The aim was to promote a sense of self-esteem and a fuller understanding of respective cultural backgrounds. A central concept for the definition of this group of languages is “heritage”, which connects with cultural knowledge and goods from the past and the roots of a community. In the Nordic countries, different terms have been used for heritage languages depending on the perspective. In Finland, for example, the education system used *kotikieli* “home language” alongside the more recent *perintökieli* “heritage language”. In Danish, the term *arvesprog* “inherited language” can be used, although *mindretalsprog* “minority language” is also common. These examples show how heritage language studies are closely connected to minority languages and indigenous languages. The particular terms are defined by the context of use, making evident the social embeddedness of language use in general.

Defining a heritage speaker is not an easy task. Identity is often central for a heritage language speaker, as language is a crucial factor of identity construction, even in communities where a minority or heritage language is largely replaced by the majority language. As such, the language may lose its communicative function but serve as a symbolic marker of communal identity and belonging, a phenomenon called “post-vernacular language use”. When a language is post-vernacular, it means that it is no longer used as a main form of communication, although people in a community might still use elements of a heritage language for certain foods, holidays, household items, names for family members and so on.

Heritage languages are a prime practical example of multiculturalism, highlighting the global aspects of everyday linguistic interactions. Contemporary Nordic societies are multicultural settings where many heritage languages are spoken, due to transnational, global and regional migration. For example, data from Statistics Finland in 2020 show that the largest foreign language groups in Finland were those of Russian, Estonian and Arabic speakers. In Sweden, although official numbers are hard to come by, the most spoken immigrant languages include Finnish, Arabic and languages spoken in the former Yugoslavia, such as Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian. While there is a wealth of research on immigrant languages in the Nordic countries, the field of heritage language research is still growing and developing. We can expect to see more research in this area in the coming years.

The balance between language maintenance and loss

Studies on language communities, including Pia Lane's research on the Kven communities in northern Norway, demonstrate that official policies and economic advancement, together with cultural pressure, create invisible, ideological forces pushing heritage communities toward mainstream assimilation. Language shift is a tangible outcome of these forces. An ideology of accepting only the majority language can become naturalised in a very short period of time, as shown in different contexts across heritage communities.

A case in point is the community of Finnish migrants that moved to Argentina in 1906 and founded a settlement known as *Colonia Finlandesa* in the province of Misiones. The Finnish language was lost in the community within about 50 years. This was the result of the small and gradually declining number of people in the colony, return migration to Finland, the bilingualism of the founding group and marriages with people who did not speak Finnish. In the beginning of their endeavour, there was a period when the colony had a separate identity, supporting the maintenance of Finnish as a home language and that of a close community. However, alongside the use of the dominant language, Spanish, in other settings such as commerce and agricultural syndicates, the Argentinian language policies supported assimilation into the Spanish-speaking society. For example, migrants had to give Spanish names to their children in official documents and registers, and the language used in schools was Spanish. Combined with the low number of Finnish speakers and the consequent lack of contact with other speakers of Finnish, these developments led to a near complete loss of the language by the 1970s. Today, some individual speakers and heritage community members who have some knowledge of Finnish can be found, but the original community has dissolved.

On the other hand, ideologies relating to identity and homeland culture might help to maintain heritage languages and certain customs. These aspects often remain in some other form even if the language itself disappears, as shown in many post-vernacular communities in the North American context. It remains to be seen whether communities in the Nordics will be able to maintain heritage languages, or if their languages will gain mainly symbolic identity functions as in other heritage communities.

Maintaining identity through post-vernacular language

One Scandinavian post-vernacular community has been identified in Sanpete County, Utah. While the overall settlement area comprised migrants from different backgrounds, the majority was Scandinavian, especially Danish people who migrated between 1850 and 1920. In their 2018 article on

the Sanpete County community, Karoline Kühl and Elizabeth Peterson noted that there was no evidence of productive use of Danish or other Scandinavian languages that had been learned in the home. That is not to say, however, that Danish language is today completely absent from the community. It lives on in the form of local traditions, including the names of foods like *æbleskiver* (“pancake balls”), conversational routines like the use of “yah” to mean “yes” and names for grandparents, for example. In a later study, Peterson (2018) even linked the Danish/Scandinavian coffee ritual to maintenance of a Danish identity. This was interesting in the context of Utah, where the dominant religion, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, recommends that its members do not drink coffee. In the specific context of Sanpete County, then, drinking coffee was a way to retain a connection to Danish heritage, an action that for some offered a link to Danish cultural customs after the language was no longer available to them.

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Open Government in the Nordic Countries

27 February 2019 by Ainur Elmgren

Summary

Open government is intended to ensure transparency and accountability. It involves fundamental issues such as press freedom, public disclosure and freedom of information legislation, all key aspects of the administration of Nordic states. These states were among the earliest to introduce lauded measures of open government, such as the ombudsman, and they have been successful in maintaining related traditions. They can be criticised in some respects, however, such as for the use of closed, unrecorded parliamentary committees. Additionally, like other countries, the Nordic states have to navigate the balance between openness and protecting personal data, as well as dealing with the challenges of technology.

Open government has deep institutional and cultural roots in the Nordic countries. Open government includes administrative measures that enable citizens to hold decision-makers accountable, either through transparency of administration in a narrower sense, or openness in governance in a wider sense. Openness in government is intended to ensure its legitimacy. Transparency is a desired quality in democratic governments, the policies of which should be easily understood and implemented, and in which it should be clear who is accountable for what. Private institutions and companies may also implement principles of open government as a management model. Recently, the concept has been broadened beyond transparency as a participatory process to the achievement of genuine collaboration between government and civil society.

The Nordic definition of open government historically emphasised transparency and access to information. The Nordic countries have long-standing traditions that are seen as defining elements of open government, such as press freedom, public disclosure and access to government documents.

While open government is often promoted in response to declining confidence in politicians and public institutions, increasing openness can lead to decision-making processes going undocumented to avoid disclosure. Access to information can also entail risks to the privacy of individual citizens, including sensitive information becoming susceptible to abuse.

Brief history of open government

Sweden is an historical pioneer in open government internationally. In the Nordic region Sweden is considered the country with the longest history of systematic efforts for transparency and openness in government agencies. The second chapter of the Swedish Freedom of the Press Act of 1766 guaranteed the right to public access to documents created or received by public institutions. This “Principle of Public Access to Official Records”, today considered a central building block of open government, was promoted by enlightenment philosopher Anders Chydenius (1729–1803), a Finnish-born member of the Swedish Diet.

The concept of open government developed in the second half of the twentieth century. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, freedom of opinion and expression included the “freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers”. Until 1970, only five countries that had signed the declaration had passed freedom of information (FOI) legislation. These countries were all Nordic, with the exception of the United States, which had signed the US Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) in 1966. The Nordic principle of public access to official records specifically addressed the right of the citizen to access state and municipal documents and records of elected assemblies, with certain limitations. The 1766 Swedish law had been supplemented by additional legislation in 1809–1812, after Sweden had lost Finland to the Russian Empire. Finland finally followed the Swedish example when, as an independent state, it re-confirmed these principles in the Act on the Openness of Public Documents of 1951. Danish and Norwegian laws were passed in 1970.

Outside the Nordic region, the Netherlands passed a public access act in 1978. The Council of Europe passed normative recommendations on open governance for member states in 1979. In the following decades, there was a dramatic increase in FOI legislation globally. The Nordic countries increasingly amended their FOI acts to reflect international tendencies toward legislative coordination. The Nordic latecomer, Iceland, passed its own freedom of information legislation in 1996.

While transparency and FOI laws are by no means unique to the Nordic countries, EU members Sweden, Denmark and Finland have often acted

independently or in concert to promote these causes within the EU. In the 1990s, the drive for transparency in European Community institutions was led by Denmark, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands. In 1996, Sweden was embroiled in a conflict with the Council of the European Union because of its more open approach to disclosure of council documents on European policing. Denmark has also challenged definitions of public disclosure, for example, with a controversial public broadcast of recordings of European Council meetings in 2003. On occasion, representatives of Sweden, Finland and Denmark have also found themselves on opposite sides of debates on transparency and public access.

Open government in the twenty-first century

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, open government has evolved into a key concept in global discourses on democracy, civil society and the public sphere. National transparency regimes have increased worldwide. The United States Open Government Directive of 2009 has become a milestone initiative that outshines the Nordic so-called “pioneers” in open government research. Norway was one of the founding members of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2011. This was a multilateral initiative to promote open government according to the three principles of transparency, participation and collaboration. Sweden, Finland and Denmark also became members and the OECD is a partner. As members of the OECD, the Nordic countries have a duty to promote open government worldwide. The OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government from 2017 indicated that transparency, accountability and openness are particularly relevant for good governance.

The development of interactive web services has changed the practical possibilities of access and participation. Civil society initiatives have highlighted difficulties in accessing public data. In 2016–2017, the Finnish NGO Open Knowledge Finland campaigned for the right to access information about visitors to parliament in order to disclose information about potential lobbyists. Governments have responded to such challenges by joining transnational efforts such as the Open Government Partnership Action Plan in 2012. The aid of new technologies can, however, also be welcomed, both as a way to increase citizens’ participation and to save costs.

Open government in practice in the Nordic countries

Openness in government and administration is seen as a typical feature of Nordic democracy, contributing to high levels of public trust. In addition, a close relationship between politicians and citizens is regarded as typical to

the Nordic countries. Members of parliament in the Nordic countries are expected to communicate directly with citizens and to be accessible both online and offline. Examples of the methods of achieving open government include various kinds of Freedom of Information legislation, the ombudsman, citizens proposing legislation and public libraries.

Ombudsmen: In the Nordic countries, citizens can file complaints to the legislature through the parliamentary ombudsman. Among other legal rights, the ombudsman provides the public with a means to keep executive power in check and to hold officials to account. The ombudsman institution was introduced in Sweden in 1809 to protect the rights of individuals against the abuse of legislative power. An even older institution, the Chancellor of Justice (*Justitiekanslern*) created in 1713, oversees government agencies, public officials and the judiciary in accordance with the principle of the separation of powers. In Finland, part of the Swedish realm until 1809, the ombudsman office was established by the Constitution of 1919 according to the Swedish model. The other Nordic countries established corresponding institutions in 1955 (Denmark), 1962 (Norway) and 1997 (Iceland). Other types of public ombudsmen have been pioneered by Norway with the introduction of a Gender Equality Ombudsman in 1979. The institution of the Nordic ombudsman has been emulated around the world and the word is used in other languages such as English, German, and Dutch. Government agencies, universities and private companies have also adopted an ombudsman to handle complaints within an organisation. Such organisational ombudsmen have been established in the United States and various Commonwealth countries since the 1960s, for example. The European Ombudsman was established by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992.

Citizens proposing legislation: Some of the Nordic countries, such as Finland and Denmark, allow citizens to propose national legislation. In Finland, the citizen's initiative was first included in the constitution of the Social Democratic revolutionary government during the failed revolution and the Civil War of 1918. Since 2012, the Finnish constitution has guaranteed that a citizen's initiative supported by at least 50,000 citizens with the right to vote can be sent to the Eduskunta, the parliament of Finland. Unlike the revolutionary proposals of the early twentieth century, the present form of the Citizen's Initiative is indirect and submitted to the legislature, not directly to a referendum. A website is utilised to propose citizens' initiatives and collect signatures.

Public libraries: A key channel for citizens' equal access to information is the public library system, which is well developed in the Nordic countries.

Public libraries in the Nordic countries provide a nationwide and coordinated range of services, including internet access.

Nordic openness under scrutiny

Despite these and other initiatives, open government in the Nordics has had mixed results in various global ratings. In 2015, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden were all in the top ten countries of the Open Government Index compiled by the World Justice Project (WJP), an independent non-profit organisation that measures publicised laws and government data, citizens' right to information, civic participation and complaint mechanisms. However, the Global Right to Information Rating rates the Nordic countries as only average achievers in the field of right to information. According to the Open Data Barometer of 2017, the UK performed better than Sweden on openness on data about government spending and public contracts, although the Nordic countries all made it into the top 25.

Although the Nordic countries have not necessarily scored exceptionally highly in recent right to information rating systems, other important factors associated with open government contribute to the perception that the Nordic countries are successful in managing and sustaining their tradition of open governance. These include low levels of public distrust and perceptible corruption, and high levels of civil control of public administration and participation in policy making. Equally, the Nordic countries have participated in transnational projects intending to improve open government and transparency in the EU and elsewhere, and they have acted together and individually when they have perceived open government to be threatened, for example by EU legislation.

A common feature of the Nordic parliaments is that legislative committees are closed to the public. While all plenary documents can be accessed and historical documents have been the object of extensive digitisation efforts, the closed setting of committees is regarded as necessary in establishing an atmosphere of trust. As much of the legislative work happens in parliamentary committees, this practice is significant. Paradoxically, the trust that is seen as crucial for Nordic open government is dependent on confidential, closed forums.

There is also intra-Nordic criticism of the rosy image of the success story of Nordic open government. Some critics claim that only a culturally homogeneous society may be able to reach the levels of trust that make the Nordic version of open government possible. Others point out that the origins of the Nordic welfare states were far from conflict-free and that the traditions of governance that are particularly Nordic do not necessarily fulfil the needs of

a global information society. For example, Sweden has been criticised for a lack of awareness and institutional support for open government data plans. Sweden's Data Act of 1973 in combination with the Freedom of the Press Act enabled third parties to gain access to data concerning Swedish citizens to such an extent that the anonymisation of sensitive data became a public concern by the 1980s. As a result of these concerns, the Act on Personal Data of 1998 substituted the Data Act of 1973 and harmonised Swedish and EU law on the protection of privacy. In turn, this was superseded in 2016 by the General Data Protection Regulation. In conclusion, the Nordic countries demonstrate useful ways of achieving open government, but they too are susceptible to the difficulties of maintaining it.

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Democracy in Scandinavia during the 1990s

12 May 2023 by Jesper Vestermark Køber

Summary

The 1990s are often seen as a watershed in the aftermath of the Cold War and burgeoning European integration. Denmark, Norway and Sweden developed differently during the last decade of the twentieth century, but there were some similarities. In all three countries there were changes in how democracy functioned – and was seen to function – influenced by international organisations such as the EU. There were also signs of domestic changes including less public participation than previously as well as the rise of a more consumer-based societal model and political parties on the right.

In the West, at least, the 1990s are often seen as starting with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and as finishing with the terror attacks on the US on 11 September 2001. In Francis Fukuyama's famous phrase, the world had reached the "end of history" and would be heading towards a broad consensus in support of liberal democracy. Defending his country's involvement in the Gulf War, the president of the United States George Bush (senior) proclaimed in 1990 that a harmonious new world order could emerge.

These global events resonated in the Nordic countries, even though their impact was less dramatic than in many other places. However, instead of looking at the 1990s as solely an era of optimism or a "holiday from history", it is important to look at the dilemmas that appeared during the decade. Scandinavia also experienced certain transformations that led political actors to question the nature of the highly celebrated Nordic model. While this questioning was multi-layered, changes in the perception of and approach to democracy were particularly interesting. During the 1990s three trends emerged in Denmark, Norway and Sweden:

1. Politicians and citizens were concerned about the transfer of power to international organisations and the decline in the high level of trust and public participation that had previously characterised Nordic democracy.
2. The social democratic hegemony of the previous decades was challenged due to the welfare state's legitimacy being in crisis and the political left largely abandoning its pursuit of economic democracy.
3. The rise of the political right opened new divisions in the Nordic countries, which pre-empted the "culture wars" of the following decades.

International and domestic pressures on Nordic democracy

As the end of the Cold War signalled democracy's triumph over authoritarianism, the status of democracy was questioned in debates across the Nordic countries. As David Runciman argues in his 2014 book about the western history of democracy, *The Confidence Trap*, in 1989 the prevailing mood was not one of democratic triumphalism but of anxiety and uncertainty. Although the 1990s were seen as the beginning of a new world order, politicians and academics were concerned about flaws in democracy in the Nordic countries that had been of growing concern and academic interest since the 1970s. There was concern about the consequences of weakened political parties and reduced public participation leading many to fear that the celebrated model of Nordic democracy was not fit for the post-industrial world.

From the mid-twentieth century, the Nordic countries had cherished a unique model of participation and representation that fostered equality. During the industrial age, mass political parties, trade unions and farmers' associations had experienced high levels of support and participation that were rarely seen in other places around the world. During the 1990s, however, emerging signs of decay dominated the academic and political discourse. The notion of a "spectator democracy" expressed elements of this concern, referring to a democracy in which people showed a general interest in politics but where there were low levels of participation in political parties, voluntary associations and trade unions.

Investigations on power and democracy

Consequently, the governments in the three Scandinavian countries showed significant interest in measuring democracy through state-financed investigations on power and democracy. Norwegian scholars had piloted the first investigation of power relations in Norwegian society in the late 1970s (*Makt-*

utredningen) and, from 1985–2003, Denmark, Sweden and Norway (again) conducted investigations on the conditions of democracy. In Sweden, there was *Maktutredningen* 1985–1990 and *Demokratiutredningen* 1997–2000, in Denmark, *Magtudredningen* 1997–2003, and in Norway, *Makt- og demokratiutredningen* 1996–2003.

Leading scholars from across different academic disciplines took part in surveys that sought to understand the development of democracy in each country, and surprisingly the conclusions diverged quite a lot. For example, the majority involved in the Norwegian investigation in the 1990s concluded that democracy was decaying due to weakening links between citizens and the decision-making process, whereas the Danish commission found that democracy was largely well-functioning and lived up to the standards of a pluralist democracy.

European integration and the potential risk of a democratic deficit that it brought with it was extremely relevant to all three investigations. In fact, the term “democratic deficit” became a constant feature in the debate about European integration in the 1990s as a critique of the alleged flow of power from the Nordic nation states to unelected bureaucrats in Brussels. Denmark had been a member of the European Communities since 1973, while Sweden and Finland joined in 1995. Norway negotiated membership of the European Union in 1994, but this was rejected after a referendum.

As Ann-Cathrine Jungar has argued, the different conclusions of the power investigations displayed the three states’ historical legacies in relation to the EU and their different normative approaches to how sovereignty and popular rule operated in increasingly internationalised political structures. The Danish investigations found that the loss of formal sovereignty entailed by entering the European Union was matched by a greater influence on European policies, whereas the pessimistic conclusions of the Norwegian investigation were related to the country’s affiliation with the EU which prevented Norwegian politicians from acting as policy makers.

However, on a national scale Scandinavian democracy was not only challenged by outside forces such as European integration. Local democracy gained prominence as a way of compensating for the growing influence of the welfare state. One of the important solutions to the problems of the time was seen to be the changing role of the citizen; more particularly, decentralisation and an increase in types of “user democracy” that could empower the users of welfare services, such as schools and day care centres, or through the establishment of senior citizen councils.

Diluted social democratic ideals

Regarding the citizen as a consumer of welfare services was an important part of the implementation of market ideas in the public sector in the Nordic countries. In the 1990s, the Social Democratic parties were at the vanguard of neoliberal reforms in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. In all three countries, since the interwar years these political parties had played a highly influential role in shaping the welfare state with comprehensive social, housing and unemployment policies that protected the population against poverty and stimulated economic growth. However, from the late 1980s, the Social Democratic parties in Scandinavia began to alter their ideological foundation, focusing on spreading market principles in society and assigning individual citizens more responsibility for their own lives.

The revisions of the social democratic ideology brought with it a new understanding of democracy. For social democrats, the idea of a broad concept of democracy was an important part of ideological thinking earlier in the twentieth century. Combined with their policies to shape future society, they understood democracy as a broad concept which spanned the political, social, economic and cultural spectrum. In general, social democrats had previously been able to reconcile a firm vision for political democracy – as opposed to the communist interpretation of a people’s democracy – with a more progressive view that had its foundation in concepts such as economic democracy. Economic democracy was an important part of the social democratic vision throughout much of the twentieth century as it held a promise of equality and public control over the economy. In his 2021 book, *Democracy and the Economy in Finland and Sweden since the 1960s*, Ilkka Kärriylä shows, however, how the idea of an economic democracy in Sweden and Finland lost momentum and disappeared from the political agenda of the Social Democratic parties during the 1980s and 1990s.

For the first time since the advent of the labour movement, there was no significant difference between the understanding of democracy on the political right and the social democratic understanding of it. Instead, democratisation and the idea of spreading democracy to other places in the world became more of a focal point to rally around – not just for the social democrats, but even for most centrist political parties at the time.

The rise of new right-wing parties

The dynamic forces in Scandinavian democracy came not from the political left but from a re-orientation of the right. The 1990s saw the emergence of a culture war fostered in conservative movements eager to break with political consensus mainly on the issue of immigration. The rise of the populist right

was perhaps strongest in Denmark and Norway where the Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*) and the Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*), respectively, experienced rapid electoral success. The precursor to this movement can be traced back to the 1970s when strong critics of the welfare state started attracting working-class voters by attacking the bureaucratic and expensive public sector. However, the movements in both countries transformed during the 1990s, coming to resemble far-right parties like the French *Front National*.

In the 1990s, the politicians of the right in the Nordic region as a whole became much more concerned with culture wars, immigration and Islam. This would eventually make the parties they were affiliated to become some of the more successful right-wing parties in Europe. Like US Republicans, such as congressman Newt Gingrich who started a culture war against liberal America at around the same time, the new right in Scandinavia questioned the dominant ideological movements and metanarratives of democracy that had created the modern Nordic states. As part of their criticism of representative democracy, the new right called for referenda on immigration. One of the leading intellectuals of the Danish right wing, Søren Krarup, even questioned whether parliamentary democracy could save the Danes from the catastrophe of immigration.

The rise of the new right – and the other threats to democracy outlined here – did not, of course, mean the end of democracy in the Scandinavian countries. However, the right did manage to significantly influence parliamentary divisions as well as highlight new political disunities, many of which have lasted well into the twenty-first century.

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Racial Colour-blindness in Sweden

12 May 2023 by Sayaka Osanami Törngren & Nicola Witcombe

Summary

According to the official Swedish understanding, race is of little or no importance because everyone is equal. Although this approach is meant to be anti-racist, it obscures inequalities. Research in ethnic and race studies shows that race is socially constructed and that race as a category cannot be completely set aside because colour-blindness leads to discrimination and oppression going undetected or ignored.

In 2009, Sweden removed the term “race” (*ras*) from its Discrimination Act (*Diskrimineringslag* 2008:567) and replaced it with the proxy term “ethnic belonging”. In 2014, the government decided to remove the term “race” from all legislation. In fact, “rasiferad” (racialised) even became the official word that should be used instead of race. But removing the term does not remove racism itself. “Racialised” seems less harsh than simply “race” to some people as it refers to a group of people who are subjects of racialisation in a given context. However, the current language of racialisation, and using the term racialised without addressing specific racial groups, obscures the various processes and ways different groups of people are categorised to form racial groups based on different structures of power and privilege. In his 2020 book Lentin puts it thus: “Ignoring race and denying that it matters or reaching for euphemisms that comfort White anxieties will not make race matter any less than it does.” (A. Lentin, *Why Race still Matters*, p.178)

McEachrance (2014) argues that the political rejection of race has led to a contradictory situation. While on the one hand “race” is said to have no meaning, social distinctions or proxy terms, such as ethnicity, religion and nationality, are attributed more meaning. These terms are directed only towards those who are not majority Swedish, i.e. those who are not racialised as White, and in turn end up functioning as proxies for race.

What is race?

Some people are anxious about talking about “race” and use other words like ethnicity, nationality, country of origin or racialisation as substitutes that may feel less harsh. The word “race” is often associated with the outward appearance of someone (their phenotype) and more often than not it is used when talking about non-White people. In this way, White people tend to be the exception to the rule and become somehow raceless. However, in understanding race, White people should also be seen as racialised as there is no racial category that is completely neutral.

Research in the field of ethnic and racial studies has differing perspectives on what race actually is. In this article, race is understood as a social construct. This means that it is not something that is inherent or essential to a person, but is projected on to that person by society. This projection is complex, involving many layers of cultural norms, values and institutions. All these aspects socialise individuals into racialised understandings of the world and of their and other people’s identities, which are, in turn, maintained by these understandings. The following layers are relevant:

- Multilevel – This refers to the levels at which race is constructed and maintained through the institutionalised structure of hierarchies, social arrangements and organisations which normalise and reproduce racial structures.
- Individual – At the individual level, racism is embedded in judgments and beliefs about ourselves and others, and in the actions we take that reflect those beliefs.
- Interpersonal – At the interpersonal level, racism is embedded in social interactions, whether or not we choose to see the effects of race and whether or not we intend to enact or choose to resist our racialised beliefs.
- Institutional – At the systematic level, racism is manifested in explicit and implicit policies, law and institutional arrangements, which maintain inequality, for example in health, education, housing and the labour market.

Because race is socially constructed, it refers to socially constructed boundaries of power, privilege and oppression. Individuals may choose whether or how they identify with a given racial category, but they cannot choose whether or how they will be racialised or racially characterised by others. It is difficult to separate one’s personal racial identity from what is going on in the world or in a particular context (as much as someone may seek to do so).

People have to negotiate these four levels of racial encounters regularly on an everyday basis. Shared experiences, such as history and oppression, also influence identity. This can lead to resilience and resistance in the face of oppression, as well as to mobilisation, often of particular groups of people and including active attempts to redefine the meanings of racial categories.

Race and colour-blindness in Sweden

“Colour-blindness” means the avoidance of attributing racial characteristics to someone (be they visible or not). The intention is usually positive, based on the assumption that people should be treated equally regardless of the colour of their skin or other aspects of their identity. However, it can actually have negative effects. It can allow inequalities to go under the radar and perpetuate discrimination and oppression. It can also work against the celebration of difference.

Proponents of colour-blindness argue that it is a way to tackle racism, because they consider that race as a social category is irrelevant when discussing discrimination, inequality and social injustice. This is because human rights, democracy, gender equality and anti-racism are already guaranteed by the existing anti-discrimination legislation. But others believe that it is absurd to talk about and challenge racism without being able to define or talk about race itself. In this context the term “colour-blindness” is revealing. Denying the manifestation of race through social understanding and hierarchy has significant material, psychological and relational costs. To try to “go beyond race” ultimately ignores the reality of racism and racial discrimination, even if they are causing harm.

Given the multi-layered complexity of race and given that the perception of race can change depending on context, it is challenging to sum up how race plays out in the Nordic countries as a whole. However, recent research, including numerous interviews undertaken in Sweden, provides some key insights.

Interviews with multiracial and multiethnic Swedes

Multiracial and multiethnic Swedes can be defined as those whose upbringing were predominantly in Sweden and self-identify as having one Swedish parent and one parent of a foreign background or is not a Swedish citizen. These groups are statistically invisible and are incorporated into the category “Swedish background”, defined as people who are born in Sweden and have at least one parent born in Sweden (Statistics Sweden, 2018). This corresponds with the colour-blind approach and makes research arguably more challenging. It does not fit with the rise of mixed populations globally and

multigenerational experiences of mixed populations. That said, it is possible to say that 18 per cent of the ten million residents of Sweden in 2018 were born abroad. Five per cent of people born in Sweden had two foreign-born parents, while seven per cent of those born in Sweden were the children of bi-national marriages, having both a Swedish-born parent and a foreign-born parent.

Interviews with multiracial and multiethnic Swedes show that Swedishness is linked to the phenotype of being White, contrary to the statistical colour-blind approach that categorises them into “Swedish background” with the alleged colour-blindness that that implies. As stated by an interviewee: “Despite everything, it feels like it is not possible [to be accepted as Swedish]. I know that if I say so [that I am Swedish], they [people] will say against me [that I am not]. [...] At the same time, if I can’t say that, what else am I?” (Osanami Törngren, 2020, p. 6).

There was quite a lot of discussion about whether multiracial Swedes can “pass” as White and/or Swedish. Interestingly, certain migrant groups which were once racialised as non-Swedes are now deracialised such as Italians and individuals from the former Yugoslavia. But using the ability to “pass” as a yardstick for success is deeply problematic, despite the associated privileges it inevitably brings with it. Firstly, it does not always sit well with everybody as there can be a sense of identity mismatch between someone’s self-perception and the perception by others. Many of the interviewees considered that Swedishness should embrace a variety of backgrounds and that the growing mixed population in Sweden needs to be recognised. Some interviewees and researchers alike have suggested that racial connotations of Swedishness be replaced with a sense of national belonging (see Song and Aspinall 2012 and Osanami Törngren 2020). Secondly, some of the interviewees found it very important *not* to “pass” or conform to the either/or categories, and wished to forge their own categories. As one of them put it, “[y]ou do not need to put me into boxes”. (Osanami Törngren, 2020, p. 12)

The argument to try to move beyond race and to erase “race” – from legislation for instance – does not help, but actually supports the maintenance of race as a hierarchy. It paints an illusion of equality without dealing with the underlying issues. Race as an analytical category is important in order to address oppression and this is because race is socialised into our world views and integrated into our institutions across generations – whether we like it not.

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Iceland's Constitutional Revision and the "New Constitution"

25 April 2024 by Jón Ólafsson

Summary

In the soul-searching that followed the 2008 financial crisis, which hit Iceland particularly badly, there was a surge of excitement about a new constitution. Despite efforts to maintain a balance between new and old ideas and input from experts and ordinary citizens, attempts to revise the constitution have repeatedly floundered over the years since then. Successive governments have employed different approaches to the subject of the new constitution, and the early promise of a "new" Iceland has – as yet – not led to any concrete outcome.

The revision of the Icelandic constitution was one of the consequences of the international financial crisis of 2008, which affected Iceland badly. Three Icelandic banks, having grown exponentially in a short time, were too exposed to survive the crisis. The Icelandic state took them over one by one as they went bankrupt and the country's currency and economy collapsed. In such an atmosphere, voices demanding political renewal dominated the public arena. It seemed inevitable that, once the country had been saved from losing its economic independence, politics and the system of government had to change fundamentally.

A new constitution, a new Iceland

Revising the constitution had surfaced time and again after the Icelanders ended the royal union with Denmark and founded their republic. This time it was different though, as many leading politicians and vocal activists now saw it as a fundamental component of Iceland's post-crisis transition. At the same time, a new constitution was seen as Iceland's final step to full independence. The 1944 republican constitution had, like previous Icelandic

constitutions (including that from 1874 on Icelandic domestic affairs and the 1920 constitution of the Kingdom of Iceland), been based on the Danish constitution from 1849.

A national meeting and a Constituent Assembly

After massive protests resulting from Iceland's economic crisis, the government of the liberal-conservative Independence Party (*Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn*) and the Social Democratic Alliance (*Samfylkingin*) collapsed. Instead, the Social Democratic Alliance formed a new government with the socialist Left-Green Movement (*Vinstri græn*). The new government led by Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir, a senior reformist politician, proposed a number of reforms to strengthen democracy in Iceland, including legislation on a Constituent Assembly.

The proposal for an assembly of 25 people was supported by MPs from all parties except the Independence Party. Icelandic citizens over 20 years of age and who did not hold public office were able to run for a seat in the assembly. The conditions for registering as a candidate were to be kept simple and they would be given the task of revising the Icelandic constitution with a focus on eight topics, including democratic participation and the management of the environment and natural resources. The result of its work was to be a constitutional bill that would be submitted to parliament (Althingi) for further discussion and approval. The preparations for the assembly included a so-called national meeting where one thousand randomly selected citizens would discuss and articulate their principal views and values in order to guide the constitutional revision process.

Elections were held on 27 November 2010 and 25 individuals out of 522, each of whom ran on his or her own platform, were elected to the assembly. After the elections, complaints were made about the privacy of voters and the security of votes not being guaranteed. The Icelandic Supreme Court reviewed these complaints and ruled that the elections were invalid. Since no suspicion of actual fraud was raised, however, the Althingi decided that, rather than call new elections, it would reappoint the 25 elected assembly members to what was now called a Constitutional Council. All except one accepted appointment to the council, and work was able to start on constitutional revision in April 2011.

The "crowdsourced constitution"

One of the first things the Constitutional Council did was to decide not to revise the constitution from 1944, but rather to write a new one. As expected, the council also decided to stream its plenary meetings and it set up a process

for the public to observe and monitor the council's progress. The drafts as they evolved were published once a week on the council's website and council members made themselves available for discussion with individuals and groups. Much of this discussion was conducted online through social media platforms, especially the council's Facebook page, which received a large number of visitors. Many ideas, proposals, criticisms and reflections were voiced and discussed there.

The highly publicised social media exposure of the council and its direct and uninterrupted communication with the public drew international media attention. As international interest grew, and activists and academics also started to observe the process, the emerging bill began to be referred to as the "crowdsourced constitution". Its drafting was a fully transparent process, as the council's subcommittees were, for example, obliged to consider proposals submitted via the official proposal system and debate them. All in all, 323 proposals were received from the public and were discussed by subcommittees and around 6,000 comments were made on social media. Some of these comments were then discussed further in one or more of the committees, but there was no formal process for handling comments or proposals received via social media.

The Constitutional Bill: Public support, expert criticism

After four months of drafting and deliberating, the council unanimously approved a bill to be sent to Althingi along with the council's commentary on it. Surprisingly, perhaps, it did not in the end present a radical departure from the 1944 constitution. Rather it reconfirmed the commitment to parliamentary democracy and introduced a number of new rights, including so-called second and third generation rights. These covered socio-economic issues on the one hand, and the environment and nature on the other, in addition to a rich repertoire of civil liberties. These included the right to a clean and healthy environment as well as "rights of nature" and those of future generations. It also characterised natural resources as "national property", constitutionally precluding their privatisation and stipulating that no one could be given the right to exploit them without full payment.

Although there seemed to be widespread public approval of the Constitutional Council's work, criticism emerged especially from the academic community. The main concerns were about the composite nature of the bill, which partly reflected the fact that its authors were neither legal scholars, constitutional specialists nor political scientists (although there were both lawyers and political scientists among the council's members). The council had borrowed from other constitutions, as was to be expected, but the num-

ber and diversity of the sources created concerns about the legal coherence of the final document.

The 2012 referendum and 2013 elections

In 2012 Althingi decided to call a national referendum on the constitution. This would not ask for direct approval or disapproval of the Constitutional Council's bill but rather explore whether voters were prepared to accept it as a basis for a new constitution. This question was grounded in the role Althingi must play in constitutional revision. Voters were also asked to answer five more general questions about constitutional issues. There was no explanation provided on precisely what these meant, but the way the questions were formulated suggested at least that Althingi would change the constitutional bill rather than abandon it, given the requisite approval. The referendum confirmed that the Constitutional Council's bill enjoyed wide approval among the Icelandic public. With slightly more than 50 per cent participation, more than two thirds of those who voted supported the proposal that a new constitution should be based on the bill.

As fresh elections drew closer in 2013, parliamentary opposition to the bill seemed to grow. Some MPs previously supportive of the bill were now becoming sceptical, partly because of criticism from experts. Although rumour had it that powerful interest groups were also lobbying against the bill, there was no open and focused discussion on the individual articles of the constitution to make opposition clearly visible. In February a compromise was reached in which it was agreed that further handling of the bill would not be undertaken, but the option for its reintroduction at a later point in time would be kept open.

A centre-right coalition was formed after the 2013 elections and the new government did not consider itself obligated to continue the previous process. According to the coalition agreement, the revision process was to be continued under the leadership of the Althingi, but this time a parliamentary committee was established headed by a retired law professor from the University of Iceland.

Ups and downs of the "new constitution"

Although a small group of activists continued to fight for the Constitutional Council's bill, there was generally little enthusiasm for it over the years that immediately followed. This changed abruptly in the spring of 2016 when Prime Minister Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson resigned because of a corruption scandal. In the upheaval that followed, the idea of wider constitutional renewal – rather than less radical revision – seemed reinvigorated. This

overriding mood had a negative effect on the three new amendment bills that were by that time ready for approval after three years of work by the appointed committee; the attempts of the interim prime minister, appointed after Gunnlaugsson's resignation, to push them through parliament failed. After two subsequent parliamentary elections, in 2016 and again in 2017, during which time the constitution was little discussed, a new prime minister, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, was appointed in 2017. She announced a fresh revision process in which the constitution would be revised over a period of seven years.

A central part of the new revision attempt was the encouragement and organisation of public engagement in the process. The method chosen for public consultation this time was a Deliberative Poll in cooperation with the University of Iceland and the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University. With this method, which involved citizens indirectly in the constitution-making process, it was shown that, although the general support of the Constitutional Council's bill remained, the public's views differed on some issues.

The new revision process revived not only constitutional debates among the political parties and in Althingi, but also led to a new campaign by an activist group, The Constitutional Society (*Stjórnarskrárfélagið*), which had continued to argue for a return to the Constitutional Council's bill and had repeatedly lobbied the political parties to bring the former process to completion. This group argued that Althingi was under a political and moral obligation to act in accordance with the 2012 referendum on the constitution. In 2022, when ten years had passed since the referendum on the constitution, the question "Where is the constitution?" could be seen sprayed on walls and walkways all over Reykjavík.

An unfinished business

In 2024 the Icelandic constitutional saga was still not over. The incumbent prime minister's revision process, although not formally abandoned, did not seem to raise much hope. Further constitutional amendment bills were under preparation, this time based on the opinion of four distinguished legal scholars. A public consultation was still seen as an important part of the process, but it remained unspecified. Despite a widely shared view among both the public and politicians that constitutional revision was long overdue, it had not been possible to create broad political support for any concrete revision. This situation reflects the political environment in Iceland. In the 15 years since the financial crisis, Iceland had gone through considerable social and political change. However, the most publicised effort to transform

the country, the one that was supposed to deliver the foundations of a “new Iceland”, had led nowhere.

Postscript: In 2025 the new constitution and its revision remain on the agenda of a new coalition government. But the government, headed by the Social Democratic Alliance, has made it clear that there are other more pressing issues that need to be addressed first. It is possible that amendments will be made during this term to take effect after a second parliamentary approval, but a more comprehensive revision is unlikely to happen in this decade.

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Scandinavian Apologies and Compensation to Indigenous Peoples

9 July 2024 by Thea Bladt

Summary

Official apologies for human rights violations perpetrated by colonising countries often attract much media attention. However, the actual meaning of an official apology and the concrete consequences emanating from it are usually highly ambiguous, particularly as indigenous communities may well be advocating for some other type of remedy. Examples from Denmark, Norway and Sweden suggest that the path from apology to compensation is rarely straightforward, and the popular fixation on official apologies can even obfuscate important steps towards justice for indigenous communities such as the Inuit and the Sámi.

In an episode of the Danish drama series *Borgen* broadcast in 2010, a fictitious Danish prime minister receives the following piece of advice from her permanent secretary: “Sorry” is a word that we are historically on the fence about when it comes to Greenland. It assumes responsibility and often leads to unexpected expenses.’

Although it comes from a fictional series, this example illustrates a general tendency in former colonial powers to mix up the legal human rights terms “apology” and “compensation”, and to make assumptions about what an indigenous community is demanding rather than listening to its actual requests. The attention of journalists and politicians turns repeatedly to official apologies and whether or not they should be made, but in a legal sense apologies are highly ambiguous and indigenous communities often advocate for other types of remedy for human rights violations.

This highlights the importance of distinguishing between what certain groups demand and what politicians and other public figures provide in

response. On the one hand, the words “apology” and “compensation” appear to be linked, since apologies can spur legal compensation cases, but, on the other hand, politicians might view an apology as a way of bringing calls for compensation to an end. So, what is the difference between these various approaches? And how have the Scandinavian countries and the indigenous peoples connected to them navigated between these two means of addressing human rights violations in recent history?

Indigenous peoples and Scandinavia

All three Scandinavian countries have connections to indigenous peoples. The Sápmi territory of the Sámi spans across Norway and Sweden, amongst other countries, and with Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) being part of *Rigsfællesskabet* (the Danish Realm), the Inuit still share a connection with Denmark. The United Nations has declared the Sámi and Inuit to be indigenous peoples, which grants them certain internationally recognised rights in addition to the general rights stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948. The 2006 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples specifies the human and legal rights of peoples such as the Sámi and Inuit, and provides international standards for how these should be upheld and redressed if breached.

A word on language: Kalaallisut is the only official indigenous language in Greenland, although there are several indigenous languages spoken (in addition to Danish). There is a difference between referring to a country by a name given by the coloniser (Greenland is a direct translation of the Danish “Grønland”) and the name used by the indigenous population, Kalaallit Nunaat (the Kalaallisut term when referring to Greenland). I have chosen to use the latter and also the Sámi term Sápmi for the territory inhabited by them, instead of Lapland.

An official apology is not always connected to compensation

Although it frequently draws headlines in discussions connected to slavery and colonialism, an official apology is actually a subcategory of the human rights legal term “satisfaction”. Historical research into human rights breaches and their public commemoration has shown that an official apology is most effective in combination with other types of satisfaction. An apology is therefore rarely the goal in itself. Additionally, it is difficult to produce an international definition of an official apology, as language variations of the word “apology” skew its meaning. However, when an official figure, usually the head of state or monarch, gives an apology it can be interpreted as leverage in compensation cases, even though the apology does not necessitate

compensation. Thus, a legal procedure cannot be carried out in order to obtain an apology, but the apology may generate awareness and can be included as evidence in court.

In English, an apology is usually more official than saying “I am sorry”. An apology can be given by a person who has not perpetrated the action for which they are apologising for, and it can constitute a human rights satisfaction. Giving an official apology in Danish and Norwegian (*undskyldning* and *unnskyldning*, respectively) can be semantically tricky, as the word apology in both languages contains the term *skyld*, which means guilt. Thus, an official apology given by an authority seeking not to assume responsibility might indicate otherwise. Swedish does not have this challenge as the terms *ursäkt* (apology) and *förlåt* (sorry) are more akin to the meaning of the words in English.

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples does not mention any right to an official apology, likely because of the lack of a universal definition as mentioned above, but Indigenous peoples’ right to compensation is fleshed out in the declaration. In contrast to the legally ambiguous apology, compensation cases can be carried out in the courts. The declaration very straightforwardly states that: “compensation shall take the form of lands, territories and resources equal in quality, size and legal status [to what has previously been taken from the indigenous population] or of monetary compensation”. The amount of money or territory to be given to the indigenous group seeking compensation is of course still up for debate, but this definition gives indigenous peoples a legal claim to bring compensation cases against former colonisers and other countries or institutions they believe have wronged them. Monetary compensation can be either individual (a sum given to each of the people wronged) or collective (a larger sum meant to benefit the community as a whole).

Scandinavian examples of apologies and compensation

The following sections provide an example from each Scandinavian country of the intersection between apologies and compensation. The overview shows that apologies do not always lead to compensation and are usually far from being the grand gestures so often presented by the media. Importantly, it also shows that indigenous peoples seeking compensation do not always obtain what they wish.

Norway: According to the Political Apologies Database, the apology in 1997 given by the Norwegian King Harald V for injustices committed against the Sámi was the first official apology given by a public figure of authority in any of the Scandinavian countries. The apology referred to the Norwegiani-

sation (*fornorsking*) of the Sámi in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, during which Sámi culture and language was systematically suppressed through official policy. In his new year's speech on 1 January 2000, the Norwegian prime minister announced the government's intention to establish a fund for the Sámi population of Norway as collective compensation for the damages caused to their community by the Norwegianisation policy. The fund proposal won majority support in the Norwegian parliament, or Stortinget, in June 2000. The fund was designed to support community-enhancing projects and would be managed by Sametinget, the Sámi parliament of Norway. This example shows the perhaps often politically feared route from apology to compensation, but, then again, not entirely, since the compensation was in this case not the result of a legal battle but rather an attempt to follow up on an apology with concrete political action.

Denmark: In 1953, the Danish government forced a hasty relocation of the Inuit population of Uummannaq (Thule in Danish) in Kalaallit Nunaat to make room for a US air base. The relocated population of Uummannaq attempted a compensation case twice, but partial compensation was not granted until a Danish high court case that took place from 1996 to 1999. During this case, the group put forward a claim for territorial, individual and collective compensation, but only achieved minor collective compensation. The end of the court case prompted an official apology from the Danish prime minister, which was phrased as an appeal to focus on future collaboration within *Rigsfællesskabet*. This example illustrates quite clearly how apologies are occasionally neither the original goal nor an acceptable outcome to indigenous people because the the relocated population of Uummannaq appealed the high court's decision to the supreme court, which denied the appeal in 2003. Representatives of the Uummannaq population further appealed the decision to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), claiming that the forced relocation was a breach of the International Labour Organisation's *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention* (this case was carried out before the 2007 *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*). This claim was denied by the ECHR in 2006. So, although the prime minister's apology was included in the case files made available to the ECHR, it did not have sufficient legal weight to change the decision made by the court.

Sweden: The Swedish state has not given the Sámi community of Sweden an official apology, but the Church of Sweden has apologised twice – in 2021 on solely Swedish territory and in 2022 in the Swedish part of Sápmi. It is noteworthy that the first apology was not accepted by the Sámi community, and they only accepted the 2022 apology when it was supplemented by an

action plan for how to further amend past wrongs carried out by the Church of Sweden to the Sámi community. From a legal point of view, the action plan appears far more intriguing than the apology itself. It declares the Church's official support of Sámi rights to forestry and land management, thus acknowledging their indigenous right to historical territories, a right also emphasised in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This right was certainly not a given at the time as only two years previously one Sámi community had brought an unsuccessful case against the Swedish state to establish hunting and fishing rights within its territory. In this example, declarations of support for an indigenous group's right to its territory may have a greater legal and political impact than an apology, and apologies are not always accepted as solutions to disputes.

Apology as only one element of a broader process

In short, instead of focusing on official apologies as solutions to improving relationships between indigenous peoples and the Scandinavian countries, it makes more sense to view an apology as one element of a broader process of remedying human rights violations. Apologies may generate attention and even occasionally lead to compensation, but other gestures or political decisions are more likely to ease these tensions than an apology.

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Why did the Nordic Countries React Differently to the Covid-19 Crisis?

6 April 2020 by Johan Strang

Summary

Given the striking similarity of the Nordic societies, it was interesting how differently some of them reacted to the Covid-19 crisis in the spring of 2020. Denmark and Norway were quick to implement a work and school lockdown and close their borders, whereas Sweden took a comparatively lax approach to enforcing social distancing through legal measures. The diverse reactions disclosed the different ways each country was run, particularly with respect to the interplay between differing governing bodies, as well as their relationships with citizens. These differences were often rooted in historical traditions and experiences.

Different ways of organising governing bodies

One of the most fundamental reasons for the dissimilar reactions to the Covid-19 crisis in the Nordic countries was the differing administrative traditions in east and west Norden. Whereas Finland and Sweden share a history of comparatively small ministries and autonomous administrative authorities, in Norway and Denmark politicians were more directly in charge of administration. Thus, in Denmark and Norway it was easier to react quickly to the Covid-19 crisis with political decisions – and even to overrule administrative bodies and their expertise when it was considered politically necessary. The Danish government swiftly imposed restrictions and closed its borders even though the epidemiologists at the Danish Health Authority (*Sundhedstilsættelsen*) said it was unnecessary.

In Sweden, the state epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell, was more often on television than the prime minister and he was widely considered to be the “captain” who would guide Sweden through the storm. In Norway and Denmark, the prime ministers were both clearly front figures. In Finland, Prime Minister Sanna Marin was also a prominent figure, but she constantly

emphasised that she followed the recommendations of THL (*Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos*, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare).

The fact that Finland acted differently from Sweden despite having the same management tradition may have been the result of Finnish historical experiences, not least the Second World War. There has been a greater preparedness to act decisively and collectively in response to abrupt crises in Finland. The lesson from the war was that all would be well if everyone followed the orders of the state, but there was also an expectation that the government would be prepared to act quickly and vigorously. Finland was also better equipped than the other Nordic countries with respect to emergency stocks, something which had long been of little concern to the other Nordic countries. In Norway and Denmark, the war experience emphasised rather the importance of individual responsibility, while Sweden alone could perhaps be said to lack a comparable crisis experience.

Explaining Swedish exceptionalism

Sweden was the only Nordic country, and one of the few countries in Europe, that did not close its primary schools and failed to introduce rigorous, legally enforced social distancing measures. Explanations for this could include the following:

Unquestioning self-confidence: It takes a lot of self-confidence to act differently than almost every other country, as Sweden did to a greater extent than the other Nordic countries. The other Nordic countries were more heavily characterised by a small state attitude, namely that it was important to follow others. Identifying and explaining where this Swedish self-confidence comes from is one of the most difficult and exciting questions for philosophers and cultural historians interested in the Nordic countries. My own theory is that it was a question of temporality. Sometime during the twentieth century, the heyday of the Swedish model, an idea emerged that Sweden was one of the most modern countries in the world, and thus “ahead” of other countries. For a society like Sweden at the forefront of human development, there was no point in making comparisons with other less advanced societies. Instead, there was a willingness and a tradition for solving every question independently.

Central role of the economy: Economic aspects were much more central to the Swedish discussion on Covid-19 and came at a much earlier stage than in the other Nordic countries. This was most likely because Sweden in many respects was more neoliberal and driven by financial concerns. At the same time, however, economists have historically had a more central place in the debate in Sweden than in the other Nordic countries. The Swedish welfare

state or *folkhem* (the “people’s home”) was in many respects primarily an economic project. Its key architects were economists like Gunnar Myrdal, Ernst Wigforss, Bertil Ohlin, Gösta Rehn and Rudolf Meidner, and the focal point of knowhow in Sweden still tends to be people from the field of economics. As Henrik Stenius, the founder of the Centre for Nordic Studies at Helsinki University, has pointed out, the central expertise in crisis situations was that of economists in Sweden, historians and philosophers in Finland, lawyers and historians in Norway, and political scientists in Denmark. This is not to say that the Swedes prioritised the economy over health and human life, or that they were making callous cost-benefit analyses. Rather, there is a strong tradition in Sweden of thinking that a functioning economy is a prerequisite for people’s health and well-being. The security of the *folkhem* could only be achieved through a strengthened economy and, conversely, the cruel social and psychological consequences of the 1990s’ recession in Sweden and Finland were still fresh in people’s memories during the covid crisis, particularly in Finland.

Swedes do what they are told: In the other Nordic countries – perhaps especially in Denmark – Sweden has had a reputation for being a paternalistic, prohibitive society, which did not appear to match the liberal attitude demonstrated during the corona crisis. How can we make sense of this? If one looks more closely, it was arguably not so much prohibitions *per se* that the Danes were making fun of, but how obediently the Swedes followed different recommendations. If Danish anecdotes are to be believed, when the Swedish public health authority (*Folkhälsomyndigheten*) recommended eating five slices of bread per day, then Swedes ate five slices of bread per day. The stereotype is more that the Swedes naively trust that the state knows what is best for them. This was precisely the same logic that pervaded Sweden’s handling of the Covid-19 crisis. The Swedish authorities trusted that Swedes in general would follow the recommendations of the state epidemiologist to wash their hands and keep away from each other; there was no need to enforce social distancing measures legally. That said, in a broader comparative perspective, trust in authorities is high throughout the Nordic region (including Denmark), so there are certainly limitations to this explanation of Swedish exceptionality.

Democracy plays out differently

Individual rights and other constitutional aspects of the measures introduced during the pandemic were much more central to the public debate in Finland and particularly Norway, compared with Denmark and Sweden. This might have been because Finland and Norway were younger nations where

constitutional concerns were more central to the debate than in Denmark and Sweden. For historical reasons, the constitution has had a special role in both Finland and Norway. In Finland, the old Swedish laws were of particular importance during the Russian period (1809–1917) and there were several democratic crises during the twentieth century which emphasised the need for the constitutional protection of democracy. In Norway, the Eidsvoll constitution of 1814 is important in the national narrative, and leading politicians during the nineteenth century were often lawyers. Norway still has the most lawyers per capita among the Nordic countries.

In Denmark and Sweden, on the other hand, the primacy of politics over law was emphasised. When the Swedish government proposed a bill in early April 2020 that would give it additional powers to tackle the Covid-19 crisis, the main talking point was not the possible consequences for individual rights, but the fact that the bill would enable the government to sidestep the Swedish parliament, or Riksdagen. Historically, the primacy of politics over law, theorised by the so-called Scandinavian legal realists, was part of the legal philosophy behind these welfare societies. The core principle was that the law should not be able to prevent progressive reforms. Instead, the law was seen as a tool in the hands of legislators. This way of thinking required an historically conditioned confidence in the strength of democracy and its ability to resist forces that wished to overthrow it from within. So, while Denmark and Sweden might be characterised by what could be termed a democratic self-confidence (or, alternatively, naivety), Norway and Finland have been more concerned with the fragility of democracy at times of crises.

Domestic support for policies

An interesting final observation concerns how strong the support was for each country's approach as the correct one. In Sweden, people with an alternate view to the approach taken were scolded as “amateur epidemiologists”, and in Finland even drastic measures, like isolating the whole province of Uusimaa, were implemented without much opposition or debate. In fact, support for the Nordic governments was generally quite stable across the region throughout the crisis, and newspapers tended to inflate news that reinforced the feeling that “our” own country was on the right track.

The longer the crisis lasted, however, the more room there appeared to be for critical debate. This applied to all of the Nordic countries, but perhaps especially to Sweden, something which can be attributed to Sweden's approach being more controversial, or perhaps because Sweden was a bigger country with more room for dissenting opinions – its well-known conformity notwithstanding. References to other Nordic countries formed a central part

of the debates which emerged and, in this sense, it is interesting that the crisis to a large extent revived intra-Nordic comparison as a national political praxis across the region. In times of crisis, the Nordic countries might not have acted similarly, but they remained eager to learn from each other in order to be better prepared the next time.

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MOVEMENTS

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A Brief History of Sámi Literature

1 October 2019 by Lill Tove Frederiksen

Summary

Literature has been crucial to the civil movements of the Sámi people and their language since at least 1900. Books written by the Sámi have helped to give them an independent voice and an impetus for claiming their social, cultural and political rights as an Indigenous people. Although writing in the Sámi language has roots in the seventeenth century, it was not until the early twentieth century that the first books written by Sámi authors appeared. The great diversity in artistic works produced by Sámi authors since then reflects important aspects of the Sámi way of living.

The Sámi are an Indigenous people who inhabit the Sápmi region in northern Europe, an area which extends across Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. The Sámi population is estimated to be around 50,000, although obtaining an exact population figure is difficult. Sámi is a part of the Finno-Ugric language group and extends across and beyond the national borders of these four countries, and there are in total ten Sámi languages.

Sámi as an early written language

Sámi was first used as a written language in Swedish southern Sápmi in the seventeenth century, by pastors and missionaries who wrote about the Sámi and translated religious texts into Sámi. The development of Sámi literature and the written language was predominantly driven by the political interests of those in power at the time. In 1673, the book *Lapponia* was published, edited by the German professor Johannes Schefferus, at the behest of the Swedes who wanted to refute the rumour that Sweden had received help from Sámi shamans to win a number of crucial battles in the Thirty Years' War, which had ended in 1648. The book's aim was to achieve this by depicting the

Sámi as ordinary people. It was a compilation of material collected by pastors and their assistants from all around Sápmi and included the two love poems “Guldnasaš” and “Moarsi fávrrot” written by the Sámi student pastor Olaus Sirma. These poems are the first fictional texts published in Sámi. The book was translated into German, English, French and Dutch, meaning that it reached a large European audience. The poems are said to have inspired Goethe to write “Nähe des Geliebten”.

In the 1800s, pastors working in Sámi areas wrote down epic yoik lyrics on topics such as Sápmi’s first inhabitants and resistance to colonisation. For instance, in the middle of the 1880s, Sámi pastor Anders Fjellner wrote down a fable about the origin of the people. According to the fable, the Sámi are children of the son of the sun, who travelled to the land of the giants to woo and marry the daughter of a giant. After his death, their three sons became stars in the constellation of Orion’s Belt.

From the mid-nineteenth century the development of the Sámi written language was constrained. Under the rising influence of Social Darwinism the authorities began to place greater emphasis on the assimilation of the Sámi population. In Norway, assimilation was promoted by a policy of Norwegianisation, including a resolution in 1898 prohibiting the use of the Sámi language in the teaching of Sámi school children.

Sámi literary mobilisation in the early twentieth century

A Sámi political movement, which included prominent activists, arose at the beginning of the twentieth century, as the national romantic period in Norway and Finland came to an end. Political mobilisation began in the southernmost areas on the Swedish side of Sápmi, where Elsa Laula (1877–1931) was perhaps the most prominent Sámi politician in this period. In 1904 she wrote the pamphlet *Inför Lif eller Död? Sanningsord i de Lappska förhållandena* (Life or death? The honest truth concerning the Lappish conditions) and so became one of the first Sámi to have a written work published, albeit in the Swedish language. Elsa Laula (later Elsa Laula Renberg) sought to make the Swedish authorities aware of the difficult conditions under which the Sámi people lived. She was a key figure in the ethno-political movement at the time and was one of the organisers behind the first Sámi national congress held in Trondheim on 6 February 1917. This date remains the national day of the Sámi people, celebrated across the whole of Sápmi.

Johan Turi (1854–1936) was a Sámi engaged in reindeer husbandry who also lived on the Swedish side of Sápmi. In 1910 he published the book *Muittalus sámiiid birra* (An account of the Sámi), the first book published in Sámi entirely written by a member of the Sámi people. In publishing the

book, Johan Turi wanted to inform the authorities about the Sámi people and their culture. In his own words:

I have been thinking that it would be best if there were a book in which everything was written about Sámi life and conditions, so that people wouldn't have to ask how Sámi conditions are, and so that people wouldn't misconstrue things, particularly those who want to lie about Sámi and claim that only the Sámi are at fault when disputes arise between settlers and Sámi in Norway and Sweden. (p. 11)

An Account of the Sámi (first published in English in 2012) has been translated into 11 languages, more languages than any other Sámi book.

Bæivve-Algo (Daybreak) was the first novel written in Sámi by a Sámi and was published in 1912. It was a short socially critical novel by Anders Larsen (1870–1949) from Nord-Troms in Norway. He was a teacher and editor who was also responsible for publishing the Sámi language newspaper *Sagai Muittalægje* from 1904 to 1911. His editorial support not only directly contributed to Isak Saba becoming the first Sámi to be elected to the Norwegian Parliament on behalf of the Labour Party (*Arbeiderpartiet*) for two parliamentary periods from 1906 to 1912, but also to the emergence of the Sámi people's national anthem, "Sámi soga lávlla". Isak Saba wrote and first published the text as a poem in *Sagai Muittalægje* in 1906. The first collection of poems published in Sámi was *Muohtačalmmit* (Snowflakes), written by Pedar Jalvi from the Ohcejohka area in northern Finland.

These authors are just some of the pioneers of Sámi literature. Nevertheless, only a few Sámi books were published between 1914 and 1970.

Ethnopolitical revival since the 1970s

In the 1970s a new Sámi movement emerged in the context of global protest movements, as minorities and Indigenous peoples increasingly demanded their political, cultural and economic rights. The first seminar in Sámi literature was held in the small settlement of Sirbmá in Finnmark in 1972. Its participants agreed that the Sámi would have to start writing about themselves to challenge the prevailing situation where all descriptions of the Sámi were written by non-Sámi. A language cannot live merely through the native speakers of other languages. The acronym "ČSV" was launched as a Sámi reference for the first time at the seminar. ČSV stands for "Show Sámi spirit!" in Sámi and was used by what was to be called the ČSV Movement. The meeting also resulted in the publication of a book series called *Čállagat* (Written Works), in which many Sámi authors published their first texts. The initial Sámi publishing houses were also established during this period, which led to more publications in Sámi.

A unique aspect of the 1970s was that many women of different generations began to write books. During this period Sámi women were given a greater opportunity to receive education beyond primary and secondary school. This proved to be valuable as a group of women, who had not necessarily been taught to write in Sámi at school or elsewhere, began to publish in Sámi having attended writing courses. One of them, Kirsti Paltto (born 1947) from Ohcejohka in northern Finland, was the first Sámi woman to publish a book in her native tongue. *Soagŋu* (Courting) came out in 1971 and is a collection of short stories. The first Sámi children's book was written by Marry A. Somby (born 1953) who was from Sirbmá on the Norwegian side of Tanadalen. The book was published in 1976 with the title *Ámmul ja alit oarbmaelle*. It was translated into Norwegian the following year with the title *Ammul og den blå kusinen* (Ammul and the blue cousin).

The most well-known Sámi author is Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (1943–2001) from Eanodat in Finland. He was a multi-talented artist, lyric poet and composer. Valkeapää was awarded the Nordic Council Literature Prize for the book *Solen, min far* (1990) (*The Sun, My Father*, 1997), which had been translated into Norwegian from the Sámi original, *Beaivi áhčážan*. The book was first published in 1988 and contained poems and a series of historical photographs of Sámi from throughout Sápmi. Valkeapää and many other Sámi authors make use of diverse forms of artistic expression as inspiration for producing literature. Other authors from this generation are Rauni Magga Lukkari, Jovvna-Ánde Vest and Synnøve Persen. Some of Lukkari's poems, as well as poems by the poets Karen Anna Buljo and Risten Sokki, have been set to music and sung by the famous Sámi artist Mari Boine, thus reaching an even larger audience.

The authors born in the 1960s and later are part of a generation that does not bear the burdens of previous generations, having benefitted from the socio-political movement which began in the early 1900s. They are also part of a generation where many had the opportunity to learn to read and write in Sámi at a young age. Many of the generation who had not learnt Sámi as children also wanted to learn it. Much of this progress has been due to new school legislation, language teaching in schools, a global consciousness among Indigenous peoples and the Sámi political movement. Some of the writers representing this generation are Inger Mari Aikio-Arianaick (born 1961), Siri Broch Johansen (born 1967), Sigbjørn Skåden (born 1976), Ann Helen Laestadius (born 1971), Máret Anne Sara (born 1983) and Niillas Holmberg (born 1990).

The struggle for language

The struggle for the Sámi language is important for many of the authors. Unlike many Indigenous peoples around the world, most of the Sámi authors write in their mother tongue. The Sámi language is seen as a crucial bearer of tradition and knowledge and is also important within research on Sámi literature. Language is in many ways a source of power and identity and can, according to the lyric poet Synnøve Persen, be used by the author as a means of reaching the innermost place in the reader. One major inspiration for the writers who use Sámi is the ability to express themselves in their own language, in relation to their own culture and to tell their own stories. This not only creates an important feeling of being Sámi, but also a collective feeling of belonging, something which has been a key aspect in the blossoming of Sámi literature. The great diversity in the artistic expressions among the authors is also an important part of the Sámi way of living, since using and developing different skills is part of the Sámi way of coping and becoming a harmonious person.

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Disability Policies and Movements in the Nordic Countries since 1945

22 January 2021 by Anna Derksen

Summary

The situation of people with disabilities in the Nordics has changed dramatically over the last century. Disability was initially regarded as an issue for national welfare services, characterised by medical diagnostics, mass institutions and exclusion from education and employment. Following the socio-economic transformations after the Second World War, this marginalisation was no longer deemed acceptable and Nordic disability rights activism grew, peaking in the 1970s and 1980s. Protests and awareness campaigns led to a new rights-based understanding of disability as well as legal reforms. While the movement is somewhat fragmented today, activists still play an important role in policy-making and monitoring.

Early developments: From charity to state welfare

Over the past century the situation of people with disabilities in the Nordic countries has changed profoundly, not least thanks to the efforts of disability rights movements that have emerged during the post-war period. Disability associations existed in the early nineteenth century, but the care of their members was largely the responsibility of the family, municipal poor relief and charities. These were complemented with special institutions like the Manilla School for the Deaf-Mute and Blind in Sweden (1817), Denmark's first institution for mentally and intellectually disabled children *Gamle Bakkehuset* (1855), and the Christiania Blind Institute in Oslo (1861). Together, these organisations created and perpetuated a system of care that segregated people with disabilities from the majority population and distinguished between different needs or disabilities until well into the twentieth century.

This began to change in the 1940s and 1950s as modern welfare policies were implemented and people with disabilities became part of broader public social security. Nevertheless, the traditional system of state-run institutions

was maintained and further expanded, creating an ever-widening gap between disabled people and the general population. In addition to their spatial isolation, special institutions for people with physical and sensory disabilities frequently lacked suitable teaching material or room for leisure activities, and training in outdated crafts like basket-weaving offered hardly any prospects on the job market. People with intellectual disabilities were furthermore subjected to eugenics, often resulting in their being housed in disability institutions (sometimes for life) and medical interventions such as sterilisation – legally practised until well into the 1970s. This understanding of disability as primarily a medical problem was also evident in the regulation of disability pensions, which were usually tied to medical and care services, and did little to stimulate qualified training, regular employment or participation in community life.

Parents' associations and disability during the 1950s and 1960s

One of the first groups that objected to the often-dire conditions in special institutions was parent associations. Advocating on behalf of their intellectually disabled children, their demands included smaller housing units and more provision for personalised care, leisure and education. Even though the influence of parent associations differed across the Nordic countries, over time they succeeded in establishing lasting networks, as well as increasing the pressure for political and administrative reforms through public awareness. Parent associations in Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Iceland were all established in the 1950s, for example, the organisation now called the Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (*Kehitysvamma-liitto*) or the Benefit Society for the Mentally Disabled (*ÁS Styrktarfélag*) in Iceland. In the mid-1960s Norwegian journalist and filmmaker Arne Skouen, father of an autistic daughter, co-founded the advocacy group Justice for the Handicapped (*Rettferd for de handicappede*) and the Norwegian Association for the Mentally Disabled (*Norsk Forbund for Psykisk Utviklingshemmede*, NFPU).

The 1950s and 1960s also saw important legislative changes. A start was made in 1959 when Niels Erik Bank-Mikkelsen from the so-called Danish Service for the Mentally Retarded (*Statens åndssvageforsorg*) drafted the Mental Retardation Act (*Lov nr. 192 af 3. juni 1959 om forsorg for åndssvage og andre særligt svagtbegavede*), in which he called for the right of people with disabilities to have living conditions and daily routines as “normal” as possible. The vocabulary we use to talk about people with disabilities is a sensitive issue that reveals a lot about past and contemporary perspectives on disability. Terms that we today perceive as highly degrading and stigmatising

were previously accepted categories, often used to distinguish between different impairments and their respective treatments in medicine and social welfare.

Smaller group accommodation, education and vocational training were introduced in Denmark by the Act, as well as leisure activities and psychological counselling services. In 1967, Sweden and Norway adopted similar laws. However, these were primarily administrative reforms, as the comprehensive decentralisation – and eventual closure – of state institutions did not take place until years later. A curious exception to the “normalisation” of disability care was Finland, where the 1958 Rehabilitation Act stipulated that accommodation in mass institutions was a central pillar of disability welfare. This Act, in stark contrast to Finland’s pioneering role in removing voting restrictions for persons with intellectual disabilities in 1972, was repealed in 1977. In Sweden, such restrictions were abolished in 1989. In the other Nordic countries, discussions about full voting rights for persons under legal guardianship are still ongoing.

Care scandals and the role of investigative media

Yet another element of change was critical media coverage. In 1959 a radio report about *Eugeniahemmet*, a Stockholm-based institution for young people with physical disabilities, revealed a strict regime of discipline and punishments even for minor misdeeds. The report sparked a debate about what many Swedes felt was a gross violation of core societal values, and institutions for the disabled as well as the people working there became exposed to a critical public with little tolerance for such conditions. A similar scandal was uncovered by a Norwegian newspaper in 1974. The so-called “Gro investigation” reported coercive measures and abuse in the Central Institution for the Mentally Retarded in Klæbu near Trondheim. After a commission had confirmed serious irregularities, the Norwegian government introduced legislative rights for the residents of special institutions and improved control mechanisms.

1960s and 1970s: Disabled activists speak up

In the 1960s and 1970s, disability rights activists – in the Nordics, but also internationally – came together in a new social movement. Using disability as a marker for persistent shortcomings in the Nordic welfare societies, people with different disabilities such as visual, hearing or mobility impairments consolidated their demands for reforms. Within these discussions, a new understanding of disability as a human rights issue emerged, shaped by social, political and environmental factors and in opposition to the existing

medical paradigm. Activist Vilhelm Ekensteen's book *På folkhemmets bakgård* (In the Backyard of the People's Home) from 1968 and the Swedish group *Anti-Handikapp* demanded the breakdown of societal and attitudinal barriers by adapting the existing welfare system to the needs of all citizens, a "society for all". In 1972 this idea was pursued further in the Swedish disability organisations' political programme of the same name and, four years later, also in a government report. Similar notions of disability also resonated in the other Nordic countries, for example the Finnish Threshold Association (*Kynnys*), founded by disabled university students in 1973.

The visibility of disability in the public arena should also be mentioned, which spanned newspaper articles, exhibitions, interviews on the radio and television, protest marches and demonstrations. In 1976 Swedish organisations of the blind and the deaf demonstrated in Stockholm, attracting about 8,000 participants. Two years later, a staggering 10,000 to 15,000 demonstrators gathered in Reykjavík for a so-called "Equality March". Gradually the activists' demands influenced new legislation that included welfare services, building regulations, technical and medical aid, public transportation and job counselling. Disability representatives also gained a political voice through seats on disability councils and committees.

1981: The International Year of Disabled Persons

The International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP), organised by the United Nations in 1981, added further momentum to the disability rights movements. Its slogan "full participation and equality" resonated well with the Nordic approach to disability and hopes were correspondingly high. Across the region as well as internationally, national IYDP committees organised a range of activities throughout the year:

- Swedish disability rights organisations continued their cooperation with politicians and authorities with a national disability survey, cultural events and other activities. However, this relationship was strained by threatening austerity measures culminating in a large demonstration of disability rights activists in Gothenburg with approximately 9,000 participants.
- When the Norwegian government hesitated to give disability a prominent political platform and tried to limit the IYDP to sports and leisure activities, disability organisations sought out new alliances with other civil society organisations and the general public.
- The IYDP in Denmark took a more radical turn as a new law on income-dependent disability assistance was seen as threatening

disabled people's self-determination. The disagreement concluded with a split between the national committee, headed by the Minister for Social Affairs, and an alternative committee established by the Danish Association of Disability Organisations (*De Samvirkende Invalideorganisationer*, DSI), which was very vocal and influential. There were also events in Greenland on setting up local disability care.

- In Finland, the year was dominated by the Veteran Association's focus on care and service provision on the one hand, and the more activist approach of the Threshold Association on the other. Four regional disability projects were conducted to do with education of Swedish-speaking Finns in Vaasa, social and health services in Oulu, employment and housing in Kuopio, and training opportunities in North Karelia.
- In Iceland, the impact of the 1978 "Equality March" still reverberated in 1981 when politicians, union leaders and disability rights activists organised a well-attended public meeting on equality and labour market integration. They also organised public events and discussions on legal reforms.

Although many disability activists afterwards voiced their disappointment that not more had been achieved, the year yielded positive results. Firstly, national action plans and policy guidelines ensured a continuing discussion about disability rights and their legal implementation. Secondly, self-advocacy organisations gained visibility and generated public interest in their concerns. And thirdly, disability was increasingly seen as a human rights concern that demanded attention and alliances across social, ideological and administrative borders.

Developments since 1980

The 1980s saw a number of legal reforms that further defined the rights of people with disabilities. Special institutions and public welfare services were devolved, while care services became more individualised. A landmark reform was the Swedish Act concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (*Lagen om stöd och service till vissa funktionshindrade*) in 1994, which introduced a personal budget for severely disabled persons and personal assistance for daily activities, housing and work. It has since inspired many other countries to enact similar laws. Other important innovations were the implementation of anti-discrimination laws

in the 1990s and the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities since 2006.

While the Nordic disability movements have been somewhat fragmented in the twenty-first century, disability organisations have continued to be sharp critics of more contemporary challenges, such as economic austerity measures and increasing marketisation of disability care. Equally, they continue to play an important role in policy-making and social debate as well as in the monitoring of disability legislation. The 2020s have seen a renewed debate on the social participation of people with disabilities and on the implementation of the UN Convention into national law, particularly regarding accessibility, voting rights and public support structures. Following the war against Ukraine and the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO, discussions have also included disability issues within security policies. Developments have included an amendment to Danish law in 2019 that allows persons declared legally incompetent to apply for partial guardianship to vote in parliamentary elections. In Norway, the 2023 parliamentary report “Human Rights for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities – It Is about Being Heard and Seen” aims at strengthening equality legislation.

Although the landscape of policy-making in the Nordic countries has changed considerably since 1945, it is clear that efforts of activists have made a vital contribution to putting the situation of people with disabilities and other marginalised groups on the political agenda as well as embedding disability in the public consciousness as a social and human rights issue, both nationally and internationally.

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The Emergence of Nordic Environmental Cooperation, 1967–1974

7 April 2021 by Melina Antonia Buns

Summary

The environment became part of the Nordic cooperation agenda in the late 1960s, not only because of the so-called “ecological turn”, but also due to key economic considerations. At a time of increasing Nordic and European integration, policy-makers were concerned that the introduction of environmentally friendly measures would be detrimental to the economy and impede the removal of trade barriers. Additionally, it made practical and financial sense to work together on scientific research and decision-making on environmental issues. In the 1970s, Nordic institutions took steps to formalise cooperation on the environment, including the first international treaty to implement the polluter-pays principle for transboundary pollution.

By the late 1960s, decades of growth during the “golden age” of the welfare state in the post-war era had improved living standards and helped build social security systems across the Nordic countries. Economic progress had changed consumer habits, single-use packaging began to reach modern supermarkets and the number of home appliances per household increased, as did private mobility. This led to people in the Nordic region coming face to face with pollution and litter more regularly, on trips to lakes and forests for example.

Influenced by emerging debates about pesticides in the US (sparked by the book *Silent Spring* by marine biologist Rachel Carson in 1962) and about mercury in Sweden, public concern for and interest in environmental issues began to grow both in and outside the Nordics. Within the Nordic region, ecology and neo-Malthusian ideas about overpopulation and finite resources were also promoted in publications by the Swedish diplomat Rolf Edberg and

scientist Hans Palmstierna. Environmental organisations and movements grew and were successful in engaging and mobilising parts of society in support of ecology, nature conservation and environmental protection. Likewise, international organisations placed the environment firmly on the agenda through, for example, conferences organised by UNESCO and the United Nations in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Despite this environmental awakening, rather than being a direct consequence of environmental disasters and growing international public unease, Nordic cooperation on the environment emerged largely as a consequence of societal and economic debates. As early as December 1966 the Nordic Council started planning for a conference on pollution to be held the following year – a process that took place in parallel with setting out an exclusively economic agenda for the annual Nordic Council session.

The 1967 Nordic Conference on Soil and Water Pollution – a watershed

Even though the Nordic Council (which was founded in 1952) had previously discussed issues such as nature protection and marine pollution caused by oil dumping, the Nordic Conference on Soil and Water Pollution was the first to seize on the topic of the environment from an ecological – although still very much anthropocentric – perspective. The conference was therefore the defining moment that kick-started Nordic environmental cooperation. Held in May 1967 on the island of Lidingö in the Stockholm archipelago, it gathered more than 170 representatives from agencies, ministries, governments, scientific research, industry, agriculture, and nature protection organisations to discuss two key issues: existing knowledge about chemicals, with a particular focus on their harmful impact on humans, and the economy and potential areas of cooperation on environmental pollution.

The emergence of the environment as a policy issue within Nordic cooperation took place in the context of an overriding debate that was concerned with increasing economic integration, international competition and the removal of trade barriers. Denmark, Norway, and Sweden had been among the founding members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1960 and there were on-going negotiations about whether a new organisation for the Nordic region should be set up. The idea of “Nordic Economic Cooperation” (*NORDiskt EKonomiskt samarbete* (NORDEK)) came to the fore after Charles de Gaulle’s second veto of the British European Economic Community (EEC) membership application in late 1967. In this context, the environment became a key consideration with respect to economic integration. Domestic environmental regulations and abatement policies were

seen as potential trade barriers that would cause difficulties within international economic competition, which – in turn – would negatively impact a country's economic growth and tax revenues. In other words, it would hit the income source on which the Nordic social security systems and welfare states were based.

This dual concern, for environmental pollution and economic growth, led to intensified cooperation in efforts to harmonise environmental legislation in the Nordics. At the same time, scientific research on the hazardous effects of chemicals had to be funded and existing environmental pollution needed to be combated. Nordic cooperation on these issues had obvious benefits; scientific cooperation increased efficiency and avoided duplication of research, while joint research secured a common standard of knowledge that would eventually define regulations and feed into the process of environmental policy-making.

At the 1967 Nordic conference and during the negotiations for NORDEK in the years that followed, international economic competition continued to be decisive, and likewise international cooperation was considered necessary for environmental progress. Since the issues concerning the Nordic region were similar to those being discussed in the on-going NORDEK negotiations, Nordic environmental cooperation seemed more realistic and easier to achieve than cooperation at the European level. This was particularly the case because the Nordics could build on experiences from previous and on-going cooperation on other policy areas.

Environmental policies: An opportunity for Nordic cooperation

When NORDEK plans failed in 1970, and Denmark and Norway applied for EEC membership, the environment was considered to be the policy issue that could fill the void left by failed economic cooperation. It could also reinforce Nordic cooperation by furthering national environmental policies through harmonised legislation and by strengthening Nordic cohesion at the international level through joint advancement of ideas and solutions.

After the conference in 1967, environmental cooperation in the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers became more institutionalised, and this process ran parallel to the reorganisation and institutionalisation of environmental issues at the national level. Initiated by a Nordic Council proposal on cooperation on pollution issues in 1967, politicians, officials and scientists entered into a discussion concerning the administrative, legislative, scientific and political aspects of environmental cooperation over the following two years.

In 1969, the Nordic Council's Social Policy Committee recommended strengthening scientific and administrative cooperation, as well as stimulating research and education on the environment, in order to provide a solid scientific basis for policy-making and law enforcement. Importantly, it also recommended setting up a cross-sectoral committee of officials to monitor this process. The initial concern that environmental abatement regulations and pollution control might cause national economic deficits unless they were harmonised across borders remained prominent during the discussions in the Nordic Council. Nonetheless, the foundation for Nordic environmental cooperation in the area had been laid, and this led to the shaping of two instruments that still underpin Nordic environmental cooperation today: the mandate of the Liaison Committee on Environmental Issues (*Kontaktorgan för miljövårdsfrågor*), and the setting of key commitments down in law, namely, in the Helsinki Treaty.

The Liaison Committee on Environmental Issues

The *Kontaktorgan* was created in 1970 and was composed of three representatives per country from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, one representing the responsible ministry, one the central authority responsible for practical implementation, and one representing scientific research. Although Iceland, too, was granted representation, it stayed in the background during the first decades of Nordic environmental cooperation. The committee's mandate included the general monitoring and promotion of environmental activities including implementing Nordic Council recommendations, managing knowledge exchange and coordinating research projects and activities – all in order to pool financial and scientific resources and avoid duplication of research.

In order to fulfil this mandate, the *Kontaktorgan* was authorised to call on experts and representatives of interest organisations, as well as to propose the creation of ad hoc working groups. With the establishment of the *Kontaktorgan*, Nordic environmental cooperation saw both its institutional beginnings as well as the founding of an organisation which was both scientific and political; to all intents and purposes, it was the Nordic equivalent of a national environmental authority. The first Nordic Environmental Programme (agreed in 1972) addressed issues such as marine pollution of the Baltic Sea, the Öresund, Skagerrak and Kattegat; waste treatment; noise pollution; environmental education and research; measures to reduce sulphur dioxide emissions caused by vehicle exhaust; and nature protection and outdoor life. Throughout the following years, Nordic environmental cooperation would be defined by similar five-year action programmes. In 1973, the *Kontakt-*

organ became the Committee of Senior Officials for Environmental Issues (*Embedsmandskomite for miljøbeskyttelsesspørgsmål*) and came under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers, which was newly formed as an intergovernmental body in 1971. While this restructuring of Nordic cooperation established a parallel stream of political, bureaucratic and scientific cooperation, the new committee by and large continued the work of the *Kontaktorgan* in line with what was originally intended.

Formalising the environment as a key area of Nordic cooperation

Key environmental principles were set down in law in the 1970s. The Nordic Environmental Protection Convention (NEPC), which was signed in 1974, was the first international environmental treaty that implemented the polluter-pays principle for transboundary pollution. It also established a procedural system that was transferable to other forms of international cooperation. Amendments were correspondingly made to the Helsinki Treaty, which in 1962 had established the legal framework of institutionalised Nordic cooperation ten years after the Nordic Council had been founded. These amendments established environmental cooperation as an essential area of Nordic cooperation on a par with that of legal, cultural, social, economic, and transport and communications. The three new articles (31–33) were based on the principle of non-discrimination and aimed at inter-regional standardisation and harmonisation of norms, regulations and prohibitions. This was to be achieved by close transnational cooperation among the various responsible Nordic agencies and ministries. More specifically, this meant that the Nordic countries should:

- “in their national legislation and in the application thereof [...] to the greatest extent possible, place the environmental interest of the other High Contracting Parties on an equal footing with their own;”
- “seek to harmonise their environmental protection regulations so as to attain the greatest possible measure of agreement on standards and guidelines relating to pollution, the use of toxic substances that harm the environment, and other damaging effects on the environment;” and,
- “seek to co-ordinate matters relating to the allocation of nature reserves and recreational areas, and to protective initiatives and other measures for the conservation of flora and fauna.”

In contrast to the NEPC, the Helsinki Treaty built on established regional cooperation between the Nordic countries. The main intention with the revision was to explicitly strengthen Nordic environmental cooperation and

to establish a legal framework in which to define specific norms and guidelines on environmental pollution – which, in turn, was seen as an essential basis for the separate convention, the NEPC.

Since this revision of the Helsinki Treaty, the environment has grown to become one of the most prominent policy issues of Nordic cooperation. Today, the Nordic countries are generally considered to be “green” nations with progressive environmental and climate policies. Within international policy-making, the Nordic countries propose solutions to global challenges. They promote green growth and climate change strategies, are active in the fight against microplastic pollution, and look into the sustainable use of resources and nature protection. Yet, just as the initial emergence of environmental cooperation did not necessarily develop from purely ecological concerns but rather from a concern about economic integration and cost allocation, environmental policies today also serve economic interests to a very significant degree, most vividly exemplified in the term “green growth”.

This article is based on the author’s research conducted for the PhD dissertation “Green Internationalists: Nordic Environmental Cooperation, 1967–1988”, University of Oslo, 2021.

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The Scandinavian States and the Environment in International Politics, 1970–2000

14 October 2020 by Jonathan Pugh

Summary

Denmark, Norway and Sweden played an important role in shaping international environmental policy from 1970 to 2000, and they have been key norm entrepreneurs in a variety of international organisations. Following the environmental movement's development in the 1960s, Sweden had a pivotal role in launching the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment and all three states took on the issue of acid rain in the 1970s. The countries' diplomacy and expertise on the environment throughout the 1980s and 1990s included their efforts to fight climate change, Norway's high-profile position within the World Commission on Environment and Development, and, with respect to Denmark and Sweden, shaping the environmental policies of the European Union.

In the 1960s, increasing threats to the environment – as well as people's perception of it – was of growing domestic concern for the Scandinavian states. This was a time when the notion of environmentalism as an ideology grew in prominence. Also, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the emergence of modern environmental groups was paralleled by the development of the Scandinavian states' national environmental policies.

Acid rain required an international response

The most pressing environmental concern for the Scandinavian states in the 1960s and 1970s was the pollution of lakes in Norway and Sweden caused by acid rain, which was the result of air pollution that was drifting mainly from the industrial heartlands of the United Kingdom and West Germany.

Crucially, these were cross-border issues that required an international response. In 1967, Sweden argued that an international conference on the environment was needed. Its lobbying paid off when the United Nations General Assembly passed UN Resolution 2398 in 1968, which eventually led to the UN's first Conference on the Human Environment four years later. Sverker Åström, Sweden's Permanent Representative to the United Nations at that time, was considered crucial to Sweden's success in lobbying the UN. The conference took place in 1972 in Stockholm, where Sweden's Social Democratic Prime Minister Olof Palme argued during a speech at the Plenary Meeting that there were 'no persons or states' when it came to environmental issues, and declared that, for humankind, "Our future is common".

The Scandinavian states were the first to put into practice the most important recommendation of the conference. Principle 21 (of 26 in total) stated that, while countries have the right to exploit their own natural resources, they also have the "responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction". The Nordic Convention on the Protection of the Environment, which was introduced two years later, allowed for an individual who had suffered as a result of cross-border pollution to bring legal proceedings against the guilty party, even if that person resided in a different Nordic state. This was the first interstate environmental agreement of its kind.

Research has found that, throughout the 1970s, the Scandinavian states were diplomatically proactive in raising the profile of the acid rain problem and helped to turn it into a pressing international environmental issue. Examples include the Norwegian Environment Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, becoming active on the international scene, including chairing the first meeting of the OECD's Environment Committee in 1974. Additionally, the actions of the Scandinavian countries were crucial to the formation of the 1979 Geneva Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP). Nevertheless, the three states were forced to compromise by the large industrial-pollutant states. In fact, Brenton in his 1994 book on the development of environmentalism takes the view that it was not until the mid-1980s that the Geneva Convention had a noticeable effect. By then it had been proved that 5,000 lakes in Norway, as well as 2,500 lakes in Sweden, had been affected by acid rain. Indeed, Norway and Sweden continued to argue the case on the effects of air pollution bilaterally well into the 1980s on the global stage. As set out in Gro Harlem Brundtland's autobiography, for instance, this included lobbying countries like the United Kingdom, which were still refusing to accept responsibility for the issue.

The Brundtland Commission and sustainable development

The Brundtland Commission was arguably a high point in Scandinavian influence over international environmental policy. The World Commission on Environment and Development (WECD), formed in December 1983 following a UN General Assembly Resolution (38/161), came to be known as the Brundtland Commission after its chair, Gro Harlem Brundtland, who at the time was also serving as Norway's prime minister. All three Scandinavian states made financial contributions to the running of the Commission. As Chair, Brundtland was able to raise Norway's profile in international environmental issues and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs attempted to utilise her position to advance Norway's foreign policy; in every country she visited in her role as head of the Commission, Brundtland was in some sense also representing Norway. In 1988, after the Commission's report *Our Common Future* was released, Norway promptly held a meeting of the OECD to discuss its findings. The most important concept by far to come out of the report was the concept of sustainable development.

A new term at the time, sustainable development was coined to refer to the fact that economic development needs to be in line with prevailing environmental conditions and that, despite human needs being an essential right, no environmental degradation should occur as a result. Over the next few years, Brundtland and Norway were instrumental in promoting the Commission's recommendations on the international stage. For instance, in 1988, Brundtland, in conjunction with UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, hosted the heads of all the UN agencies at a meeting in Norway to discuss how to implement sustainable development. Then, in 1990, Norway also hosted a conference called "Action for a Common Future" in an attempt to further refine the concept of sustainable development ahead of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in 1992. All three Scandinavian states refined their development aid policies in the wake of the WECD report. Denmark produced its own action plan; Sweden merged environmental concerns into its development aid policies, while Norway launched the Norwegian campaign for environment and development.

Climate change and the European Union in the 1990s

The three Scandinavian states expressed concerns over the issue of climate change from at least the late 1980s. For example, Denmark's environment minister was seen as crucial in the setting up of the United Nations' Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at the Rio de Janeiro Conference in 1992. In 1989, Norway was the first nation to set emission

reduction targets and this determination to be a frontrunner in tackling climate change continued well into the early 1990s. However, Norway tried to offset its own domestic CO² emission targets against reductions achieved through its overseas development aid programmes; thus, passing the burden of tackling climate change onto developing countries.

Denmark and Sweden have both played prominent roles in promoting new environmental legislation in the European Union, which they joined respectively in 1973 and 1995. When the two nations have had the EU presidency, environmental issues have frequently been a priority, and Denmark has often been labelled as the “European Union’s greenest state”. Key actions that Denmark has taken include winning the right to have higher environmental standards than the rest of the European Economic Community in the 1980s, such as regulations for labelling chemicals, and demanding that the European Single Market should include an environmental chapter. In 1993, the Danish government used its presidency of the EU to support the total ban of toxic waste exports to the Global South by the OECD. In the 1990s the transfer of toxic waste from the Global North to the Global South became an issue. Denmark was instrumental in getting a new European law enacted that banned this export of hazardous waste, and did so largely by undermining the EU’s position with the support of various other actors, including states from the Global South as well as Greenpeace.

In the 1990s Sweden had an international reputation for its expertise and national legislation in environmental policy, and the country’s officials had arguably built up much more experience in issues around the environment than many other EU member states. Sweden, according to Aynsley Kellow and Anthony R. Zito, “sought to steer EU regulation by building up precedents in other international for a” (p. 56). This means that by promoting their favoured policies in non-legally binding international organisations like the OECD, it was easier for Sweden to build up support for these policies within the EU, which had more clout as they were legally binding.

Finally, according to British diplomat Tony Brenton, the Scandinavian states’ successful negotiating tactics on global environmental policies included setting international targets so high that, when it came to negotiations, their larger opponents would feel themselves pressured by their own individual domestic audiences into making concessions.

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Transnational Interactions among Feminist Activists in the Nordic Countries, 1970s–1990s

21 May 2019 by Hannah Kaarina Yoken

Summary

The Nordic countries are globally renowned as states that embrace gender equality. At the same time, the region has a rich history of feminist activism at the grassroots level. This history includes activism undertaken during feminism's "second wave", from the late 1960s to the 1990s. Throughout this period, women's movements in the Nordic countries learned from interactions with non-Nordic political and cultural forces, and were influenced by people, resources and literature from outside the region.

Feminist activism at the grassroots level

The Nordic countries are renowned for their track record regarding women's political participation and representation, and the region has positioned itself as a champion of gender-aware social provisions. Therefore, the welfare state and its benefits for women, such as parental leave and subsidised childcare, often take centre stage in our imaginations. What can go unnoticed and un-discussed, especially by commentators located outside the Nordic countries, is that the region has a rich history of overtly feminist activism at the grassroots level. From the late 1960s into the early 1990s, during the period known as "second wave" feminism, several new women's groups and organisations were established in the Nordic countries. Together, they formed the "new women's movement" (*den nya kvinnorörelsen* in Swedish, *den nye kvindebevægelsen* in Danish, *nýja kvennahreyfingin* in Icelandic, *den nye kvinnebevegelsen* in Norwegian and *uusi naisliike* in Finnish). Groups that belonged to the new women's movements in the Nordic countries included, but were not limited to:

- Sweden: *Grupp 8* (Group 8), *Arbetets Kvinnor* (Women of Labour) and *Kvinnoligan* (Women's League).
- Denmark: *Rødstrømpebevægelsen* (The Redstocking Movement) and *Kvindefronten* (Women's Front).
- Iceland: *Rauðsokkahreyfingin* (The Redstocking Movement).
- Norway: *Nyfeministene* (New Feminists), *Kvindefronten* (Women's Front) and *Brød og Roser* (Bread and Roses).
- Finland: *Marxist-Feministerna* (Marxist-Feminists), *Puna-akat/Rödkäringarna* (Red Hags) and *Naisten kulttuuriyhdistys* (Women's Cultural Association).

Groups like these were predominantly autonomous, meaning that they were not directly or officially part of political parties, trade unions, public institutions or other wider social movements. Individual groups and organisations were established and disbanded at different points in time, but the wave of feminist activism they created lasted into the mid-1990s.

Feminist activism in the Nordic countries varied over time and differed depending on whether it took place in the countryside or urban areas. These variances led to feminists organising in distinct ways in each of the five Nordic countries. For example, Swedish feminists targeted and worked with the state to a larger extent than their Danish counterparts. Unlike Swedish feminists, Danish activists kept official political institutions at a distance. In Finland, feminism as a distinct social movement materialised noticeably later than in the other Nordic countries. The Finnish movement also remained relatively small. In Iceland, consciousness-raising groups, or groups where women gathered together to talk about their lives and feminist outlooks, were never a significant part of feminist activism. There is not one social, political, cultural or historical model that would perfectly explain feminist activism across the Nordic countries from the late 1960s to the 1990s.

Key influences

Differences between feminist activism within the region were partially due to activists in each Nordic country engaging with a wide range of international influences. From reading foreign feminist magazines and translating books into the Nordic languages to attending international meetings at home and abroad, Nordic feminists actively engaged with material from elsewhere. There is a common misconception that Nordic feminism has been exceptional. As proof of this, references are made to the willingness of Nordic welfare states to incorporate woman-friendly measures, such as universal childcare, equal pay legislation and feminist foreign policy. However, femin-

ism in the Nordic region did not develop in isolation from European and North American influences and followed similar trajectories as feminist organising elsewhere. Outside influences and cross-cultural exchanges played a significant part in bringing feminist ideas and practices into the Nordic countries. Nordic feminists were inspired by events, initiatives and campaigns that took place in various locations, for example, the United States to the UK, Italy and the Netherlands.

The books produced by feminists within and outside the Nordic countries were an important source of inspiration for the new women's movement. During the 1970s, feminist activists, many of whom belonged to openly socialist-minded groups, read the works of early twentieth-century female Marxist thinkers such as Alexandra Kollontai, Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg. Nordic feminists also considered canonical socialist male thinkers and writers, such as Vladimir Lenin, Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, as significant. Their works were often cited in reading lists composed for feminist literature circles and consciousness-raising groups.

Nordic feminist activists read contemporary feminist texts, written in the 1970s and 1980s. They read books by feminist thinkers such as Kate Millett, Juliett Mitchell, Sheila Rowbotham, Shulamith Firestone and Germaine Greer, either in their original language of publication (often English) or as translations into the Nordic languages. For example, Kate Millett's foundational book *Sexual Politics*, originally published in English in 1970, was translated into Swedish, Norwegian and Danish the following year by mainstream publishers (rather than independent feminist publishing houses).

In addition to books, feminist activists across the Nordic region produced magazines and bulletins. These publications tended to include articles on various international topics. Magazines such as the Danish *Kvinder*, the Swedish *Kvinnobulletinen*, the Norwegian *Kvinnefront* and the Finnish *Aikanainen-Kvinnotid* exposed their readership to foreign influences by translating or paraphrasing articles that had been originally published in, for example, the West-German feminist magazine *Emma* or the British publication *Spare Rib*. The Nordic magazines often cited each other. Nordic feminist activists furthermore covered various transnational topics in these magazines. They wrote travel diaries, exchanged travel tips and more generally showed solidarity to fellow feminists and women living in both the Global North and the Global South as well as communist Eastern Europe.

Events and activities inspire new ideas and knowledge-sharing

From the 1970s to the 1990s, feminist activists from across the Nordic countries took part in events that brought together an international array of

participants within the region. Examples include annual feminist summer camps held on the Danish island of Femø from 1971 onwards. Initially organised by the Danish Redstockings, Femø summer camps brought together feminists from multiple countries, most significantly the Nordic region but also from other places, such as West Germany and the United States. Other events included:

- A meeting in Lund in February 1971, where feminist activists belonging to the Swedish *Grupp 8*, the Danish Redstockings and the British *Women's Liberation Movement* met for the first time.
- An international conference in Stockholm in the summer of 1971 organised by *Grupp 8*, which brought together women from the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Germany and Norway.
- Large feminist festivals held in Fælledparken in Copenhagen organised by the Danish Redstockings and later also *Kvindefronten*, from 1974 into the early 1980s.
- The mid-decade World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women and the accompanying forum for voluntary organisations were held in Copenhagen from 14 to 30 July 1980. The official UN conference and the surrounding activism brought together a global array of feminist activists and women, many of whom were from across the Nordic countries. Feminist activists reported back, for example, by writing articles for national feminist magazines and bulletins.
- In 1988 *Nordisk Forum*, organised in Oslo by the Nordic Council of Ministers, was attended by women from across the Nordic region. The second *Nordisk Forum* took place in Turku, Finland in 1994.

There are equally many examples of influential events outside the Nordic region. Numerous women from the three Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden) participated in the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women, held in Brussels, Belgium in March 1976. Icelandic feminists did not participate in person but submitted a written statement. The Scandinavian participants provided testimonies on, for example, abortion legislation in Norway, the legalisation of pornography in Denmark in 1969 and its effect on women, and women's experiences of sexual violence and rape in both Denmark and Norway.

Transnational interactions among feminists from the Nordic countries, as well as between Nordic activists and feminists further afield, often relied on personal connections, contacts and experiences abroad. Several women who

took part in the new women's movements in the Nordic countries had lived abroad or travelled extensively. When returning to their countries of origin, they brought back fresh ideas and practices.

Many of the concrete practices used by feminist activists in the Nordic countries originated abroad. For example, Feminist Radical Therapy (FRT), a form of collective therapy popular in Finland during the 1980s, was imported to Finland from Berkeley, California via the Netherlands. Feminist self-defence had a similar trajectory. It was brought to Denmark by American feminists and then made its way across the Nordic countries when feminist activists travelled and exchanged ideas and practices. Similarly, knowledge regarding menstrual extractions, the practice of inducing a period, was brought to Denmark by a member of the Danish Redstockings who had first learned of menstrual extractions from American feminists while living in California.

Global politics and Nordic feminist activism

Nordic feminist activists were affected by and discussed the global politics of the period. Topics included the dynamics of the Cold War: decolonisation and anti-imperialism, the threat of nuclear warfare, and the international competition between socialism and capitalist liberalism.

Nordic feminist activists often voiced their solidarity towards women living in the Global South. Feminist magazines published articles discussing problems faced by women in various locations around the world, from Chile to Vietnam, and from South Africa to Palestine. Nordic feminists also took part in wider demonstrations against conflicts like the Vietnam War and the Chilean *coup d'état* of 1973. Engaging with the new women's movement in Greenland, Danish feminist publications arguably showed a greater interest in indigenous rights than feminist publications in the other Nordic countries.

Nordic feminists wrote about and commented on the rights of immigrant women and the conditions under which they lived in the Nordic countries. This topic was of significance especially in Sweden and Denmark, where the number of "guest workers" had increased significantly during the 1960s and 1970s. Many of the families of these immigrants had followed them through family reunification, increasing the number of women from areas such as Eastern Europe and the Maghreb region, amongst others. Subjects included illiteracy and the importance of adequate language training.

Finally, the Nordic Women for Peace movement (*Kvinnor för fred, Kvinder for Fred, Kvinner for fred, Naiset rauhan puolesta*) was a truly transnational feminist project. It brought together women from across the Nordic region and beyond. The movement campaigned for nuclear disarmament

and pacifist approaches to global Cold War politics. The Nordic feminist peace movement organised three protest marches during the 1980s: in June 1981 from Copenhagen to Paris, in July 1982 from Stockholm to Minsk, and in August 1982 from Oslo to New York and onto Washington D.C. Nordic pacifist-feminists also took part and showed interest in peace camps abroad, such as Greenham Common in England and La Ragnatela in Comiso, Sicily.

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Populism and the Growth of the Radical Right in the Nordic Countries

12 May 2023 (updated 2025) by Anders Widfeldt

Summary

Radical parties on the political right have a long history in the Nordic countries and are significant in all of them, except Iceland. They are anti-establishment and anti-immigration, and often pro-welfare. Cas Mudde's term "Populist Radical Right" is helpful in understanding this movement as populist, nativist and authoritarian. Their electoral fortunes have fluctuated, but everything suggests that they will continue to play a part in the Nordic political systems.

The Nordic countries have a reputation as consensual and peaceful, with low levels of political conflict. It can be debated whether this picture has ever been justified, but in recent years it has become increasingly inaccurate. Nordic countries have suffered terrorist attacks (such as in Copenhagen in February 2015 and Stockholm in April 2017), and there are growing problems with gang violence and organised crime. The exact causes behind these and other social problems are complex, but the political debate has increasingly focused on the extent to which they can be linked to immigration. There has been immigration to the Nordic countries for centuries, but it accelerated from the 1980s, especially in Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Migration into Finland and especially Iceland has been lower and began to increase at a later time.

Populist Radical Right parties

The issue of immigration became a priority for a new kind of political party, which combined an anti-immigration agenda with strong rhetoric against the political establishment. Parties with such a message began to grow in con-

tinental Europe during the 1980s and 1990s, for example, in France (*Front National*, now called *Rassemblement National*), Austria (Freedom Party; *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*), Italy (*Lega Nord*, now called *Lega*) and Belgium (*Vlaams Blok*, now called *Vlaams Belang*). These, and other parties which followed later, were initially small and isolated but gradually increased their support. In many cases they have also gained political legitimacy. Parties such as *Lega/Lega Nord* and the Austrian Freedom Party have participated in several coalition governments.

What to call these parties has been subject to an intense debate. There is a wide variety of suggestions, such as far right, extreme right, populist right and radical right. One proposal, put forward by the US-based Dutch scholar Cas Mudde has become increasingly influential. His suggestion is to call the parties Populist Radical Right (PRR). They are populist because they see themselves as representing the interests of the people against the political elite. They are radical because they seek to achieve profound changes in society and the political system. They are not extreme, however, because they operate within the existing democratic framework, and do not seek to take power via violent means. They are to the right because they believe that inequalities between people are natural and should not be reduced by political means.

Populist radical right parties share a common ideological core with three ingredients:

1. Populism: The belief that society is divided into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: the corrupt political establishment and the “pure” people.
2. Nativism: The belief that a country should be inhabited by native people, and that non-native people and ideas are threats.
3. Authoritarianism: The belief in a strictly ordered society, where breaches against authority are to be punished.

Populist Radical Right parties have a long history in the Nordic countries, although the details vary from country to country.

Denmark and Norway

Nordic anti-establishment populism is often regarded as having started in Denmark and Norway in the early 1970s. Initially the main focus of these new parties was opposition to high taxation and bureaucracy, but immigration became a key part of their agenda from the mid-1980s.

In Denmark in early 2025 there were two parties of significance that can be classified as Populist Radical Right. The oldest was the Danish People’s

Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*), which was formed in 1995 after a split from the Danish Progress Party (*Fremskridtspartiet*), which had been formed in 1972. The party leader from 2022 has been Morten Messerschmidt. The second was the Danish Democrats (*Danmarksdemokraterne*), formed in 2022 by the former Minister of Migration and Member of the Liberal Party (*Venstre*), Inger Støjberg. Both were at the time of writing opposition parties, but the Danish People's Party served as support party for governments led by the Liberal Party from 2001–2011 and 2015–2019.

In Norway, the Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*) was formed in 1973. It was originally named after its founder as “Anders Lange’s Party for Strong Reduction in Taxes, Fees and Public Intervention” (*Anders Langes Parti til sterk nedsettelse av skatter, avgifter og offentlige inngrep*), but took its current name in 1977. The Progress Party served in a coalition government led by the Conservative Party (*Høyre*) from 2013 to January 2020. At the time of writing in early 2025, the leader of the Progress Party was Sylvi Listhaug, who had replaced Siv Jensen in 2021.

Sweden

For many years Sweden lacked a PRR party, except for a number of local parties in southern Sweden. There was no national breakthrough until 1991, when a party called New Democracy (*Ny Demokrati*) entered the political stage. This party, which combined criticism of immigration with a market liberal pro-business agenda, fell victim to internal splits and disappeared after a few years. After the New Democracy interlude Sweden was again without a significant populist radical right party, until the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*, SD) entered the Riksdag in 2010. The party had been formed in 1988, but remained very small for many years. It was disadvantaged by its problematic origins, as some of the party’s founders and its leadership included elements with Nazi and extremist connections, both in historical as well as more contemporaneous contexts. The Sweden Democrats tried to clean up their image by expelling extremist members and deradicalising the party programme. This bore fruit, slowly at first, but support for the party increased significantly after the electoral breakthrough in 2010. Another reason for the success of SD is its leader since 2005, Jimmie Åkesson, whose low-key leadership style has become increasingly popular.

The background of the Sweden Democrats is still considered by many as problematic. It was not until the late 2010s that other parties began to consider some form of co-operation with SD. After the 2022 election, the party reached a co-operation agreement with a coalition government led by the Moderate Party (*Moderata samlingspartiet*). This agreement included a

number of proposals, such as a drastic reduction in asylum immigration, additional options for expelling foreign citizens found guilty of crime or bad behaviour, and stricter measures against crime.

Finland

It can be argued that Finland has the longest history of anti-establishment populism in the Nordic countries. The Rural Party (*Suomen Maaseudun Puolue*), formed under a different name in 1959, had its first electoral breakthrough in 1970. Its electoral fortunes then fluctuated, but it served in a coalition government between 1983 and 1990. In 1995, however, it went bankrupt and was closed down. Out of the remains of the Rural Party a new party was formed. Called *Perussuomalaiset* in Finnish, it was initially referred to in English as the True Finns. In 2011, however, the party announced that it prefers “The Finns”, or the Finns Party, as the English translation of the party name. The Finns Party was at first very small, but it began to grow in the early 2000s. It was also at this time that the party started to highlight immigration, which had been almost completely absent from the agenda of the Rural Party and was initially not emphasised by the Finns Party. During the leaderships of Jussi Halla-aho (2017–21) and Riikka Purra (from 2021), however, immigration became a key priority.

The Finns Party made a major electoral breakthrough in 2011, and four years later it entered a coalition government together with the Centre (*Keskusta*) and conservative National Coalition (*Kokoomus*) parties. The time in government was difficult, however, and the Finns Party had to agree to a number of welfare cuts. In 2017 the party split, after the outspoken critic of Islam Jussi Halla-aho was appointed to succeed Timo Soini as leader. Less radical members defected to form Blue Future (*Sininen tulevaisuus*), which continued in government, but this party performed very badly in the 2019 election and folded in 2023. The Finns Party recovered after the split. It received 20.1 per cent of the vote in the 2023 election, its best ever recorded result, and went on to join a coalition government.

Iceland

Iceland is regarded as not having a PRR party of significance. To an extent this is because Iceland has had comparatively low numbers of asylum seekers, although they increased from 2015 onwards. The leader of the Centre Party (*Miðflokkurinn*), the former Prime Minister David Gunnlaugsson, has spoken out against immigration, while the leader of the People’s Party (*Flokkur fólksins*) Inga Sealand has claimed that immigrants are given better treatment than elderly, sick and disabled native Icelandic people. Sæland has,

however, denied that she is opposed to immigration and neither party is widely regarded as populist radical right.

Here to stay?

The Nordic PRR parties resemble Cas Mudde's core ingredients of populism, nativism and authoritarianism. Where they differ is on issues related to economics and welfare. The Danish People's Party is pro-welfare, with a comparatively left-leaning economic outlook, and it has participated in important welfare reforms, on pensions for example, together with parties on the left. This combination of anti-immigration and pro-welfare positions is sometimes called welfare chauvinism. The Finns Party has also been strongly welfare-chauvinist, which caused the party to lose support when it participated in a government that made welfare cuts. Under the leadership of Riikka Purra, however, the Finns Party has toned down its welfare chauvinism. The Norwegian Progress Party has more consistently emphasised market economics, low taxes and in general a right-leaning economic agenda. The Sweden Democrats and Danish Democrats are somewhere in between.

In summary there are significant Populist Radical Right parties in all Nordic countries, except Iceland. Their electoral fortunes have fluctuated, but everything suggests that parties prioritising restrictive immigration policies will continue to play a part in the Nordic political systems. At the time of writing in early 2025, PRR parties had only participated formally in governments in Norway and Finland, but it is entirely possible that this could also happen in Denmark and Sweden. Indeed, the Danish People's Party could have entered government after a very good result in the 2015 election but decided by itself not to do so. This turned out to be a mistake, and the party lost a lot of support in the 2019 and 2022 elections. It still remains possible that it, or another Populist Radical Right party, may enter a Danish government in the future. The same applies to Sweden, where the strong electoral performances of SD could mean that this party will enter government at some point.

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The Colonialism of Denmark-Norway and its Legacies

7 January 2021 by Niels Brimnes

Summary

Overshadowed by British and French Imperialism, the small-scale colonialism of some of the Nordic countries can all too easily be downplayed. From the nineteenth century, the self-image of the Nordic countries as a group of small, neutral nations has probably perpetuated this misconception. However, from the seventeenth century Denmark-Norway engaged in a variety of colonial activities throughout the world, which still have legacies today. Although these activities were less extensive than those of some other colonial powers, they merit attention, not least because they took place in at times brutal ways and in very different contexts in the Caribbean, West Africa, India and Greenland.

The dual kingdom of Denmark-Norway engaged in colonial ventures from the seventeenth century. After the secession of Norway in 1814, Denmark continued as a colonial power in the traditional sense until it formally integrated Greenland into the state as a county (*amt*) in 1953. Compared to Britain and France the scale of activities was modest, but colonial trade stimulated significant economic growth in the late eighteenth century, particularly in Copenhagen. While Denmark parted with most of its colonies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there remains an awareness of past connections through, for example, architecture and historical narratives, and colonial legacies are actively debated in the US Virgin Islands and Greenland. In Denmark, there have recently been efforts to remind Danes about the colonial past and to emphasise that, even if colonial activities were only conducted on a small scale, they were in essence similar to the colonialism of greater powers.

The building of a small-scale colonial system

Denmark-Norway's engagement as a colonial force might be said to have begun in 1618, when King Christian IV dispatched an expedition to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to form an alliance with the Rajah of Kandy. This initiative was highly influenced by Dutch entrepreneurs, and the goal was to emulate the promising trade of the Dutch and English East India Companies. While neither the treaty nor the trade with Kandy materialised, the expedition resulted in the negotiation of an agreement with the Hindu kingdom of Thanjavur on the Coromandel coast of south-east India. This allowed the Danes to establish a trading post by the village Tharangambadi, which the colonisers named Tranquebar. Trading activities from there peaked in the last two decades of the seventeenth century, the main commodities being pepper and cotton textiles. In addition, European and Indian traders from the settlement participated in regional trade across the Bay of Bengal.

In 1755 Denmark-Norway expanded its presence in and around India. First, the settlement of Serampore (named Frederiksnagore) was established close to Calcutta (or Kolkata) in Bengal. Although the area originally granted by the nawab Alivardi Khan was less than a square kilometre, it developed into a dense urban settlement, which in 1800 had approximately 10,000 inhabitants. Second, the first of several failed attempts to colonise the Nicobar Islands was made.

Denmark-Norway entered the Atlantic trading system in the second half of the seventeenth century. Trading forts were established on the so-called "Gold Coast" (present day Ghana) from 1659. Initially the desired African goods were gold and ivory, but from the early eighteenth century the slave trade became dominant. The Danish presence in West Africa was greatest in the 1780s, when there were six fort-like establishments, the most important being Christiansborg in present-day Accra.

Meanwhile, Denmark-Norway occupied the Caribbean islands St. Thomas and St. John (*St. Jan*) in 1672 and 1718. While white settlers and indentured servants began to establish a diversified plantation economy, the "sugar revolution" soon came to the two Danish islands. The production of sugar received a boost when St. Croix was purchased from France in 1733. Only half the size of Barbados, this island was larger than St. Thomas and St. John combined and more suited to the cultivation of sugar.

Throughout the eighteenth century a slave plantation complex developed on the islands, and Denmark-Norway became a slave-trading nation of some significance. It is estimated that 110,000 enslaved people were transported on Danish ships across the Atlantic from the 1660s to 1803, equalling approximately two per cent of the entire Atlantic slave trade in this period. In 1792

Denmark-Norway decided to prohibit the trans-Atlantic slave trade with effect from 1803. The reason behind this decision has been debated, and three explanations have been suggested. First, the slave trade was facing continued economic loss. Second, there was an expectation that a British ban was imminent. And third, finance minister Ernst Schimmelmann, who was the main architect behind the ban, was influenced by humanitarian ideas. Slavery continued until 1848, however, when a simmering rebellion forced the governor to declare emancipation of the enslaved population.

From medieval times the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland were dependencies of Denmark-Norway but contact with Greenland was lost in the fifteenth century. In 1721 an expedition arrived at *Haabets Ø* (meaning Hope Island, near present day Nuuk) on the western coast of Greenland with the double purpose of converting the “heathen” Inuit population and establishing a profitable trade in products derived from sea mammals. During the eighteenth century a string of settlements was established along the western coast of Greenland, and the Danish presence there assumed a more outright colonial character than in the other North Atlantic dependencies, which might be seen as settler colonies.

Trading in sugar, cotton and tea

By the late eighteenth century, the colonial possessions and interests of Denmark-Norway had reached its peak. Colonial trade through Copenhagen was pivotal to the increasing wealth among the mercantile class in Copenhagen in the period from 1772 to 1807, also known among Danish historians as “the period of the efflorescent trade” (*den florissante handels periode*).

While trade in sugar, rum, cotton and tobacco from the Caribbean and spices and textiles from India was lucrative, the most profitable branch of long-distance trade was probably in Chinese tea. Until 1784, when the customs tariff on tea in Britain was dramatically reduced, it was highly profitable to smuggle tea into Britain. While the China trade cannot be characterised as colonial as such, it was integrated into the colonial system because it was conducted through the Danish Asiatic Company (*Asiatisk Kompagni*), which was in charge of the settlements in India until 1777.

The flourishing trade was only possible however because Denmark was one of very few neutral trading nations during the repeated wars of the late eighteenth century. Colonial trade and the “efflorescent” era came to a virtual standstill in 1807 after the British successfully attacked Copenhagen and seized the Danish-Norwegian Navy, forcing Denmark-Norway into an alliance with France.

Dismantling Denmark-Norway's colonial system

Following defeat in the Napoleonic Wars in 1814, the Danish Crown was compelled to cede Norway, and the Kingdom's role as a medium-sized European power was over. 1814 also marked the end of an expansive – if modest – colonialism. Denmark-Norway had acquired its colonies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for economic reasons. During the nineteenth century Denmark parted ways with its colonial territories, now seen as an economic burden on a much-reduced state. The Indian settlements were sold in 1845 and the African forts in 1850, in both cases to Britain. From the 1860s buyers were sought for the Caribbean islands. Eventually St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix were sold to the United States in 1917 – following a referendum in Denmark (but not on the islands themselves) – and became the US Virgin Islands.

Greenland was the exception. The reasons for the renewal of the relationship with Greenland from 1721 cannot be reduced to economics, and throughout the nineteenth century Denmark consolidated its rule and even established a presence on the sparsely populated east coast. As late as 1933, Denmark had to fend off a Norwegian claim to parts of Eastern Greenland in the International Court of Justice. After the Second World War, Denmark came under pressure to redefine its relationship with Greenland, as the United Nations defined it as a “non-self-governing territory”. This resulted in the incorporation of Greenland as a Danish county (*amt*) in 1953, which meant that Greenland was entitled to have two elected members in the Danish parliament. While this satisfied the United Nations, relations between Danes and Greenlanders in Greenland were still marked by inequality in matters such as language and salary scales.

The bonds between Denmark and Greenland were loosened in 1979 and 2009, as Greenland obtained first “home rule” (*hjemmestyre*) and then “self-rule” (*selvstyre*). Today Greenland is an independent part of the Danish *Rigsfællesskabet* (sometimes translated as “Commonwealth”) which consists of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Denmark. Within this framework Greenland remains dependent on significant funds from Denmark and may not conduct its own foreign policy.

Variety within a small-scale colonial system

An interesting feature of the colonial system established by Denmark-Norway is that it contained variations on the broad concept of “colonialism”. In the Caribbean Denmark-Norway based its slave plantation complex on the brutal oppression of enslaved Africans, and there was no indication that the Danes behaved in ways that differed from the larger colonial powers.

In India, by contrast, Denmark-Norway was compelled to navigate as a coloniser on terms set by others, first the Indigenous rulers and elites, and later the major European powers. Relations with the local population were therefore ambiguous and often characterised by negotiation and accommodation to local interests and world views. A similar situation prevailed around the slave-trading forts in Africa. Colonialists had to accommodate their actions to shifting configurations of power in the hinterland, and their trade often depended on their ability to create networks and alliances with influential African actors. The existence of large numbers of enslaved people, however, added a very different dimension to the spectrum of relations between colonisers and the local population. While some sections of the African population benefitted from the colonial encounter, others were caught, sold and shipped away in one of history's most brutal regimes of oppression.

In Greenland a third kind of colonialism developed. As it was difficult for the colonisers to control the sparse and mobile Inuit through coercion, they had to use the "carrot" at least as much as the "stick". From the late eighteenth century, a particular kind of "tutelary" colonialism developed, in which the Danes saw themselves as the guardians of a vulnerable people, who should not be too hastily exposed to the vices of the modern world. This approach was arguably the Danish version of the "civilising mission" and it meant that Greenland was effectively sealed off from the rest of the world.

Modernist voices from the Greenlandic elite began to question this policy from the 1930s, and when US troops occupied Greenland during the Second World War, they brought with them jeeps, jazz and Coca-Cola. Denmark's protectionist policy and tutelary colonialism lay in ruins. In a remarkable U-turn, linked to the change of Greenland's formal status from colony to county, Denmark launched the G-50, a massive plan for the modernisation of Greenland. For two decades after 1950, Danish administrators sought to concentrate the population in larger settlements, modernise the fishing industry, and expand educational institutions and health care. From the late 1960s, this policy – which gave priority to the Danish language and entailed higher salaries to civil servants born in Denmark – was increasingly contested as neo-colonial and a threat to Inuit culture. In the 2020s, Greenland's relations to Denmark and the wider world are continuously being recalibrated.

The legacies of Denmark-Norway's colonialism

In India and West Africa, the legacy of Danish colonialism is overshadowed by later British imperialism and therefore relatively harder to trace. It is,

however, identifiable. For instance, Tranquebar was home to the first protestant mission in Asia and the Evangelical-Lutheran legacy remained visible in church and school buildings in the 2020s.

The period of Danish rule in the Caribbean is more contested. During the 2000s and 2010s there were repeated demands that Denmark apologise for its involvement in slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, but Danish heads of state have stopped short of this to date.

In Greenland an attempt was made in 2013 to establish a “reconciliation commission” (*forsoningskommission*), although the Danish prime minister at the time, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, declined the invitation to participate, forcing the commission to act as a purely Greenlandic initiative.

In Denmark itself it is often claimed that the colonial past has either been written out of public memory or, at the very least, neglected. While these allegations are debatable, an influential narrative – which probably emerged in the 1940s – exists that Denmark (and Denmark-Norway) was a relatively benign colonial power. This view was rooted in Denmark’s nineteenth-century transformation into a small, “innocent” state, its self-image as a benevolent “tutelary” coloniser in Greenland, and the fact that there have been few post-colonial minorities in Denmark itself to contest metropolitan narratives.

In recent years and culminating in 2017 – when the sale of the Caribbean islands was commemorated – interest in the colonial past has intensified. This has led to the publication of more research in the area as well as support for art and culture exploring Denmark-Norway’s colonial legacies.

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Colonial Desires and Anxieties in Iceland in a New Millennium

24 February 2021 by Kristín Loftsdóttir

Summary

The economic boom in Iceland in the early 2000s demonstrated how colonial memory can linger and become mobilised. Prior to the economic crash in 2008, Iceland became internationally visible due to aggressive global investments, embodied by businessmen frequently referred to as “business Vikings”. This economic expansion, or *útrás* as it is called in Icelandic, focused strongly on Denmark, reflecting how Iceland’s history under Danish rule was particularly salient. Icelandic business people, politicians and the media employed racialising and nationalistic discourses that echoed those of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries prior to Iceland’s independence in 1944.

In the early 2000s, Icelandic business people became internationally visible, buying up firms in different countries. The country had no history of investment banking and had limited experience in commercial banking in an international sense, since it only became part of the global financial market in the 1990s through various processes of neoliberalisation. In the 2000s, a masculine image of the banker became an iconic figure, embodied in the phrase “business Viking” (*útrásarvíkingur*). Especially during the final years before the massive economic crash of 2008, this figure was widely celebrated and evoked not only outside the country but also by Icelandic media, politicians and the general public. Across the Global North and beyond, the figure of the banker lent “imaginative cohesion” to a diverse set of practices, as argued by Hannah Appel; a slim and glamorous figure replaced the older image of the banker as dull and dry. Throughout this period of economic boom, the memory of Danish rule repeatedly bubbled to the surface. Many of the processes taking place during that time – including the strong support

of high-risk banking by government and public alike – are difficult to understand without this context.

Colonial relations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Iceland were defined by a strong call for full independence from Denmark. Iceland was under Norwegian rule from the 1260s, and became a part of Denmark in 1380 with the unification of the Danish and Norwegian crowns. Prior to full independence in 1944 Iceland was, however, not a colony in the same sense as most African countries were, as the population was not brutally subjugated. Despite this, Icelandic discussions became characterised by an anxiety of being too closely associated with other colonised peoples and the desire for recognition from more powerful European nations as being on an equal footing. The question of whether Iceland could be labelled a “colony” is thus to a certain extent a technical one, but it is significant that, at the end of the nineteenth century, people living in Iceland started to feel a need to emphasise that they were far from being colonial subjects (see Loftsdóttir, 2019).

There is a long history of Iceland being exoticised, particularly in narratives of elite European scholars and travellers. In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Denmark, Iceland was generally seen as pre-modern and belonging to the past, while also being seen as a country that had successfully preserved its old Nordic heritage. Icelandic demands for independence were underpinned by references to the uniqueness of the country due to its language and medieval manuscripts. However, while seeing independence as a natural step for themselves, Icelandic people did not necessarily recognise that this was also the case for other colonised peoples under the rule of different European states. The Icelandic discourse at the time thus emphasised that Iceland and its inhabitants belonged within a community of civilised, modernising nations.

Economic boom and colonial memory

Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, during the boom period in the 2000s there was a strong engagement with the memory of Iceland’s history as being under Danish rule, and this was widely reflected in the media as well as in political and public discourse. A research project that I undertook in the early 2010s on the economic crash reflected the importance of this past colonial relationship. The subject came up time and again in the 60 interviews I undertook with people in Iceland engaged in either the economic expansion or with

international development assistance. There was the same common thread in the other materials I analysed.

Interestingly, these different levels of discourse were similar to those from the early nineteenth century: nationalistic rhetoric emphasised Iceland's exceptionalism, as it did then, and the country was placed as firmly belonging in the group of the most powerful European nations. Often these discourses referred directly to Iceland's past relationship with Denmark. Iceland's two major business weeklies in 2006 and 2007 covered conventional business news, but the papers also often carried materials that reflected on how Iceland was portrayed internationally as well as Iceland's relationship with Denmark. The memory of Danish rule was salient. The acquisition of companies and property in Denmark also received special attention in Iceland, in particular the buying of historically important establishments such as the famous department stores, *Illum* and *Magasin du Nord*, and *Hotel d'Angleterre*, all located in the heart of Copenhagen. In September 2007, the Icelandic newspaper *Morgunblaðið* ran the headline: "Icelanders Still Buying Companies in Denmark". The text explained that this referred to "[d]epartment stores, newspapers, hotels, airlines and now a film company. Every day brings news of acquisitions by Icelanders of Danish companies."

One of the businessmen I interviewed said that, during his frequent business trips to Denmark, the taxi drivers would almost always ask what the Icelanders were going to buy next. When he jokingly replied that he had come 'to buy Tivoli', they had all expressed shock. My interviewees often referred to the relationship between Denmark and Iceland as fraternal, which reflected not only a sense of intimacy but also hierarchy, as Iceland was always portrayed as the younger brother.

In my interview with a Danish banker a few years after the economic crash, he referred to the Icelandic businessmen as "Gucci bankers", implying everything was "over the top". An example of this was a fishing trip where the Icelandic hosts served champagne and expensive whisky instead of something that he saw as more suitable for the occasion. The allure of the business Viking figure in Iceland was also strong due to the small size of the country, or as someone explained to me in an interview later: "This was almost you, somehow", meaning that anyone in Iceland could be a business Viking.

In 2006 *Danske Bank* and the international agencies Merrill Lynch and Fitch Ratings raised concerns about the sustainability of the economic boom in Iceland. This was largely dismissed in the country itself. The *Danske Bank* report was widely interpreted as being influenced by envy of the country's economic success, with its roots in the past relationship between Denmark

and Iceland. The acting Minister of Foreign Affairs in Iceland stated, for example, that there was something “unnatural” about this criticism, directly linking it to past relations and a feeling of jealousy. In actual fact, prior to the 2000s, there had been no history of investment banking in Iceland and only limited experience of international commercial banking, since the country had only become part of the global financial market in the 1990s. In 2008 Iceland underwent a massive economic crash, and the Icelandic government had to bail out three of the country’s banks after they failed to refinance their short-term debt. Ironically, these banks had been privatised only a few years earlier, in 2003.

Iceland’s dualistic colonial experience

The economic expansion prior to the crash involved direct and indirect references to the memory of Iceland under Danish rule. One was the way Icelanders in general talked about the business Vikings, expressing the desire to demonstrate that Icelanders were stepping higher than – or in front of “the Danes” – in the hierarchy of the community of nations, and in doing so echoing the nationalist discourses of the early twentieth century. The economic boom also reflected coloniality in many other ways, where economic expansion was portrayed in masculine terms as conquest and domination. Moreover, the economic boom drew migrant workers to Iceland in unprecedented numbers, especially from Poland but also from other countries such as Lithuania. These populations were often referred to in racialised terms as inferior to Icelanders, activating older discourses within Europe between East and West (see Loftsdóttir, 2017).

These different strands can be seen as reflecting Iceland’s dualistic colonial experiences, as subjects of a colonial nation on the one hand, and as part of the Global North where they have contributed to the reproduction of coloniality on the other. This part of Iceland’s history has shaped how racist and nationalistic discourses have been expressed in Iceland.

Icelandic boom and bust in retrospect

Some questions can be asked in retrospect: Why was there such an emotional investment in Danish people and their opinions of the economic “miracle”? Why were the Icelandic business Vikings so interested in buying companies in Denmark, and especially those that were historically important to Danish identity? Did this make it easier to mobilise the support of people living in Iceland due to colonial memory and, in turn, make it easier for the country to support the significant economic risks that were taken even by its national

institutions? Or, did it merely fit well with a nationalistic portrayal of Icelanders as different and better than everyone else?

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The Nordic Countries and Humanitarianism

24 February 2025 by Norbert Götz

Summary

Humanitarianism has been a defining feature of Nordic international engagement since the beginning of the twentieth century. Its evolution from individual initiatives to a state-led, institutionalised and globally recognised tradition reflects both continuity and strategic adaptation. After the end of the Cold War, Nordic humanitarianism adjusted to new geopolitical conditions, while “humanitarian interventions” in places like Somalia and Kosovo challenged traditional Nordic principles of peace and neutrality. Nordic humanitarianism in the twenty-first century is confronted with challenges such as protracted conflicts, politicisation of aid and increasingly extreme weather events.

The Nordic self-perception as “humanitarian great powers”

Unlike cultures that prioritise self-promotion and grandiosity, Nordic societies tend to emphasise a low-key, results-oriented approach. Internationally, they are recognised as humble and efficient team players who contribute constructively to politically viable solutions. However, there is one striking exception: humanitarianism. In this field, the Nordic countries do not merely participate in collective efforts in a pragmatic small-state manner – they assert a leadership role and even describe themselves as “great powers”. What underpins this self-image?

There is no universally accepted definition of humanitarianism. Generally speaking, however, voluntary emergency aid lies at its core, as my colleagues and I concluded in our book on the history of humanitarianism (Götz, Brewis, and Werther 2020). Broader interpretations may also encompass government action, development assistance and human rights advocacy. State involvement includes multilateral initiatives, contributions to UN missions and “humanitarian interventions” that use military force to protect vulnerable populations. Armed conflict is regulated by international human-

itarian law, which is in turn rooted in the Geneva Conventions that were adopted in 1864 in connection with the establishment of the International Committee of the Red Cross. In the Nordic countries, governments are seen as constituting the centre of the national humanitarian system, coordinating and collaborating with a cluster of voluntary organisations and corporatist bodies that specialise in the field. This contrasts with other Western countries, where humanitarian efforts are more independently driven by civil society.

The Nordic countries collective self-perception as a “humanitarian great power” illustrates the significant role that governments play in shaping and directing Nordic humanitarianism. Denmark was one of the 12 signatories of the 1864 Geneva Convention, and Sweden and Norway ratified it in the same year. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these countries increasingly acquired a profile of constructive engagement for international conflict settlement.

The evolution of Nordic humanitarianism in the early twentieth century

Pivotal figures in shaping the Nordic countries’ reputation as key humanitarian proponents were the Swedish missionary Alma Johansson (1881–1974), the Swedish nurse Elsa Brändström (1888–1948) and the Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen (1861–1930). During the First World War, Johansson witnessed the mass deportations and massacres of Armenians. She played a crucial role in documenting the Ottoman genocide of the Armenians as well as in fostering Nordic fundraising and relief efforts for survivors. Similarly, Brändström’s relief work on behalf of the Swedish Red Cross for prisoners of war held in Siberian camps was followed by a publication that helped fund further humanitarian work.

As an explorer, Nansen was already a celebrity before his high profile in Soviet famine relief and refugee work in the 1920s. He became the League of Nations’ first High Commissioner for Refugees and developed the so-called Nansen Passport, which provided stateless refugees – especially displaced Russians after the 1917 revolution – with a legal identity and travel rights. Not only Nansen, who was significantly backed by the Norwegian government and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1922, but also figures like Johansson and Brändström became symbols of national pride in their home countries and had a major share in establishing an internationally acknowledged tradition of Nordic humanitarianism.

At the same time, institutional developments, such as the evolution of the Red Cross as a strong popular movement in the Nordic countries or the

major role of Nordic branches in the transnational Save the Children network, laid the foundation for Nordic humanitarian identities. Sweden, Norway and Denmark took active roles in the League of Nations' humanitarian work and their Red Cross societies and labour movements expanded their activities to assist refugees and displaced populations in Europe.

The effects of the Second World War on Nordic humanitarianism

The Second World War marked a further step in the development of Nordic humanitarianism. Neutral Sweden became a key hub for aid efforts, providing refuge to those fleeing war and Nazi persecution, including Finnish children and thousands of Jews from Denmark and Norway. The diplomat Raoul Wallenberg saved large numbers of Jews in Budapest by distributing protective passports, while Folke Bernadotte of the Swedish Red Cross orchestrated the renowned "White Buses" operation, rescuing concentration camp prisoners in the final weeks of the war. In German-occupied Denmark and Norway, underground resistance networks engaged in humanitarian activities ranging from smuggling refugees to providing medical care.

After the Second World War, the establishment of the United Nations provided a new arena for engagement, with Nordic diplomats playing leading roles in shaping humanitarian frameworks. Sweden, Denmark and Norway were among the six countries providing medical support to UN forces during the Korean War. Later the Nordic countries, including Finland, emerged as some of the most prominent contributors to UN peacekeeping missions. From the mid-1960s, the Nordic countries were also strong proponents of international development assistance. Sweden, Norway and Denmark became the most generous donors of official development assistance, consistently surpassing the UN target of 0.7 per cent of GDP for development aid (Ekengren and Götz, 2013).

State-driven Nordic humanitarianism in the post-war era

In the post-war decades, Nordic humanitarianism became increasingly state-driven. Building on earlier civil society networks, governments institutionalised their commitment to foreign aid by establishing development agencies such as SIDA (Sweden, 1965) and NORAD (Norway, 1968). While voluntary humanitarian organisations remained significant, they increasingly operated within state-sponsored frameworks, receiving funding and mandates from national governments.

A notable exception to state dominance in the Nordic humanitarian sector was the Biafran War (1967–1970), when church aid organisations and the Red Cross played a pivotal advocacy role alongside the mass media. Their

lobbying efforts pushed Nordic governments towards a more pro-Biafran stance than diplomatic caution toward a secessionist regime would have ordinarily warranted (Götz and Marklund, 2024).

Despite Biafra's defeat, the crisis became a watershed moment for modern humanitarian advocacy and fundraising in the Nordic region and across the Global North. It marked the initial breakthrough of human rights frameworks in humanitarian discourse. In the Nordic countries, the Biafran War led to comprehensive cooperation between national church aid organisations, who established the collaborative platform NordChurchAid with a secretariat in Copenhagen. The conflict also reinforced a humanitarian approach rooted in neutrality and solidarity, and it consolidated the comprehensive civil society cooperation and public-private partnership that mirrored the corporatist structures of the welfare state (Marklund, 2016).

Challenges to Nordic principles of peace and neutrality after 1989

With the end of the Cold War, Nordic humanitarianism adapted to new geopolitical conditions. The wars in the Balkans in the 1990s saw significant Nordic engagement, including peacekeeping missions, humanitarian aid and diplomatic mediation efforts. At the same time, “humanitarian interventions” in places like Somalia and Kosovo challenged traditional Nordic principles of peace and neutrality, as military force became increasingly integrated into humanitarian efforts.

In the twenty-first century, Nordic humanitarianism is confronted with new and evolving challenges. Protracted conflicts, rising migration pressures and the increasing globalisation and politicisation of aid have complicated the traditional Nordic approach. Additionally, climate change and the growing number of extreme weather events have made environmental crises a central humanitarian concern, with Nordic countries taking a leading role in linking humanitarian aid with climate adaptation efforts.

Facing such challenges, the Nordic countries continue to uphold their reputation as humanitarian leaders through national policies and civil society organisations alike. However, the self-proclaimed status of the “humanitarian great powers”, as some Nordic politicians have described their countries, is not without critique. Some argue that Nordic humanitarianism is primarily a tool for national identity-building and soft power projection, rather than an expression of altruism. Others point to contradictions, such as restrictive asylum policies that seem at odds with professed humanitarian values. Meanwhile, populist political movements call for radical cuts in aid

budgets and the dismantling of the close public–private partnerships that underpin the Nordic humanitarian sector.

Nonetheless, humanitarianism remains a defining feature of Nordic international engagement. Its evolution from individual initiatives in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to a state-led, institutionalised and globally recognised tradition reflects both continuity and strategic adaptation. However, although the legacy of Nordic humanitarianism is firmly established, its future path in a rapidly changing global landscape is difficult to predict.

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Nordic Adult Educators and Tanzanian Development in the 1960s and 1970s

2 March 2020 by Nikolas Glover

Summary

One of Sweden's earliest development efforts in the 1960s focused on correspondence education in Tanganyika (renamed Tanzania in 1964). This was largely because of Sweden's own experiences with mass correspondence education, which had been successful due to a high level of literacy, an efficient publishing industry and reliable postal services. Much research has focused on the ideological affinities between the Nordic Social Democratic parties and Tanzanian President Nyerere's socialist TANU party, as well as the respective cooperative organisations. However, a focus on the institutions and educators involved suggests a more complicated and interesting picture than simply the exporting of a "Nordic model" to postcolonial Africa.

Relationship between the Nordics and Tanzania

Tanzania became independent from the UK in December 1961. Between 1962 and 1983, it was one of the recipients of the largest amount of foreign aid in the world. The Nordic countries were the most important donor countries, having provided Tanzania with on average 30 per cent of its total bilateral aid. Sweden alone provided approximately half that share. Tanzania received over ten per cent of Sweden's total foreign aid during the second half of the 1960s, and that share increased to around 15 per cent during the years that followed. From an early stage, Swedish aid to Tanzania included support for education, which was gradually concentrated on adult education and vocational training.

The emerging relationship between the Nordic countries and postcolonial Tanzania was characterised by ideological solidarity on the one hand, and hard-nosed political manoeuvring on the other. The depictions of this relationship offered by researchers and commentators have ranged from harsh

criticism to praise. The historian Jarle Simensen characterises the Nordics as naïve in their dealings with the Tanzanian regime and unwilling to see the realities of Julius Nyerere's increasingly authoritarian policies. Nyerere led the country as president from 1965 to 1985, before which he was first prime minister and then president of the country's precursor state, Tanganyika, from 1961 to 1964. Nordic support for Tanzanian co-operatives has even been denoted a "bleak chapter" in the history of foreign aid. On the other hand, scholars examining Tanzania's adult education policies have tended to highlight its relative success, crediting the Tanzanian government with educating the citizenry and the Nordic donors for their financial backing and continuous support.

It is possible to combine these conflicting narratives by concentrating on previously overlooked areas such as correspondence education. Studying such initiatives can help reveal the interplay between what can be described as either "laudable Nordic idealism" or "problematic Nordic pragmatism" (or vice versa).

The organisers of correspondence courses in Tanzania in 1960s

The Co-operative Educational Centre (CEC) in Moshi was founded in 1964 and jointly initiated by the Nordic co-operative movements. The CEC's main objective was to offer training for the rank and file of Tanzania's rapidly growing rural co-operative societies. The number of students increased over its first years, and 6,100 individuals enrolled between 1965 and 1969. By the end of 1970, eight correspondence courses had been produced by the CEC, including those on topics such as "Savings and Credit Societies" and "Book-keeping".

In contrast, the National Correspondence Institute (NCI) was created through a bilateral agreement between the Tanzanian and Swedish governments. It was based in Dar es Salaam and established in 1971 with Swedish funding. It was a central, national institute for mass correspondence education under the auspices of the Institute for Adult Education in Dar es Salaam. By July 1974 there were 8,600 students enrolled, and two years later the number had reached 20,000. While the Moshi centre had been launched with a handful of employees, by 1974–1975, the NCI was already employing 64 Tanzanians on full-time contracts. From the start, the most prioritised course at the NCI was "Political Education", which was to teach Tanzanians about Nyerere's national ideology of "socialism and self-reliance". Addressing staff at the NCI, the Minister of National Education proclaimed that the course was to be the "star that guides all our plans of Adult Education".

Domestic aid policy and international organisations

Existing research has tended to focus on the ideological affinities between the Nordic Social Democratic parties and Nyerere's socialist TANU party. Yet my research on the actual institutions which carried out education aid suggests that the relationship between Tanzania and Sweden was in fact shaped elsewhere, including within international non-governmental organisations. Both the foundation of the Co-operative Educational Centre in Moshi and the funding of the National Correspondence Institute can be linked to specific organisations adapting to the geopolitics of decolonisation and the related political thrust towards implementing, managing and leading "development". Swedes played a prominent role in these organisational transitions. Thus, it was through their involvement in international non-governmental organisations that individual Swedes could muster the clout to influence their developing domestic governmental aid policy. Examples include the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) and the International Council of Correspondence Education (ICCE).

The ICA was in fact instrumental to the Nordic involvement in the setting up of the Co-operative Educational Centre (CEC) in Moshi in 1964. Founded in 1895, the ICA began engaging in earnest with co-operative development at its 1957 congress in Stockholm. The Swede Dr Mauritz Bonow became president in 1960, a position he would hold until 1975. He led the move to set up a regional headquarters for the Alliance in New Delhi, which was largely funded by the Swedish Co-operative Union (*Kooperativa Förbundet* or KF). During this time, Bonow became a board member of the Swedish aid authority NIB and was in that capacity closely informed about, and able to influence, the launch of official co-Nordic assistance efforts in Tanzania. In his inaugural presidential speech, Nyerere had emphasised the role that the co-operative movement would play in the establishment of "a true socialist society".

The Nordic co-operative movements were eager to be of assistance. Since they had a long and successful history in largely agricultural societies, the national co-operative unions in Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland soon began planning for a Nordic educational centre for Tanzanian co-operatives. The joint preparations, led by Bonow with his influential positions in both national and international organisations, resulted in the foundation in May 1964 of the Nordic Co-operative Tanzania Consortium. It was this joint Nordic body of co-operatives, *Nordiska Kooperativa Tanzania-konsortiet*, again led by Bonow, that lay behind the setting up of the Co-operative Education Centre in Moshi in 1964.

Another example is the role of the International Council of Correspondence Education (ICCE). The Swede Lars-Olof Edström worked for the private institute *Nordiska Korrespondensinstitutet* (NKI), but was also NIB's educational advisor. He played a key role at the ICCE, not least at their congress in 1965, which for the first time was held outside the US – in Stockholm. A quarter of participants at this congress were Swedish and, for the first time, one of the main themes was correspondence education in developing countries. The ICCE changed from a largely North American organisation in the 1950s to having an increasingly global membership by the mid-1960s, and this congress marked the shift. A pre-meeting was also held to ascertain how Swedish aid funds could best be used in the field of correspondence education, and Edström played a crucial role in his capacity as adult educator, representative of the ICCE and member of the fledgling Swedish aid bureaucracy.

A few weeks later, the NIB was replaced by a new aid agency, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), which still operates today. Edström became head of its education division in 1972 and was a driving force in the Swedish-Tanzanian process of setting up the National Correspondence Institute in Dar es Salaam.

The discourse of development and the increasing flows of foreign aid offered organisations like these a concrete way to live up to their international designations. In both the ICA and the ICCE Swedes played a prominent role in this expansion. They did so by identifying and articulating apparently useful national experiences that could be integrated into the government's rapidly expanding programme of foreign aid. They also in effect extended the field of adult education into the realm of Swedish foreign policy. The actors that drew Swedish adult education into the so-called "aid rush", such as Bonow and Edström, successfully facilitated and utilised the government's ongoing attempts to mould a new active foreign policy.

Was the Swedish model being exported?

NGOs and international professional associations played a formative role in articulating development challenges and formulating potential solutions which the Nordic governments then incorporated into their expanding foreign aid agendas. Interestingly, the Swedish actors at once owned and disowned the policies they were seeking to define and adapt as aid. While much was made of "Africanising" education methods in Tanzania, there was a simultaneous tendency to frame them as essentially "Swedish" when communicating back home. In this way all the actors involved in some sense benefitted from the formation of partnerships through the lending and

borrowing of policies. Aside from the Tanzanian government, which received funding and could pursue its ideological agenda, Nordic governments, cooperatives and professional organisations also stood to gain from playing their part in the ongoing aid rush. The pressing global development agenda offered new ways to gain political legitimacy, claim cultural relevance and activate the grassroots. Getting involved was both considered a moral necessity and a strategic opportunity.

Simultaneously, not only were the educational correspondence organisations changing through involvement in foreign aid, but so were their educational methods and practices. In the throes of decolonisation, Nordic declarations of “Third World”, solidarity led to inventories of what, financial and rhetorical support aside, these countries actually had to offer their new allies in the Global South. At this very practical level, resorting to a general “ideology of goodness”, which researchers have identified in the Nordic countries as an explanation for their readiness to provide foreign aid, simply did not suffice. Rather, irrespective of the ideological positioning at home, there were few examples of directly exporting successful Nordic or Swedish “models”. Right from the start such visions were complicated by the hands-on challenges of working in international settings.

Instead of outright “model export” it seems more fruitful to think in terms of the pragmatic identification of adaptable national experiences. Through interactions between individuals, NGOs and state authorities, those experiences became re-contextualised and transformed. While resulting educational practices were often rhetorically re-nationalised and strategically branded as essentially “Swedish”, “Nordic’ or “Tanzanian”, each label has always been a simplification.

This article is based on the author’s ‘The “aidification” of national experiences: Swedish-supported correspondence education in Tanzania, ca 1960–1975’, *Nordic Journal of Education History*, Vol. 6, no. 1 (2019): 25–47.

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Political Approaches to Immigration in Scandinavia, 1995–2019 – and what happened since

18 February 2019 (updated 2025) by Kristina Bakkaer Simonsen

Summary

Immigration was one of the policy areas where Denmark, Norway and Sweden differed most from 1995 to 2019. Towards the end of the period, Denmark was amongst the most restrictive countries in Western Europe, Sweden the most liberal and Norway somewhere in-between. These differences can be explained, at least to some extent, by divergent approaches to national identity and party-political dynamics in each country. Increasing politicisation of immigration and integration especially in Denmark during this period provides a useful background for understanding the sea change that has occurred on these policy issues in Swedish politics since then.

Like almost everywhere else in Europe, immigration and integration have become highly salient topics in the Scandinavian countries. Denmark, Norway and Sweden share many background factors considered important for how states respond to immigration. They all have small, open economies built around universal welfare states; they have similar histories of immigration; and egalitarianism is held in high esteem, as is individual autonomy and constitutional rights. Despite these similarities, the differences between Danish and Swedish immigration and integration politics have been the focus of not only scholarly but also public and political attention since at least 2010.

It was not uncommon for Danish politicians to argue for more restrictive immigration policies with reference to the undesirable “Swedish conditions” that would purportedly result from a too liberal approach. The “political correctness” of Swedes was presented as an obstacle to talking about real and serious problems with immigrant integration. During the 2015–2016 refugee

crisis Swedish ministers criticised Denmark’s restrictive asylum policy as “lacking in solidarity” (*osolidarisk*), and in Sweden the climate of the Danish debate was considered polarising and potentially damaging for integration at that time. The reasons for the differences in these policies and the consequences of them are worth exploring further, as they are helpful in putting the changes in immigration policy since 2019 in context.

Similarities in the history of immigration and immigration policy

In contrast to some other Western European countries, especially the major colonial powers with large industrial economies such as France and Britain, the Scandinavian countries had little experience of immigration prior to the 1960s. People have moved between the Nordic countries for centuries, not least because they were historically part of the same states in various constellations, and they continue to do so. However, significant immigration from outside the region was rather limited until the economic boom in the 1960s. From then into the late 2010s, similar immigration patterns could be discerned across the three countries.

In the late 1960s, growing numbers of labour migrants came from Turkey, Pakistan, Morocco and Yugoslavia. After the economic recession in the early 1970s, labour migration was tightly restricted in all countries, but from then on refugee numbers increased, resulting in continuing migration to Scandinavia. Additionally, while the 1960s “guest workers” were expected to leave after a period of work, many stayed and were joined by their families. This was possible given the liberal right to family reunification that existed in all three countries.

Policy divergences in the Scandinavian countries from the 1990s

From the 1990s until the late 2010s, the Scandinavian countries diverged in their immigration and integration policies. Rankings vary depending on the policy indices used and areas examined, but researchers generally consider Denmark to have moved towards being among the most restrictive countries in Western Europe during this period; a position it has maintained since then. Sweden was considered one of the most liberal and Norway somewhere in between, though from around 2005 Norway became increasingly restrictive. Since the early 2020s, Sweden too has slowly introduced more restrictions, moving it somewhat away from the exceptionally liberal approach of the late 2010s.

It was from 2001 in particular that Denmark saw a long succession of more or less incremental policy changes that tightened asylum rights, raised the bar for access to permanent residency and citizenship, and restricted immigrants’

rights to social welfare benefits. During the same period, Norway introduced a mandatory integration programme that immigrants must pass to obtain permanent residency. In 2017 Norway also introduced language requirements and a citizenship test as prerequisites for naturalisation. For most of the period from the 1990s to 2015, Swedish policies remained liberal. Only after the 2015/2016 refugee crisis, when public concern grew over the substantial numbers of refugees accepted by the country, did Sweden introduce a slightly more restrictive policy on asylum and family reunification. However, Swedish laws remained more liberal than those of most other countries in Europe and access to citizenship remains comparatively liberal.

Table 1 displays the requirements for citizenship in the three countries in 1995, 2005 and 2019 (updated from Jensen, 2016, p. 25). As can be seen, over the time period Denmark made the most substantial changes, while Norway became more restrictive, though not to the same degree as Denmark. Sweden maintained a liberal citizenship regime throughout the 2010s. Since 2019, the requirements in all three countries have remained largely stable, but Sweden is planning to introduce substantive restrictions in 2026 including a residency requirement of eight years and that applicants must demonstrate economic self-sufficiency along with knowledge of Swedish culture and language. In other words, it is likely that Sweden soon will become much closer to its Scandinavian counterparts in terms of its citizenship requirements.

The drivers behind policy differences

Typical explanations for a country's approach to immigration and integration include the country's economy and welfare state regime, its immigration history and dominant values. These cannot account for the divergence in this case as Denmark, Norway and Sweden are relatively similar in these areas. Researchers have suggested two alternative explanations: one grounded in conceptions of national identity, the other in party competition dynamics. These explanations are not mutually exclusive but may supplement each other to give a more nuanced account of the causes of Danish – and to some extent Norwegian – policy movement versus Swedish stability before the 2020s.

National identity: Although the Scandinavian countries share basic values and norms, the way in which these values are understood and prioritised differ. In particular, conceptions of social cohesion and integration differ in significant ways, which are consequently reflected in policy developments. Based on analyses of parliamentary debates, government publications and party manifestos, Kristian Kriegbaum Jensen argued in 2016 that Swedish,

Norwegian and Danish integration politics have been structured by different ideas about national identity construction.

Requirements	Country	1995	2005	2019
Language requirements	DK	Informal	B1	B2
	NO	-	-	800hrs*
	SE	-	-	-
Citizenship test	DK	-	Yes	Yes
	NO	-	-	Yes
	SE	-	-	-
No social benefits**	DK	-	-	Yes
	NO	-	-	-
	SE	-	-	-
Dual citizenship allowed	DK	-	-	Yes
	NO	-	-	Coming
	SE	-	Yes	Yes
Years of residence	DK	7/6	9/8	9/8
	NO	7	7	7
	SE	5/4	5/4	5/4

Table 1: Requirements for citizenship in the Scandinavian countries

Note: *Immigrants are required to have followed 800 hours of language instruction corresponding to level A in the European language level system. **“No social benefits” refers to the requirement that immigrants may not have received social benefits during a period of years before applying for citizenship.

In Swedish politics, the nation’s identity is presented as mouldable, shaped through processes of collective negotiation. At the individual level, national identity is seen as something one can choose. In other words, immigrants can become part of the dynamic Swedish nation by actively choosing to belong. Denmark’s national identity, in contrast, is presented as historically determined, and immigrants must engage in long processes of socialisation to become Danish. This view may explain the recent focus on compulsory childcare and early initiatives to socialise the children of immigrants born in

Denmark. The Norwegian understanding of national identity has oscillated between the two apparent poles of assimilation on the one side (Denmark) and multicultural acceptance on the other (Sweden). Jensen suggests the debate in Norway “has been more ambivalent – perhaps even confused – giving expression to more moderate versions of both kinds of arguments”. While this was certainly accurate during the time period in question, conceptions of social cohesion – and the understanding that it is under pressure – can change, as seems currently to be the case in Sweden, prompting political elites to signal vigour through political action.

Party political dynamics: Party political dynamics can also help to explain the differences in the immigration and integration policies of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. One significant factor is the presence of a successful populist right-wing party. Denmark and Norway have had long-standing experience with such parties. Initially named the Progress Party in both countries, in Denmark it was succeeded by the Danish People’s Party in 1995. Electorally influential right-wing populism was a more recent phenomenon in Sweden, but the 2018 success of the Sweden Democrats (receiving 17.6 per cent of the vote) marked a change. The presence of such parties is not necessarily in and of itself sufficient to change government policy: The strategies of mainstream parties in response to the success of anti-immigrant parties and the different conditions for centre-right coalitions are important factors influencing whether immigration and integration issues become politicised and whether policy changes present themselves as necessary to the electorate.

In Denmark, minority Conservative-Liberal governments depended on parliamentary support from the Danish People’s Party from 2001, because the centrist Social Liberal Party switched sides to cooperate with the Social Democrats and was therefore no longer a viable government partner. In Norway, centre-right parties sought to defuse integration issues together with the centre-left, seeking to create a strong consensus around this policy area throughout the past 20 years. However, in 2018, the Progress Party became part of the government with the Conservative Party, which explained at least in part the subsequent shift in a more restrictive direction.

In Sweden, the Moderate Party (a liberal-conservative party), which was in power from 1991 to 1994 and from 2006 to 2014, chose a moderate approach, as its centre-right coalition partners all advocated a pro-immigration platform. The strategy of mainstream parties was to block the influence of the Sweden Democrats, the right-wing, anti-immigration party. Despite the public support for the Sweden Democrats and the extraordinary difficulties in forming a government after the 2018 election, mainstream parties

succeeded in maintaining that position for a time. In January 2019 the Social Democrats formed a government with the Green Party, supported by the Liberal Party and the Centre Party, on a promise to keep the Sweden Democrats out of the sphere of influence. Despite this, it is clear that Swedish political elites experienced a need to signal that it took public concerns over immigration and challenges to social cohesion seriously. During the 2020s, Denmark is no longer framed as a scare case; on the contrary, Swedish political elites are adopting discourse from Denmark, emphasising that immigrants must demonstrate their effort and willingness to become part of society.

The consequences of varying Scandinavian immigration policies since 2015

It is a difficult and complex task to identify and isolate potential consequences of the different political directions that the Scandinavian countries took on immigration and integration policy. The consequences include the fact that Sweden's immigrant population at 19 per cent is significantly bigger than that of Denmark and Norway, which is respectively 11 and 15 per cent (according to the Nordic Statistics Database in 2024). Another consequence is that it is harder to obtain citizenship in Denmark than in Sweden or Norway, as discussed above, though this might soon change. In a 2017 study of refugees, it was shown that the Danish citizenship regime made it significantly more difficult for applicants to be eligible for citizenship in comparison with the Swedish and Norwegian requirements. In particular, the high demands for language proficiency appeared to be a major excluding factor. Similarly, a 2021 study showed that while more than 80 per cent of immigrants have naturalised in Sweden after 21 years in the country, the number is only 37 for Denmark. Citizenship not only holds symbolic value as a signal of inclusion and belonging, it is a precondition for exercising important rights such as voting in national elections.

Research has also shown that it is easier for immigrants and their descendants to feel a sense of belonging in countries where the political discourse is more open and inclusive. A political climate where the tone of the debate on immigration is more negative, such as the Danish case, has been demonstrated to damage first- and second-generation immigrants' faith in democracy.

Majority populations are affected too. In a 2008 study of the effect of political influences on public opinion in Denmark and Sweden, it was found that people were more likely to associate their ideological position with their attitude towards refugees in Denmark than in Sweden. In other words,

Danish voters thought of immigration issues as ideologically polarising because political elites had politicised this field to a greater extent than their Swedish neighbours.

While many factors were at play, including conceptions of national identity and party-political configurations, greater politicisation of immigration was clearly a decisive factor, driving divergences in policy across Scandinavia from the 1990s to the late 2010s. It is instructive, therefore, how the Danish political climate since then has made immigration into an almost consensual and low-salience issue that does not seem to require the same degree of political signalling as it did before. In contrast, since the late 2010s, Sweden has experienced increased politicisation of the issue, leading to changes that have moved the three Scandinavian countries closer on immigration policies once again.

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Sports Clubs in Sweden and Integration

19 May 2022 by Tony Mickelsson Blomqvist

Summary

Associational life is a key element of civic engagement in the Nordic countries, with voluntary organisations creating networks that facilitate social inclusion and community cohesion, and contribute to a resilient public sphere. The sports movement has a strong political presence in Sweden, notably to do with migrants' integration. Sport has been touted as a “universal” language where individuals from diverse backgrounds can take part in something meaningful that does not require particular linguistic skills. This context is examined through a detailed case study of a local martial arts club, which reveals the potential and the limitations of sport clubs as integration projects, and outlines key considerations when engaging with marginalised groups.

The existing structure of sport clubs in the Nordic countries provides a tremendous opportunity to contribute towards migrants' well-being and their feelings of belonging and to provide meaningful leisure time. This is invaluable in a migration context where previous social networks may have been eroded, and barriers at school and in the labour market may be overwhelming. Exploring Nordic sport clubs in conjunction with refugee projects can shed light on the integration process. While integration is a contested concept, I use it in this article to refer not only to inclusion in the local sporting sphere, but also to the broader process of fostering strong communal bonds, empowering individuals, and ensuring equitable access to healthy, fulfilling lifestyles.

Sports clubs in the Nordic countries

Sport clubs in the Nordic countries make up a significant share of the voluntary sector – they are run by members, for members. Although there is some variation in how sports systems in the Nordic countries operate and are constructed and influenced by government, they share key common features. Most sport clubs are run on a non-profit, voluntary basis by individuals. Besides membership fees and some limited commercial revenues, they are supported by government funding and are governed by their respective national sports federations. Federations can function as the government’s extended arm in the sphere of sport, attempting to steer sport clubs in ways that are conducive to social policy.

Associational life is strong in the Nordic countries and this is no different in sport clubs. In international comparisons, the Nordic countries frequently top listings measuring both sport club membership generally and the number of volunteers in sport. Accordingly, there is a prevalent understanding of how sport is to be carried out in the Nordic countries, building on a long tradition of bureaucracy, organisation and volunteerism.

Sports for all?

One key consideration is that the Nordic countries adopt a “sport-for-all” notion, meaning everyone should have the opportunity to partake in sport equally. This idea coincides with the growing political significance that has been attributed to sport in the Nordic countries, namely, that it combats a range of social ills, including crime, by promoting public health, social cohesion and migrants’ “integration”. Sports clubs are often perceived as vehicles for social change that can help alleviate problems which are generally the responsibility of the public sector.

However, while sport-for-all is an honourable idea, sport – like any other sphere of society – is conditioned by a range of factors including socio-economic status, ethnicity, sex, gender, and age. Moreover, inclusion in Nordic sport has often been seen as linked to different forms of cultural and physical capital. Individuals who understand the bureaucracy of Nordic sport and have the physical skill necessary to participate in a satisfactory manner (that is, are able to compete) are more likely to partake in sports clubs than others. In this sense, access is not quite as equal as it seems at first. Limited sporting access is an important public health issue, notably with respect to people in the low socio-economic bracket or with a migration background.

Nordic migration policies reflect this context. In Sweden, where my own research has been based, a shift has gradually occurred where the country has gone from being a strong defender of human rights and multiculturalism

towards more populist ideas emphasising migrants' integration. These ideas influence the Swedish sporting sphere as well, where implicit or explicit learning practices are used to "include" – or rather assimilate – migrants into mainstream sports. While sport can provide meaningful leisure time and improve mental and physical health, it can also function as a mediator for less obvious aims and agendas.

Academic approaches that help show hidden inequalities

Sport and social inclusion in the migration context has been the primary focus of my research and I have drawn extensively from the theoretical principles of critical realism – a perspective which places itself between interpretivism and positivism. These principles provide a framework for analysing societal behaviours and trends, which can be carried out in a variety of ways.

Focusing on structure, such as that of organisations, state initiatives or policy-making, can overlook the importance of a particular individual's own agency. On the other hand, focusing too much on the individual's perspective and their decision-making power plays down the importance of structural aspects. A book by Margaret Archer from 1995 helpfully coins the term "morphogenetics", which is an analytical tool enabling both of these aspects as well as others, to be included when analysing what is going on in a particular social situation.

Archer is a foundational author within the critical realist-inspired branch of social science, and her morphogenetic approach illustrates how actors within a given setting both exert agency but are simultaneously limited by their surroundings. That is, actors negotiate with their surroundings in a conscious way in pursuit of their goals. Accordingly, some individuals are more limited by their surroundings than others and may be more vulnerable to power dynamics. For instance, some individuals may wish to maintain a hegemonic status and further contribute toward inequalities, whereas others struggle to break such cycles. This perspective is particularly useful when examining the conditions of social inclusion and integration in migration research, and was helpful when I sought to investigate a martial arts sports club and how it incorporates new members like refugees.

A refugee project at a martial arts club

I carried out research on a Swedish martial arts club through an analysis of the club's relevant paperwork, five interviews with key volunteers, and a three-month ethnographical observation. My research took place in the aftermath of a project where refugees were permitted to train free of charge

and they were integrated into the existing club structure. Guided by the principles of critical realism and the morphogenetic approach, my main findings were as follows:

First, the guiding principles of the sports club itself consisted of a mix of traditionally “Nordic” ideals such as democracy, social solidarity and equality (specifically gender equality). Unsurprisingly, these were also mixed with Asian influences, as martial arts have a solid cultural foundation in this region. These influences entailed matters such as discipline, respect, etiquette in the gym (such as bowing before stepping on to the mat) as well as others. All in all, these values were supposed to guide members of the martial arts club in both their organisational and individual behaviour.

Secondly, since this organisational and philosophical foundation set out a normative framework for the sports club’s members, this culture also served as a gateway in and out of the club. Throughout the interviews with key volunteers, it was clear that they benefitted greatly from this framework. It was consistent with their way of life, their perception of how sport should be conducted, and served to maintain a kind of social order. In other words, these members had a structure around them that they actively upheld.

This became very salient when the club received refugees. Despite the high level of good will that existed within the club towards the refugees, there was also a substantial expectation that they would adapt to the sports club’s etiquette and practices. This was not without issues. The refugees had difficulties with the language and with adapting to the level at which martial arts training was perceived as “satisfactory”, and they failed to understand implicit rules about volunteering. This was problematic for the existing members in the sports club who seemed to believe that the migrants had failed to integrate properly. Little thought was given to how difficult it may be to adapt to existing norms which were new to them, or how the refugees could have contributed in a variety of other ways. While much was said about what organisational measures had been taken to accommodate the refugees (for example, lowered fees, free equipment), little attention was paid to understanding these new individuals entering the club.

The refugee project ultimately failed to include the refugees in the existing organisation, and by the time the research was concluded, most of them had left. In the words of one coach, the majority of the members believed that “those who wished to stay, stayed”; only one refugee remained in the club.

My study focused on the voices of already existing members – in other words, the people who tend to be the agenda-setters with powerful voices. It is also imperative that further research elucidates the refugees’ stories in order to accommodate better their sporting experiences.

Sports clubs more complex than “universal” appeal

Sport clubs in Sweden have a unique opportunity to contribute towards migrants’ well-being when their previous social networks may have eroded and social and structural barriers may exist in other parts of society. Yet, as evidenced in this case study, enforcing norms and agendas upon migrants may cause the opposite of social inclusion and integration, even in the sporting sphere. Accordingly, sports (practice) is not an isolated island unaffected by other societal influences, but resembles much of the political rhetoric found elsewhere that has to do with migrants’ integration.

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Unemployment Benefits and Precarious Workers in Finland

19 March 2020 by Young K Shin & Petri Böckerman

Summary

The Nordic countries have some of the highest trade union membership rates in the world. One reason for this is the “Ghent” system in Denmark, Finland and Sweden, which is a voluntary unemployment insurance system administered by trade unions. This approach to unemployment protection, which has been in place since the 1910s, differs from compulsory systems in other welfare states. In 1992, Finland introduced a fund which is independent from trade unions and offers more flexibility. This fund is likely to have contributed to decreasing rates of trade union membership since then, and data from 2000 to 2012 show that different groups of precarious workers have different preferences when it comes to unemployment insurance.

The Ghent system in Denmark, Finland and Sweden

Compulsory public unemployment insurance is common in most welfare states in order to protect people from income insecurity caused by unemployment. However, Denmark, Finland and Sweden operate public unemployment insurance in a different way based on the “Ghent” system, where workers may voluntarily decide whether to join an insurance scheme or not. It is usually trade unions or union-affiliated organisations which manage these funds and their memberships. Voluntary unemployment insurance was common in many European countries in the early twentieth century, but the Nordic countries which have maintained the Ghent system have been exceptions since the Second World War. Research has demonstrated that the Ghent system has influenced the high levels of union density in the Nordic region, as trade unions have played a pivotal role.

Since the 1990s, however, the Nordic Ghent systems have experienced a significant transformation. In 1992 and 1998 respectively, Finland and Sweden introduced unemployment insurance funds which were independent from trade unions. In 2002, Denmark allowed employees to enrol in any

unemployment insurance fund regardless of their type of employment, when previously certain professions could only enrol in particular trade union unemployment funds. All Danish unemployment funds could convert to being cross-industry and recruit employees from every sector, diminishing workers' sense of belonging to a particular trade union.

The main reason for these reforms was to offer employees a greater number of options in step with neo-liberal ideas, both in the Nordics and globally, and their focus on individual choice. Many people anticipated that such reforms would affect union density in a negative way and multiple studies have revealed that the predictions have become a reality in recent years. As Figure 1 shows, the union density in Denmark, Sweden and Norway gradually decreased from the mid-1990s.

In 2020, the Finnish unemployment security system consisted of a three-tier system of unemployment benefits. The first tier is an earnings-related unemployment allowance provided through unemployment insurance funds (via a trade union or an independent fund called "YTK"). The second one is a basic unemployment allowance, which is financed by taxes and managed by the Social Insurance Institution (KELA). The last tier of unemployment benefit is the labour market subsidy that KELA pays on the basis of a means test for long-term unemployed people who have used up their eligibility for the first or second tier of unemployment benefit. This means that an unemployed job seeker can receive the earnings-related unemployment allowance if they were a member of an unemployment insurance fund during the requisite period of employment (tier 1). Otherwise, he or she has to rely on the basic unemployment allowance or the labour market subsidy (tier 2 or 3).

The introduction of an independent fund in Finland

In Finland, the existence of employees who had difficulty in joining unions, due to their exclusion from collective agreements or the high level of union membership fees for example, led to the introduction of the independent unemployment insurance fund. Employers and right-wing parties supported these efforts. In the early 1990s, the country experienced a severe economic depression and a drastic increase in unemployment. Against this backdrop, there was a strong argument that employees should have other options than union-affiliated funds, and the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health decided to allow the establishment of an independent unemployment insurance fund in the autumn of 1991.

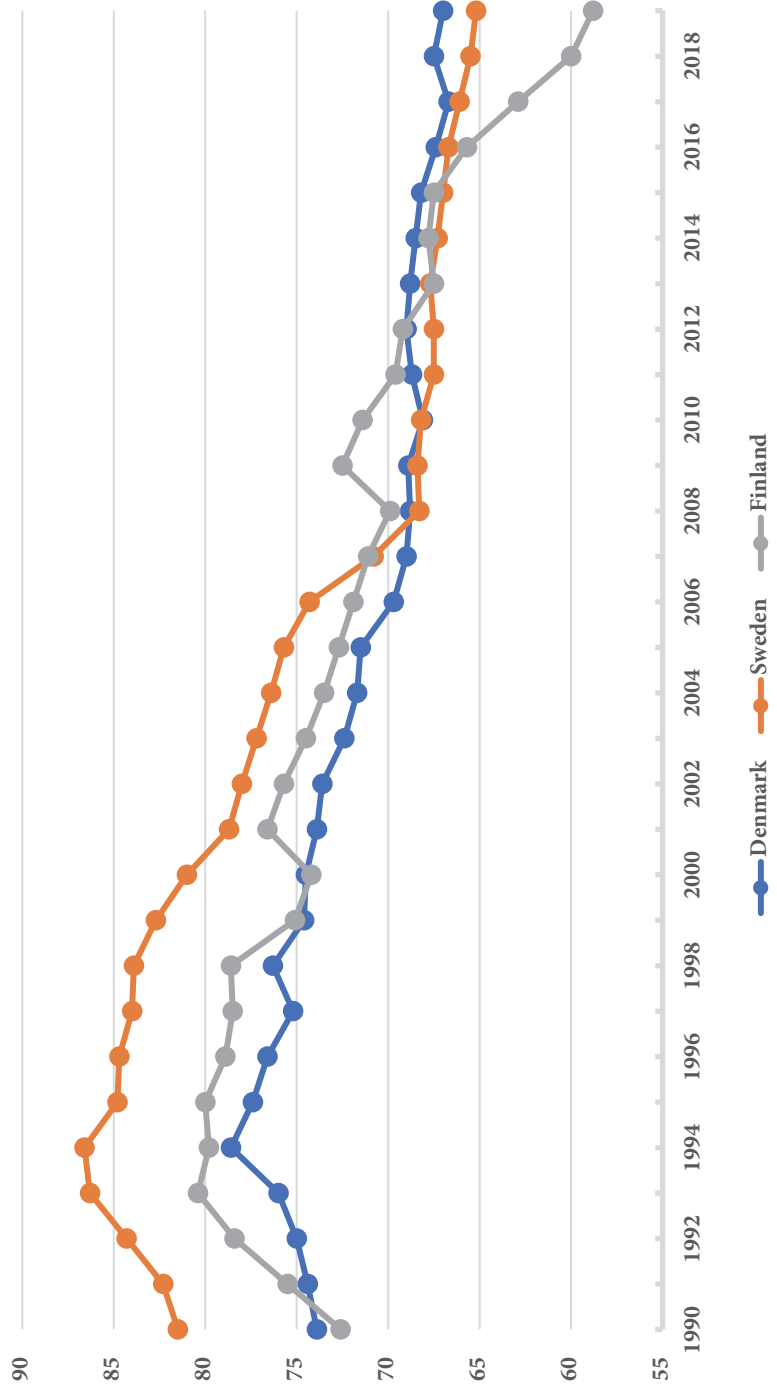


Figure 1: Union density in selected Nordic countries (per cent of population). Source: OECD.

At that time, trade unions did not actively respond to the decision because they anticipated that the new fund would not have a significant impact on the labour market. However, the independent fund (YTK) grew to have a larger number of members than any of the union-affiliated funds. In addition, the Federation of Finnish Enterprises has publicly expressed its preference for the independent fund and right-wing politicians have sometimes criticised the unions' strong influence on unemployment insurance, claiming that the expansion of the independent fund shows that unions are not necessarily as key to society as was once assumed. In general, it seems that the independent fund has politically had a negative effect on unions in Finland.

Finnish trade unions play an essential role in the management of the earnings-related unemployment allowance. They jointly manage unemployment insurance funds based on the type of industry and provide unemployment insurance services for their members. As of 2018 when the Finnish population was about 5.5 million people, 26 unemployment funds were in operation. 25 funds were administered by unions, while only one fund (YTK), which was introduced in connection with the reform of the Ghent system in 1992, has been managed independently from unions. Because unions tend to strongly encourage their members to join funds affiliated with themselves, all employees who are members of an unemployment insurance fund but are not union members are members of YTK.

For employees, the biggest difference between joining a union and having a YTK membership is the membership fee. Unions usually charge one to two per cent of gross earnings or a flat rate, which was around €400 per year in 2019, for their membership, whereas the annual YTK membership fee was €110. Union membership fees basically include fund membership fees. As the YTK membership fee is much lower compared to union membership fees, this can be an incentive to make workers withdraw from a union and enrol in YTK. On the other hand, in addition to unemployment insurance services, union members have benefits such as travel insurance, job information and occupational training, which are generally provided by unions.

The basic unemployment allowance (the second tier above) has nothing to do with trade unions. Unemployed people who have not been members of an unemployment insurance fund can instead receive benefits from KELA. This means that employees can rely on the basic unemployment allowance without paying a union or YTK membership fee when they are out of work. The amount of basic allowance was on average €697 per month in 2019 and the maximum payment period is 400 days. Because most unemployed job seekers who have an unemployment insurance membership are eligible for more than 50 per cent of their previous wages and salaries, the basic allow-

ance is generally much lower than the earnings-related unemployment allowance.

The growth of precarious work

Since the early 2000s, non-standard employment has grown and become more uncertain and risky in terms of job and income security. The three main groups of precarious workers are part-time employees (who work fewer than 30 hours per week), temporary employees (with fixed-term employment contracts) and low-skilled service employees (who work in the service industry and whose level of education corresponds to less than lower secondary school).

According to Statistics Finland, in 2014 part-time and temporary employees accounted for 14.6 per cent and 15.6 per cent of the labour market, respectively. Calculations based on Finnish Income Distribution Survey (FIDS) data show that the percentage of low-skilled service employees was about 6.2 in 2012. Analysis of the FIDS data demonstrates that the average income of precarious worker groups is much lower than that of other employees. The average income of all Finnish employees was about €37,000 per annum in 2012, whereas that of part-time and temporary workers was €18,980 and €24,308 respectively, and low-skilled service workers' average income was €27,386. Low-skilled service employees showed the highest average income among the precarious worker groups.

Precarious employment and worker choices 2000–2012

Data from the FIDS show that, for the period from 2000 to 2012, the type of unemployment insurance precarious workers chose was linked to their type of employment. Part-time and temporary employees in particular tended not to enrol in unemployment insurance funds. If they chose to enrol in unemployment insurance schemes, temporary workers preferred YTK over union-affiliated funds. On the other hand, low-skilled service workers do not show any particular preference for YTK or the basic state unemployment allowance. The reasons for precarious workers' different choices are as follows.

Part-time employees: Few part-time employees enrolled in the unemployment insurance funds because of their very low income and the fact that it would be difficult to guarantee that their earnings-related unemployment allowance would be much higher than the basic one they would otherwise receive. Additionally, part-time employees do not necessarily meet the criteria for earnings-related unemployment allowances in the first place because of their limited income and short working hours. They also tend not

to feel the need to join a union for reasons of workplace solidarity, often because of their short working hours.

Temporary employees: Few temporary employees enrolled in funds because of their rather low income which makes them more likely to give up the earnings-related unemployment allowance or enrol in YTK, whose membership fee is considerably lower. Additionally, employees on fixed-term contracts are less likely to feel pressure to join a union compared to permanent workers, who tend to share the need to unite through union membership.

Low-skilled service employees: Low-skilled service employees are more likely to join unemployment insurance schemes than the other two groups of precarious workers. This is because they have higher incomes and joining an unemployment insurance fund can guarantee higher earnings-related unemployment allowances than the basic one. Finnish trade unions in the service sector were in fact quite successful in recruiting low-skilled service workers in the period. Nevertheless, the YTK membership fee, which is much lower than union membership fees, can also attract low-skilled service workers.

The emergence of the independent unemployment insurance fund has clearly affected precarious workers' choices about unemployment benefits, and their choices tend to depend on the type of precarious employment. Because it is probable that the proportion of precarious workers will further increase in the post-industrial labour market, Finnish society should try to find ways to encourage them to register for unemployment insurance to prevent income insecurity in the case of unemployment.

Impact of the reforms on trade union membership from 2000 to 2012

Union density in Finland has decreased, whereas the share of workers who are members of the independent insurance fund has gradually increased. According to more general data from FIDS, the independent fund has become more popular among workers generally; its share was only 7.1 per cent in 2000, but then increased, reaching 17.3 per cent in 2011. By contrast, the union membership rate has gradually declined over the 12 years from 2000. Three quarters of employees were union members in 2000, but union density dropped to 67.2 per cent in 2012. It is interesting that the proportion of workers who opted for the earnings-related unemployment allowance remained around 85 per cent, independently of the introduction of the independent fund. This means that the Ghent system reforms have not actually affected the ratio of unemployment insurance members overall.

Considering the results above, it seems that the independent fund will continue to grow, while union density will decline – at least for the foreseeable future. Therefore, trade unions can hardly rely on the Ghent system anymore to expand their membership.

This article is based on research by the authors which was published in the article “Precarious workers’ choices about unemployment insurance membership after the Ghent system reform: The Finnish experience.” in *Social Policy & Administration* Vol. 53, no. 7 (2019): 921–938.

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Gender Segregation in the Nordic Labour Market

22 February 2019 by Astrid Elkjær Sørensen

Summary

Since the 1960s the Nordic countries have been renowned for their high level of gender equality due to high rates of employment and education for women. At the same time the Nordic countries have greater horizontal segregation by sex than the rest of the European Union, that is, most women work in different occupations than most men. The gender segregation of labour is often seen as the main reason behind the gender wage gap in the Nordic region. It can also lead to useful talent going undetected, higher unemployment rates and the perpetuation of a traditional division of labour in the family.

The Nordic gender equality paradox

Horizontal gender segregation refers to the fact that most Nordic women still work in different occupations than most men, leading to segregation between the genders. It is a paradox that this is the case when the Nordic region has one of the world's highest employment and education rates for women.

In Denmark, for instance, over 60 per cent of all workers are employed in a profession where their own sex accounts for 75 per cent or more of the workforce. Women mainly work in the public sector, often with education, care or health, while the private sector is dominated by men, who often work with production and engineering. Gender segregation exists at all educational levels. Even when a woman and a man have the same educational background, research indicates that the most likely scenario is that the woman will be found working in the public sector and the man in the private sector.

Gender segregation leads to a wage gap

Professions dominated by women have a lower average wage than those dominated by men, leading to a wage gap between the genders. In the Nordic

region the average wage gap between men and women in 2017 was 15.3 per cent. Furthermore, part-time work is much more common in the traditionally female professions, which also leads to a lower average income for women.

The relatively low wages in the female-dominated caring professions resulted in a series of strikes and demands for equal pay across all the Nordic countries from the early 1990s. This culminated in long-lasting and significant industrial action among public employees in the caring professions during the period from 2005 to 2010 in all of the Nordic countries (except for Iceland). In Finland more than 12,000 nurses collectively quit their jobs in protest over their wages.

The result of the protests varied. In Finland the nurses got a 22 to 28 per cent pay rise, which lifted the profession up to the average wage level for public employees with a comparable level of education. In Norway an equal pay commission was established which, after two years, recommended that a special equal pay pool of three billion Norwegian Kroner be established and used to increase the pay in the female-dominated professions in the public sector. In Denmark and Sweden the results have been less tangible, but the strikes raised general awareness and stimulated debate in society about the issue of equal pay. Wage levels in professions dominated by women continue to cause discussion, particularly to do with whether the Nordic labour model in its current form can provide an acceptable solution to the wage gap between men and women.

Other negative consequences of gender segregation in the workplace

Gender segregation in the labour market may be responsible for causing an inflexible workforce. Many unemployed men and women simply do not consider changing sectors or entering a profession associated with the other sex – which in some cases can lead to longer periods of unemployment. In the 1980s, gender segregation was mostly seen as a factor that caused unemployment for women in the Nordic countries. Since 2000 we have experienced periods when, for the first time, Nordic men are starting to face higher long-term unemployment rates than women. The reason for this is that unskilled or low-skilled traditionally male jobs are at greatest risk due to new technologies.

Another possible consequence of gender segregation is loss of talent. When some jobs are seen as principally tied to one sex, employers risk not being able to recruit enough workers or not employing those who are most

qualified. Furthermore, research suggests that the most efficient workplaces are those with a diverse staff.

Finally, gender segregation in the labour market seems to correlate with a traditional division of labour in the family and vice versa. Women who work in professions with low pay but with family-friendly benefits and a tradition for part-time working often end up taking on the main responsibility for care work in the family – such as the greater share of any parental leave. In fact, the unequal care burden within the family drives many women to look for shorter and more flexible hours of work, potentially exacerbating the problem. This search for family-friendly occupations often prevents women from choosing work with irregular working hours or a high workload.

Root causes of gender segregation

No single factor can explain the gender segregation in the Nordic region. The phenomenon has by and large persisted in spite of gender roles and women's educational levels having evolved enormously over the last 50 years. Research has pinpointed various possible factors which both cause and preserve segregation in the workforce:

Preference: Gender segregation is partly maintained by women's and men's preference for different jobs. Whether this difference in preference is due to biology or socialisation has been the subject of much debate.

Stereotypes: Employers and co-workers often have fixed ideas about which sex does the job best, leading to discriminatory practices in hiring or workplace culture that favours one sex.

Different roles in the family: Statistically Nordic men and women still have different roles in the family, where the woman has the role of primary caregiver and the man the role of primary earner. Women tend, therefore, to have an interest in jobs with the potential for part-time working and family-friendly benefits, and men for jobs with higher wages.

Interestingly, ethnic minorities in the Nordic region often do not follow the same patterns as the ethnic majority when it comes to the gender-segregated labour market. As an example, a large number of men with a Middle Eastern background are seeking employment in traditionally female-dominated healthcare professions. Otherwise, the horizontal gender segregation of labour has historically been very stable, although from 2008 we have seen a small increase in the number of women in classically male-dominated, skilled professions.

Other forms of gender segregation

Vertical gender segregation refers to Nordic women statistically working in lower status and lower paid positions than their male counterparts within the same field. The degree of vertical segregation varies across the Nordic region. Compared to the rest of the EU, Denmark and Finland are close to the average, whereas Sweden, Norway and Iceland have a lower degree of vertical gender segregation than the EU average.

At the level of the individual workplace, researchers have observed what they call a “sliding gender segregation of labour”, which means that men and women with the same job title and workplace over time end up doing different tasks. For example, in a kindergarten, the female employees often become primarily responsible for cleaning and basic care, while the men take care of physical activities and technical tasks. Sliding gender segregation seems to support vertical segregation, as the tasks assigned to men are often assigned more value and are seen as having more potential for professional development.

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Childcare Infrastructure in the Nordic Countries

21 February 2024 by Yvette Lind

Summary

Childcare infrastructure is largely understood in the Nordic countries as including access to universal and subsidised childcare, individual rather than joint taxation of married couples, as well as paid parental leave that is designed to promote equal participation by both parents. Childcare infrastructure has been shown to help economic gender equality as it enables women to join the labour market to a greater extent, although there is still room for improvement. A cycle may exist where the partner who is less well paid tends to do more at home, leading to them often choosing to work part-time. This can reinforce gender pay gaps and existing workforce hierarchies.

What is childcare infrastructure?

Just as roads and power supplies are necessary infrastructure for the physical functioning of society, paid parental leave and universal childcare are necessary for the social functioning of society and maintaining the labour force.

The concept of childcare infrastructure is a relatively new idea, yet it has gained immense traction in the political debate in the Nordic countries. Childcare infrastructure includes paid parental leave, universal access to childcare and subsidised childcare. The Nordic countries share similar characteristics, commonly associated with comprehensive social safety nets which are mainly tax-funded. These systems are built on some fundamental premises, namely:

- an overall high tax burden;
- public pension plans;
- a high percentage of workers belonging to labour unions; and,
- a labour market built around the tripartite relationship between employers, trade unions and the government.

Extensive labour regulations encompass rules that support the different social safety nets. For instance, in the Norwegian and Finnish systems, paid parental leave is found within labour law, as childcare infrastructure is considered a way of supporting working environment conditions. Research has also shown that labour unions had an important impact on the development of paid parental leave in the Nordic countries – a development highly influenced by the large number of female members of labour unions in the Nordic countries.

Taxation and social insurance in the Nordic countries are naturally inter-linked; one collects and the other distributes. Nordic tax scholars often argue that individual taxation as practised in many of the Nordic countries raises gender equality, whereas the joint taxation of married couples is a key contributor to gender inequality. The reason for this is that it incentivises the practice of one spouse assuming the responsibility to support the family financially while the other spouse, often the woman, remains at home and cares for children and household, or alternatively is employed part-time as a secondary earner.

How does childcare infrastructure impact gender equality?

Under conditions of economic gender equality, it is envisaged that women would have the same opportunities as men, whether it is the same opportunity to work full-time, to advance in their career, or to attain equal pay. There is a general belief in the Nordic countries that equally shared parental leave will strengthen opportunities for women in the labour market. This is particularly valid when considering the possibility of achieving and maintaining full-time employment, closing the wage gap and facilitating women's promotion to senior positions.

The Nordic countries have, to a certain extent, managed to grant women access to the labour market as a result of childcare infrastructure, regulated through the interlinking of tax, social insurance and labour law provisions. They have consequently been more successful compared to elsewhere in enabling women to join the labour market, whether part-time or full-time, in addition to aspiring to equally shared responsibilities both inside and outside of the home.

As a general rule, the Nordic countries award social welfare benefits, including aspects of childcare infrastructure, on criteria linked to work (and therefore payment of taxes) and residence. Several of the Nordic systems base the reimbursement level on salary and previously paid taxes.

Parental leave

Paid parental leave is funded differently across the Nordic countries. It can either be paid by the employer through payroll taxes, or by the employee through fees or taxes based on their employment income. In some countries, Denmark for instance, benefits also stem from the employment contract, meaning that some employers may pay additional parental leave as terms of employment. For those who have not been able to work full-time or have been unemployed in the time leading up to pregnancy, there is a minimum level of paid parental leave as a safeguard. See Table 1 for a broad comparison of the rules in 2024. Note that the level of reimbursement that is received varies between countries. For instance, some countries pay 100 per cent for part of the leave and a reduced amount for the remainder of the paid leave.

Several of the Nordic countries have reformed their parental leave systems in the last few years. The aim of Finland's reform in August 2022 was to recognise a broader spectrum of employment forms and families on more equal terms than the previous more traditional system. Consequently, the new rules acknowledge and support parents engaged in various forms of entrepreneurship and self-employment, and families with non-biological children. Denmark also revised their paid parental leave in August 2022 as a way of complying with the new EU Directive 2019/1158, which establishes a minimum of four months' parental leave per parent.

The trend in the Nordic countries is largely towards an equal distribution of parental leave between the two parents. While this has led to more economic parity between the sexes than elsewhere, some thorny issues remain, including the lack of take-up amongst men and the knock-on effects of women still taking more responsibility in the home. Legislation in the Nordics increasingly makes provisions for single parents, adoptive parents and same-sex parents, but this is beyond the scope of this article.

Childcare

Childcare in the Nordic countries is subsidised and is generally paid as a monthly fee dependent on the household income and the number of children. Access to childcare and its costs in the Nordic countries varies. In Sweden and Norway, the amount parents pay is linked to household income and the number of children. Different caps exist for high and low-income households in Sweden, and Norway offers a certain number of free childcare hours for low-income families. Caps also exist in Finland. In Denmark, childcare costs are considerably higher and there is greater variation across municipalities, although municipalities pay around 75 per cent and parents the residual amount, with low-income earners receiving sometimes up to 100

per cent of childcare costs. Costs also vary across municipality in Iceland, with costs reducing when the child reaches two and moves to kindergarten.

Individual taxation

Individual taxation can create incentives that encourage both spouses to participate in the workforce. For instance, tax deductions can be used by both spouses instead of merely one, which doubles the potential financial gain for the household. As a result, the practice of individual taxation creates a strong incentive for married women – or the partner who earns less – to work. The Nordic countries have to a large extent abandoned the practice of joint taxation and introduced individual taxation in the following years:

Norway: 1959

Sweden: 1971

Denmark: 1971*

Finland: 1976

Iceland: 1978

*Some elements of joint taxation have been kept in the Danish system as a way of providing taxpayers with a choice in how to divide income and the tax burden within the relationship, although the remaining elements primarily concern tax planning schemes between spouses in connection with self-employment and investments.

In principle, taxes apply equally to men and women in a gender-neutral fashion. However, tax systems and fiscal policies affect men and women differently. Scrutinising the application and implication of fiscal rules and policies, they can have a larger or more detrimental effect on women for various reasons. Childcare infrastructure can mitigate these effects for example, as it can allow both spouses to retain their employment instead of couples being forced to choose who works and who stays at home with the children. This is usually the woman as, in most cases (for heterosexual couples), women's gross hourly earnings are on average lower. For example, according to Eurostats' gender pay gap statistics, women's gross hourly earnings were on average 13 per cent below those of men in 2020. Perhaps surprisingly, the Nordic countries do not fare better than the European average in this respect. In the Nordic countries, the gender pay gaps in 2020 were 11.2 per cent in Sweden, 13 per cent in Iceland, 13.4 per cent in Norway, 13.9 per cent in Denmark and 16.7 per cent in Finland.

Country	Total paid leave	Maternal Leave (paid leave reserved for mother)	Paternal Leave (paid leave reserved for father)	Parental Leave (paid leave that is flexible)
Sweden	480 days	<i>Föräldrapenning</i> : 240 days (Maximum of 420 days)	<i>Föräldrapenning</i> : 240 days (Minimum of 60 days)	Days can be transferred between the two parents but with 90 days minimum per parent. As a result, 90 days will be forfeited if the father takes 0 days.
Denmark	52 weeks	<i>Børnepenget</i> : 4 weeks before expected birth + 2 weeks after birth + 22 weeks of maternity leave	<i>Børnepenget</i> : 2 weeks after birth + 22 weeks of paternity leave of which 9 are non-transferable	24 weeks each of which 9 are non-transferable. As a result, 9 weeks will be forfeited if father takes 0 days.
Norway	49 weeks	<i>Føreløpene</i> : 3 weeks before expected birth + 15 weeks after birth (6 weeks are mandatory directly after birth)	<i>Føreløpene</i> : 15 weeks after birth (6 weeks are mandatory directly after birth)	15 weeks each of which 6 are non-transferable. As a result, 6 weeks will be forfeited if father takes 0 days.
Finland	320 days	<i>Vanhempainraha</i> : 160 days of which 63 days are transferable	<i>Vanhempainraha</i> : 160 days of which 63 days are transferable	Parents are allocated 160 days each of which 63 days are transferable. As a result, 97 days will be forfeited if father takes 0 days.
Iceland	12 months	<i>Førelðragreiðslur</i> : 6 months each of which 6 weeks can be transferred to the other parent	<i>Førelðragreiðslur</i> : 6 months each of which 6 weeks can be transferred to the other parent	6 weeks can be transferred to the other parent. As a result, 6 weeks will be forfeited if the father takes 0 days.

Table 1: The extent of paid parental leave in the Nordic countries in February 2024.

Sources: Sweden: *Föräldralönlagen* (1995:584) and Chapter 12 SFS 2010:110 *Socialförsäkringsbalken*. Denmark: LBK nr 235 of 12.2.2021 *Børnselsloven*. Norway: Chapter 12 LOV-2005-06-17-62 *Lov om arbeidsmiljø, arbeidstid og stillingsvern mv. (arbeidsmiljøloven)*. Finland: Chapter 4 of 26.1.2001 *Työsopimuslaki*. Iceland: 2020 nr. 144, 29. desember *Lög um fræðingar- og foreldraorlof*. Please note that the policies and amounts stated in this article do not reflect possible changes after February 2024.

The Nordics are still far from achieving economic gender equality

A natural outcome of women being more active in the labour market has been that men have assumed more responsibility in the home. Fathers on parental leave have become the norm in the Nordic countries, at least to some extent. However, Nordic researchers emphasise that, while men appear to assume more responsibility in the home, employers remain discouraged from hiring women for managerial and more powerful positions.

One hypothesis has been that this is a result of women still assuming greater responsibility at home compared to their partners. This pattern can perpetuate the likelihood of women favouring more female-oriented occupations which often have more convenient working conditions (such as the ability to work part-time). Preference for female-oriented occupations reinforces the existing gender pay gap as women tend to earn less in these sectors. Despite the individual taxation model being prevalent across the Nordic countries, the partner who is paid less – often a woman – is still more likely to be the one staying at home after birth and when the children are sick, as the household will lose less of the household income.

Neither families nor employers have so far managed to achieve a system where the responsibilities in the home are shared equally. The ultimate duty may arguably fall on the state through governmental incentives or mandated equal sharing, and this has been noted by the governments in the Nordic states as well as the EU. There is currently a development towards earmarking paid parental leave instead of leaving it to the families to choose who should stay at home with the children and who should work. Additionally, governments need to address the problem of lower salaries in traditionally female-oriented occupations as this reinforces the gender pay gap and the pattern in which parents divide their roles as stay-at-home parents (when needed) and breadwinners.

This article is largely based on the author's research paper: "Childcare infrastructure in the Nordic countries as a way of enabling female labour market participation" in the *National Tax Journal*, Vol. 74, no. 4 (2021): 937–957.

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Racial Attitudes in Swedish Welfare Institutions

31 October 2019 by Carolin Schütze

Summary

The racial bias of staff at welfare institutions can result in negative outcomes for minority clients. Staff are not only professionals, but also individuals with personal beliefs and values. While the overriding organisational task may be to give equal services to all clients, the attitude of staff and various work pressures can influence their approach, particularly with migrant clients. Recent research recommends combining organisational theory and theory on racial attitudes in order to illuminate pertinent issues. For example, increased workload and stress can cause welfare professionals to resort to stereotyping clients.

Previous research shows that stereotypes about migrants may influence the welfare services they are provided with. It is therefore important to consider in what ways welfare institutions possibly contribute to exclusionary processes that affect migrants negatively. Welfare organisations are not only neutral bureaucratic structures but also entities that produce, shape and interact with people's biases. This understanding helps to unfold mechanisms of inequality by scrutinising how personal and organisational factors interplay. Recent scholarship has started to recognise the importance of combining organisational theory on the one hand, and theories on racial attitudes on the other, in order to understand better how inequalities are manifested. This is particularly important in the context of western countries which are increasingly becoming more diverse societies, such as Sweden.

A brief history of migration in Sweden

Sweden has long been described as a universal welfare state and as a forerunner for equality and equal access to social benefits for the entire popu-

lation, including migrants. Migrants with the right to reside in Sweden are integrated into the larger welfare system and have access to Swedish welfare institutions as service seekers. Migrants constitute a significant proportion of the Swedish population. At the end of 2018, no less than 24.9 per cent of the Swedish population had a foreign background, and a considerable portion of this immigrant population had arrived relatively recently.

In Sweden, the period after the Second World War was characterised not only by survivors of the war coming to Sweden, but also by an increase in organised labour immigration from other European countries. This was to fulfil labour-market demands at that time, demonstrating the close link between migration and the labour market in Sweden. Due to a slowdown in the Swedish economy in the 1960s, restrictions on labour migration were introduced and, from the 1970s onwards, immigration changed from mainly labour migrants to refugees, most of whom came from countries outside Europe.

Overall, immigration from countries like Finland, Iran, Iraq, Poland and Somalia have dominated in the past few decades, in addition to recently arrived refugees from Syria. In 2015, Sweden experienced a short period of a substantially higher inflow of migration due to an increase in the number of asylum seekers. This influx led to an intensified debate on migration, which was portrayed as a substantial societal and political challenge. This resulted in concrete changes in migration policies, including more restrictive laws and measures like closed borders, temporary resident permits, and more limited opportunities for family reunification.

Professionals in welfare institutions

Professionals working in welfare institutions are in a powerful position since they are responsible for allocating resources to clients and making decisions on welfare programme placements. As organisational representatives, they are socialised into organisational norms and practices. Their professional identity and attitudes are not only shaped by society at large but also through the organisation they work for. In this way, they are both professionals and individuals with personal beliefs and values.

Swedish welfare institutions are supposed to give equal services to all clients. Yet, welfare professionals' attitudes might, despite organisational norms based on equality, influence their work with migrant clients. To illustrate the effects of personal beliefs, one can imagine a professional's personal attitude as a backpack they carry to work. This backpack is not left outside the office in the morning, but stays with the professional throughout the

working day and therefore can also influence their professional decision-making.

Empirical research about Swedish welfare institutions shows that clients being perceived as stereotypically “Swedish” have a higher likelihood of being recommended for labour market programmes, indicating that racial biases of welfare professionals can result in negative outcomes for minority clients.

Organisational processes shape attitudes too

Attitudes are not only shaped by personal beliefs but also by organisational conditions and especially by structural constraints. Organisational forms and practices play a role in the production of values, but similarly relevant is the intersection of racial biases and organisational constraints, like workload. A new line of research has attempted to capture these intersections in a Danish context. It was found that unintentional prejudice is more likely to influence service provision when professionals have a higher workload. This implies that organisational conditions are important “amplifiers” or “reducers” of existing biases, which may, in turn, influence welfare outcomes. The effect of racial prejudice might therefore be subject to change based on organisational conditions.

This line of research makes use of both a psychological *and* a sociological perspective. Psychological reasoning can be used when referring to the mechanisms linked to organisational conditions, such as coping mechanisms. In this context, for example, stereotypes are used to cope with the limited time available to deal with complex client demands. A sociological perspective is more likely to overlook these organisational conditions when scrutinising unequal treatment of migrant clients. From this perspective, symbolic boundaries that one can find in society are prominent, such as when professionals simply rely on “learned” social categories in order to make sense of their work with migrant clients. Both ways of scrutinising inequalities in organisations should be considered.

Bridging relevant research areas

It is neither organisational conditions nor personal attitudes alone that shape the practical work with migrants in welfare institutions; it is the synthesised empirical knowledge across these two scholarly fields, and a combination of the two different theoretical approaches that allows us to provide a more accurate understanding of a professional’s way of working.

The interrelations between the micro, meso and macro levels are crucial for understanding the dual dynamic between organisational and personal factors. It is relational at the individual level, where stereotypes and prejudice

arise through interactions. The process by which racial categories are created is in turn related to, first, the larger societal level and “learned” social categories and, second, the organisational level where categories are shaped, inhabited and transformed through organisational processes. These organisational processes are marked by their own cultural rules and the organisation’s own ordered reality, with the power to shape aspects of social interaction and norms.

Seeing racial bias as something which is shaped by welfare institutions can also provide a better understanding of how these organisations are formed and function. Paying more attention to organisations (that is, the meso-level) allows the various mechanisms leading to the (re)production of inequality to be revealed further.

Welfare institutions and migration – thinking forward

The organisational context is a vital component in understanding attitude formation among professionals and this is valid beyond the context of welfare institutions. By intersecting organisational factors with personal ones (such as attitudes), we can learn more about how attitudes play out in concrete contexts and under specific organisational conditions. Future research should focus on building theory that pays attention to the intersection of individual and organisational factors.

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Access to Justice in the Nordic Welfare States and the Issue of Digitisation

13 October 2023 by Bettina Lemann Kristiansen

Summary

The availability of legal redress through the courts is considered crucial for people's "access to justice". While the Nordic countries all have legal systems based on their constitutions and the rule of law, there is also a tradition for administrative bodies to deal with certain types of redress rather than the courts. This is largely due to the historical development of the Nordic welfare states, which has led to centralised administrative systems that are easier to digitalise. Although digitalisation undoubtedly brings many benefits, it also entails a series of problems from an access to justice perspective.

Access to justice is closely related to the state and the rule of law. Perhaps the most significant feature of access to justice is the role of an independent court system in maintaining the core values and ideals of the rule of law. The courts ensure that the legislature stays within the framework of a country's constitution, and access to a fair trial is a fundamental – even a human – right. The current constitutions from the Nordic countries are as follows:

- Denmark: *Grundloven*, from 1849 and last amended in 1953.
- Finland: *Suomen perustuslaki*, from 1919 and last amended in 2000.
- Iceland: *Stjórnarskrá lýðveldisins Íslands*, from 1944 and last amended in 2013.
- Norway: *Kongeriket Norges Grunnlov*, from 1814 and last amended in 2014.
- Sweden: *Sveriges författning*, from 1809 and last amended in 2014.

Access to justice

The concept of access to justice is not always clear and unequivocal, particularly as the understanding of both “justice” and “access” varies over time and context, such as across different countries’ legal systems. Access to justice does, however, include a series of fundamental issues that are of great importance not only to lawyers and judges, but also to all citizens and society as a whole, and there are some core principles that are significant the world over.

“Justice” usually includes elements such as equality before the law, which means that all citizens must be treated equally. Another important aspect is fairness, which refers to citizens being treated fairly when they are party to a court case or subject to decisions made by one of the state’s administrative bodies. Fairness includes both substantive fairness, in the sense of the court or another body reaching the legally correct decision (the result), and procedural fairness, which entails ensuring adherence to a series of legal requirements for how concrete cases are handled, such as the right to be heard. Justice also presupposes respect for a citizen’s individual rights including constitutional freedoms such as the freedom of speech, freedom of assembly or the freedom of belief. Courts are generally perceived as the primary safeguard against a government’s abuse of power. Thus, “access” to justice is inextricably linked with access to the courts. Citizens must be able to address infringements of rights and defend themselves in criminal proceedings.

In a broader perspective, access to justice is the means through which individuals or groups solve legal problems. This understanding includes various ways of remedying civil wrongs and holding executive power to account. It covers private law disputes between citizens and public law disputes involving citizens and administrative authorities. Access to the courts is still a core element, but review through administrative recourse and different types of boards of appeal or tribunals are also included, such as the various *ankenævn* in Denmark. From a Nordic perspective this broader understanding of the term access to justice is particularly relevant.

Administrative justice in the Nordic welfare states

With the introduction of social security legislation during the first half of the twentieth century came a new form of legal regulation. Welfare regulation was more purpose-oriented than traditional forms of regulation, and administrative authorities gained a more prominent role in society. Framework legislation and discretionary rules became increasingly widespread. This type of regulation had a greater degree of variability; there was consider-

able scope when it came to making concrete assessments, and administrative authorities had much more discretion. These developments entailed fundamental changes that affected the relationship between the authorities and citizens, as well as the perception of access to justice. For ordinary citizens and their everyday lives, public administrative authorities began to play a much more central role than the courts. A practical example could be citizens who disagreed with the level of housing benefit they received, or the amount of tax they had to pay.

This new type of legal regulation administered by public bodies, which still exists in many contexts, made it significantly more difficult for citizens to know and foresee their legal position, raising important issues relating to access to justice. For example, often citizens could not fully know their legal position until a decision had been made, and contact with, as well as guidance from, public administrative authorities became indispensable for citizens' access to justice. In a welfare state context, where public authorities play a decisive role in many citizens' everyday lives, and where legal rights presuppose that authorities make a decision or are otherwise involved, access to justice in administrative matters takes on central importance.

In Sweden an administrative court system was developed, that is, a special court for administrative cases between a citizen and the state or other public authorities. In Denmark and Norway access to administrative recourse displaces the role of the court in securing access to justice to a significant degree. This means that citizens can appeal an administrative decision to another administrative body, while elsewhere in the world, like the UK for example, this appeal would likely be to a court.

Administrative redress has a very long history in Denmark, dating back to the nineteenth century. With the rise of the welfare state, the administrative system of recourse has been expanded, and over the years numerous complaint and appeal bodies, as well as boards of appeal, have been established. Thus, access to justice in a welfare state – especially in Denmark – is closely connected to the case processing of the administrative authorities, both in regard to first instance decisions and also in regard to redress (the appeal process). This system lends itself to the digitalisation of legal processes, which are already highly structured via a central system.

Access to justice and digitalisation in Denmark

Digitalisation comprises various measures and actions in an access to justice context, including the digitalisation of communication, automated decision-making within case management, and digitalised data collection through sensors, such as, automatic registration of data via instruments measuring

motion, and logging speed, wind, temperature and insulin levels. However, digitalisation often leads to changes in the organisation of legal processes and legislation, and thus has a fundamental impact on society. For example, contact between the administrative authorities in Denmark and citizens is to a great extent digitalised. As a rule of thumb, all communication in Denmark from the public sector is sent digitally to a citizen's electronic mailbox (e-Boks). In fact, Danish political parties reached a parliamentary agreement in 2018 that legislators must make sure that all legislation is adapted to the digital age. This means that legislation must be designed in a way that enables digitalisation. The system of public administration in Denmark is a clear frontrunner in terms of digitalisation and has already undergone significant changes.

Administrative case processing is often based on standard forms with increasing use of software robots and digital self-service provision. The consequence of this is that citizens are expected to find out for themselves what their legal rights are and how they can pursue these using the various digital solutions, predominantly different types of online platform. Even the decisions themselves are increasingly digitalised and automated, meaning that many are made by IT systems without human intervention. Now AI-based solutions are utilised more and more; the AI system is trained on data from earlier cases, and a proposal for a decision is made on the basis of an assessment of the likely outcome based on these previous cases. In this way, AI-generated outcomes are based on probability calculus.

The digitalised welfare state strengthens access to justice on some parameters but weakens it on others. Digitalisation undoubtedly brings with it many benefits both for the authorities and for ordinary people. Citizens get easier and faster access to information, and arguably better access to the authorities, since they can contact them regardless of office hours. As for case processing, digitalisation can help ensure that the information relevant to the case is obtained from the start, increasing the likelihood of an informed outcome, for example. People can also follow their case proceedings digitally and thus may have a better understanding of what is going on. Finally, digitalised case handling can provide more uniform decisions.

On the other hand, digitalisation also entails disadvantages from an access to justice perspective. There may be a lack of or inadequate compliance with even basic administrative legal rules and principles. The traditional approach, which includes the participation of the person bringing the case, is abandoned in digital processes to some extent, potentially undermining the right to be heard – a right which also ensures a factually correct basis for any decision. Another fundamental procedural right is the right to have a

reasoned decision, thus ensuring a person bringing or involved in a case can fully understand the reasons behind a decision that impacts them. With digital processes, the reasoning is usually standardised. In respect to AI-based solutions, the citizens (as well as the authorities) cannot always follow what is going on as the neural networks that constitute the systems used are difficult or indeed impossible to discern. Additionally, the uniformity of the decisions can be contrary to the basic idea in much of welfare legislation which builds on the concrete needs of each individual citizen.

Furthermore, the fundamental procedural right to complain about a decision and obtain possible redress through an independent body becomes more challenging as administrative authorities are inevitably part of the state, unlike the independent court system. Finally, there is a clear risk of digitalisation leading to increased inequality regarding access to public services. Different parts of the population experience different kinds of challenges with digitalised systems. This can constitute a barrier to some receiving the services to which they are entitled. There is therefore a real risk that social inequality is reinforced through digital inequality.

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The “Danish Model” and Food Delivery Platforms

11 March 2022 by Laura Scheele

Summary

Most food delivery riders fall outside the scope of the “Danish model”, its comprehensive system of social welfare and the industrial relations model where trade unions bargain collectively for a large proportion of workers. Steps are needed to protect riders in Denmark, although the degree of insecurity and contractual terms vary. Domestic and EU developments and a collective bargaining agreement at Just Eat in the early 2020s may give riders a reason for optimism.

Riders at the margins of the Danish model

It may be assumed that the Danish model of welfare and industrial relations provides the necessary safeguards to buffer the risks of precarity that are commonplace in the global food delivery industry (or the platform economy at large). After all, Denmark is known for its comprehensive public health and social welfare system that aims to protect citizens from the risks of unemployment, sickness, disability and old age. This safety net allows Denmark to have a flexible labour market with comparatively low levels of employment protection – meaning employers are relatively free to hire and fire. At the same time, Danish employment law is governed by collective bargaining agreements, individual employment contracts and case law. While a minimum set of statutory rules exists and applies to almost all salaried employees, rules regarding pay and working conditions depend on collective bargaining agreements or individual employment contracts.

The active role of the Danish social partners (the trade unions and employers) has meant high collective bargaining coverage – even as high as 73 per cent in the private sector, according to information from 2012 provided by the Confederation of Danish Employers. The system therefore generally leads to regulated wages, access to sick leave, occupational pensions as well as full pay during parental leave for the majority of employees.

But this also means that non-standard forms of employment, commonly used by food delivery platforms where there is little or no collective bargaining, have little or no employment-related social protection. Many food delivery riders do not even enjoy the minimum levels of protection guaranteed by, for example, the Danish Act on Salaried Employees (*Funktionærloven*). Without collective bargaining agreements, they face the full brunt of the Danish model's flexible labour market: no minimum wage, no set maximum working hours, no provisions for paid sick leave or holiday, flexible regulations about dismissal, and no agreed rules about informing and consulting workers or about strikes and lockouts. Riders are therefore likely to find themselves at the margins of the Danish model with far less protection than most employees in Denmark.

Bogus self-employment

The majority of food delivery platforms in Denmark still rely on sub-contracting, that is, hiring riders as “partners” rather than employees. The self-employed status stands in contrast to the lived experiences of riders who work for the same platform repeatedly or even daily. They are usually closely supervised through algorithmic management in terms of task assignment and performance tracking, and receive payments through the platform's app or website.

Food delivery platforms such as Wolt and Hungry.dk define themselves as “digital intermediaries” instead of employers with managerial control. They are thereby not legally bound to fulfil (costly) employer responsibilities such as safeguarding health and safety measures, sick pay, holiday pay, insurance or social security contributions. Critics regard this as “bogus self-employment”, a practice common in the global food delivery sector which has detrimental effects on the protection of riders' social and labour rights.

Consequently, supposedly “self-employed” riders bear the responsibility for their own employment-related social security. In theory, riders can take out a voluntary insurance policy or receive state-financed compensation during sick leave or parental leave as self-employed persons. However, this depends on aspects like whether the rider is registered as self-employed (which is not required unless yearly gross income exceeds 50,000 Danish kroner); how long they have worked as self-employed; how many hours they have worked per week; and, whether their yearly income is high enough to qualify for support.

In most cases, riders will have difficulty meeting all the requirements and would need to set aside a part of their earnings to save up for sick or parental leave, as well as for their pension, insurance contributions or holidays. This

is difficult considering the low and volatile earnings of riders. Self-employed riders are further disadvantaged in the Danish welfare system as eligibility criteria for other welfare programmes have become stricter and are also increasingly bound to factors like employment status, a minimum set of working hours or length of formal employment (see Mailand & Larsen, 2018). This leads to unequal access to and overall lower levels of social protection.

Other forms of low wage and non-standard employment

Some riders are actually employed, but forms of non-standard employment are used by Just Eat, for example: “on-call” work contracts for regular or marginal part-time work (less than 30 hours a week and less than 15 hours a week respectively). These employment contracts give riders employee status but can still lead to disadvantages in terms of social protection. Fulfilling the increasingly tight entitlement rules of welfare programmes can be particularly difficult for employed riders who work fewer hours than standard employees, especially when combined with temporary contracts and low earnings, and they may not meet minimum income requirements for eligibility to unemployment insurance benefits. With regards to contribution-based social protection programmes, such as occupational pensions, riders’ non-standard working hours and low hourly pay also translate into income vulnerability in the future. This is particularly problematic considering the growing importance of occupational pensions compared with the Danish state pension.

Low sectoral collective bargaining coverage

Improving working conditions through a collective bargaining agreement at some platform companies, such as Wolt and Hungry.dk, appears to be virtually impossible because of their self-employed status. This is in part due to EU antitrust legislation: self-employed riders have been considered “undertakings” and therefore agreements on “prices” (wages) among self-employed riders could be considered cartel-like behaviour “distorting” market competition.

Negotiating collective bargaining is nevertheless possible in certain circumstances. Danish competition authorities may grant self-employed service providers immunity to competition laws when it is demonstrated that they “perform services under the same terms as employees, at the same entity and under the instruction of the employer whilst performing the tasks” (see Munkholm & Schjøler, 2018). One such exemption was granted in 2018 for the first collective agreement at the cleaning service platform Hilfr (see Ilsøe,

2020). However, this case can be considered the exception rather than the norm. Trade union efforts have been impeded by union-busting by some platforms and attempts to enter into negotiations with Wolt or Hungry.dk have so far been in vain in Denmark. In this way, Wolt and Hungry.dk challenge the Danish system of industrial relations which relies on the adoption of collective agreements.

The food delivery sector overall shows low collective bargaining coverage for riders in Denmark. Just Eat entered into a collective bargaining agreement negotiated by the Danish Chamber of Commerce (*Dansk Erhverv*) and the trade union 3F in October 2021. This was an important watershed to ensure protection of the most essential social and labour rights as well as a stable, regulated income for Just Eat riders. However, Just Eat appears to be the market leader as it had circa 70 per cent of the market share in 2020 according to an article in the newspaper *Berlingske*. However, it employs fewer riders in all of Denmark (circa 600 riders in 2020) than Wolt (circa 6 per cent market share), which in the capital region alone employs around 1,500 riders. At Just Eat, only ten per cent of its total business in Denmark is based on its own deliveries, as the majority of deliveries is organised by restaurants themselves. The collective bargaining agreement therefore could not cover all riders active on the Just Eat platform. Hungry.dk and Wolt, which have a larger workforce than Just Eat, remain without a collective bargaining agreement, so the effect of this new agreement was marginal.

Occupation-specific risks

Food delivery riders may also face occupation-specific risks which are common in the industry including:

- low job mobility due to little or no access to training and career development, keeping riders in a “dead-end” job;
- income insecurity due to performance-based earnings and bonus-systems, leading to low and often volatile incomes;
- risk of exposure to traffic accidents, heightened through performance pressure from algorithmic management and control (tying earnings to the speed of deliveries); and,
- barriers to establishing bodies for worker representation and unionisation, which include the lack of a common workplace; a high turnover; lack of familiarity with local unions and labour law among immigrant riders; and, the disparity in interests and membership incentives between side-job riders and full-time riders.

Looking ahead – a buffer to riders’ risks of precarity?

The collective bargaining agreement at Just Eat was an important first step towards improving riders’ social and labour rights in Denmark. It regulated a sectoral minimum wage, overtime bonus, holiday pay, sick pay, wage compensation during parental leave, occupational pension and workers’ interest representation through shop stewards. It showed that over time (and legal employment status), the Danish model could positively shape riders’ rights when trade unions step into new, previously unorganised sectors. Just Eat’s collective bargaining agreement marked a shift towards a new sectoral standard. However, as long as Hungry.dk and Wolt – whose rider fleets outnumber Just Eat’s – rely on solo self-employed riders and make no effort towards collective bargaining, the majority of riders in Denmark remain firmly outside the “Danish model”, without rights otherwise considered the norm for most Danish employees.

Considering regulatory developments, however, pressure on Hungry.dk and Wolt to discontinue bogus self-employment increased after a decision in January 2022 by the Danish tax authorities (SKAT) which ruled in favour of Wolt rider’s employment status and meant that Wolt (rather than its riders) has to pay taxes and labour market contributions. However, only the riders’ tax profile has changed to “employee” and riders remain classified as “self-employed” with regards to their social and labour rights. Additionally, an EU directive came into force in December 2024 to improve working conditions on digital labour platforms, including a “rebuttable presumption of employment” that could lead to presuming and classifying riders as employees instead of self-employed if there are “facts indicating direction and control” as defined by national laws, collective agreements or EU case law (Directive (EU) 2024/2831). This might mean the end of “food delivery as usual” on platforms – although much will depend on EU member states’ transposition of the Directive into national law and platform companies’ continuous efforts to find regulatory loopholes.

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Female Writers of the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough

14 June 2024 by Janet Garton

Summary

The Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough was a literary movement from the 1870s until the turn of the century. It saw writers demand changes in the rigid social structures, including those that repressed women. Pioneering women writers across Scandinavia had been trying to expose the unequal life chances of men and women since at least the 1820s. The urgency of reform gained momentum through Modern Breakthrough writing and the call for greater autonomy was taken up by many women writers. These included Amalie Skram's studies of double moral standards in her novels of marriage, Victoria Benedictsson's explorations of the problem of female desire and Adda Ravnkilde's depictions of women's difficult path to self-determination.

The Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough was a literary movement which is usually reckoned to begin in 1872, when the Danish critic Georg Brandes (1842–1927) published his lectures on *Hovedstrømninger i det 19. Århundredes Litteratur* (Main Currents in Nineteenth-Century Literature). Brandes called for a socially engaged literature which would deal with contemporary issues in a realistic manner, replacing the more romantic and idealistic tradition of the mid-century. In many ways Brandes' work was a catalyst for what was already happening, as writers like Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832–1910) in Norway and J.P. Jacobsen (1847–85) in Denmark were addressing the need for reform in laws and customs. Demands for change in the social conventions which repressed women were bolstered by the growing movements for women's rights, and women writers were not slow to add their voices to the calls for reform.

Even earlier in the nineteenth century, pioneering women writers were drawing attention to the unequal life chances of men and women. In 1854–55 Norwegian writer Camilla Collett (1813–95) published *Amtmandens Døttre* (The District Governor's Daughters), which focussed on the limited options available even to girls growing up in relative prosperity; either they got married – ideally but not necessarily for love – or they stayed at home as spinster aunts-come-housekeepers. The Swede Fredrika Bremer (1801–65) too, in *Familien H**** (1830–31, *The Colonel's Family*), produced an entertaining story of family life, which through the shrewd observations of the housekeeper Beata Workaday portrayed the dire effects of repressed passion on silenced women.

The Modern Breakthrough

Many women writers in Scandinavia contributed through their fiction and their journalism to the growing demands for social reform, and for changes in the law to give women more rights over their own property and their own lives. Copenhagen was to all intents and purposes the literary capital of both Denmark and Norway during the nineteenth century, and that was where the works of Modern Breakthrough writers from both countries were most often published.

Norway

Examples from Norway include Aasta Hansteen (1824–1908), whose vigorous campaigning attracted censure and ridicule in her early life; and Magdalene Thoresen (1819–1903), who managed to support herself by her writing, and in *Billeder fra Midnatsolens Land* (1884–86, *Pictures from the Land of the Midnight Sun*) penned finely observed portraits of women's life in rural Norway. The early novel of Hulda Garborg (1862–1934), *Et frit Forhold* (1892, *An Open Relationship*), follows the struggles of a young shop assistant through seduction, pregnancy and the eventual death of her child, demonstrating that it is possible to find the strength to survive even such tragedy.

Denmark

In Denmark there were several women writers who foregrounded women as independent subjects, not mere objects of men's desire or men's power. Apart from Amalie Skram and Adda Ravnkilde (see below), authors less well known to posterity include Olivia Levison (1847–94), who wrote mostly short stories, or *noveller*, in which women's energy and sexual desire is often thwarted by convention and men's inability to respond. Erna Juel-Hansen

(1845–1922) was a pioneer in writing about the lives of financially independent women, for example, in *Terese Kærulf* (1894), at the same time as helping to introduce modern pedagogy into schools and largely supporting her own family. Agnes Henningsen (1868–1962) had a *succès de scandale* with her descriptions of “free love”, stories of women who actively follow their own desires, whatever the costs.

Sweden

Swedish writers were less directly involved in the movement, although some of August Strindberg’s (1849–1912) early works, such as *Röda Rummet* (1879, *The Red Room*), made a vivid case for social reform. Selma Lagerlöf (1858–1940) was a storyteller whose entertaining tales often commented obliquely on the silencing or sidelining of their female characters. The popular playwright Alfhild Agrell (1849–1923) took up contemporary social problems in plays such as *Räddad* (1882, *Saved*), reminiscent of Ibsen’s *Gengangere* (1881, *Ghosts*) in its portrayal of a profligate husband who destroys the lives of his wife and son. Anne-Charlotte Leffler (1849–92) spoke out boldly in support of freedom for women; her play *Sanna Kvinnor* (1883, *True Women*) echoes Agrell’s play in its condemnation of the ruin caused by a dissipated husband. Her most outspoken work is the novel *Kvinnlighet och erotik* (1883, *Femininity and Eroticism*), set in a sensual Italian landscape, in which traditional notions of femininity are contrasted with a woman’s right to explore her own sexuality.

Many of these writers struggled to make a living, and many were forgotten by literary historians until the twentieth-century women’s movement rediscovered them and gave them new prominence in Nordic and national histories of women’s writing. In such a short article it is impossible to examine all who deserve attention, so I have chosen to focus on three, the Danon-Norwegian Amalie Skram, the Swedish Victoria Benedictsson and the Danish Adda Ravnkilde.

Three pioneers of the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough

Amalie Skram (1847–1905) started writing late; it was not until her second marriage to Erik Skram, when she moved to Copenhagen in 1884, that she began to publish novels. Several of her works address the problem of the double standard, which encouraged men to be sexually active whilst expecting their future brides to remain chaste. *Constance Ring* (1885) and *Forraadt* (1892, *Betrayed*) focus on the mismatch between men of the world and the young girls who become their wives without any idea of what marriage involves – often with tragic results for both parties. In *Fru Inés* (1891), set in

Constantinople, the wife in a loveless marriage seeks sexual fulfilment with a younger lover, but on finding herself pregnant becomes trapped in a downward spiral from which there was no escape. *Lucie* (1888) looks at the other side of the coin, with a dancing girl who becomes the mistress of a respectable civil servant; he decides to marry her and make her into a model wife – only to destroy her with his censure.

Skram also wrote an epic story of a peasant family from Western Norway, the four-volume *Hellemyrsfolket* (1887–98, *The People of Hellemyr*), which has often been compared to Zola's naturalist works in its unsparing depiction of grinding poverty and a family's desperate and doomed attempts to escape from the degrading influence of their early environment. It was this work which was most highly rated by critics during her lifetime, and only when feminist writing became an object of study were her "novels of marriage" re-evaluated and became essential reading.

Victoria Benedictsson (1850–88), like Amalie Skram, had married young and unhappily to an elderly widower with five children. She also began writing later and about women whose experiences mirrored her own. Central to her works was the problem of female desire and the conflicts it caused for individual women in a society unwilling to acknowledge its existence. Her first novel *Pengar* (1885, *Money*) tells of how young Selma is persuaded into an unhappy marriage to an older man and later experiences a dawning passion for her cousin Richard. This forbidden desire must be quenched, as she cannot accept it herself, and she rejects his love; but it gives her the strength to leave her marriage and find fulfilment as an artist. The later *Fru Marianne* (1887, *Mistress Marianne*) explores a similar dilemma; Marianne chooses to remain in her marriage and tries to find fulfilment in work and motherhood – but the split in her character remains.

Creative fulfilment was however short-lived for the author, who had only found the space to write when she became unwell and needed to recuperate. In her short periods in Copenhagen she found a circle responsive to her literary aspirations. Her much later published diary, *Stora boken* and *Dag-boken* (*The Big Book* and *The Diary*, written 1882–88) reveals both her development as a writer and her passion for Georg Brandes. Her discovery that her commitment to him was not reciprocated was a major factor in her decision to commit suicide.

Adda Ravnkilde (1862–83) seemed in her early years to have a greater chance of success as an author, being encouraged by her parents to study in Copenhagen, where the ubiquitous Georg Brandes became her mentor. She showed great promise, and her works *Judith Fürste* and *To Fortællinger* (*Two Stories*) were written when she was around 20 years old. These stories are

concerned with the unequal sexual relationships in contemporary society and with women's struggle for self-determination. *Judith Fürste* is the story of a marriage which becomes a power struggle between husband and wife, and ends with the wife's submission – of her own free will.

Female autonomy is finally achieved in the story “Tantaluskvaler” (Torments of Tantalus), where the heroine becomes a writer. Yet the positive message of this novel is somewhat undermined by the fact that its author killed herself shortly after writing it, at the age of 21. A final part of her story is that all three of her manuscripts were published after her death in 1884, after being “shortened and corrected” by male editors – who thus reasserted control over her creativity. What she really wrote we do not know, as all of her original manuscripts have disappeared.

All three of these authors demonstrate the urgency of the need for the reform of society expressed in Modern Breakthrough writing, especially for women, and the difficult and often tragic path to autonomy.

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Cross-country Skiing as a Nordic Media Spectacle

14 August 2024 by Martin Johansson

Summary

The Nordic countries dominated competitive cross-country skiing during the post-war era, but their hegemony was challenged by competitors, mainly from the Soviet Union and European Alpine countries. Since 1990, the media image of cross-country skiing as something innocent and unspoiled has been challenged by commercialisation and doping scandals. Skiing is often associated with narratives of Nordicness, including those of intra-Nordic rivalry between Sweden, Norway and Finland. Male-centred perceptions of Nordic identity within skiing have changed, particularly given the Nordic countries' success in women's cross-country skiing over the last 20 years.

Cross-country skiing gradually declined as an everyday practice in the Nordic region during the twentieth century due to a number of factors, including urbanisation. Although it remains a popular pastime in the region, broadcasts of the sport became increasingly prevalent. While media landscapes have changed enormously since the 1950s, coverage of cross-country skiing has reflected – and even helped to construct – Nordic identity in different ways. Analysing media coverage provides a window into how narratives of “Nordicness” are portrayed and challenged.

Norden's success rate challenged by Soviet and Alpine skiers, 1950 to 1990

The post-war era of cross-country skiing started much as the interwar era had ended, with the Nordic countries dominating the Winter Olympics and the World Ski Championships. Nordic victories were lauded by the Nordic press, who contrasted the sports culture in Norden with that of continental Europe. The press often juxtaposed the democratic and supposedly nature-oriented

Nordic culture with that of the decadent continent, the latter often being female-coded in various ways.

The imagined geography of skiing changed in the 1950s due to two shifts in the cross-country community. First, from 1952 women were allowed to compete in Olympic cross-country events. Then, in 1954, the Soviet athletes entered both the Olympics and the World Championships, and their success throughout the post-war era meant that the days of exclusive Nordic hegemony were gone. Notably, Soviet athletes fared especially well in the women's races, which opened up the possibility for it to be seen as not just a male sport. Still, the scarcity of successful female athletes from the Nordic countries meant that much of the media in Norden continued to see cross-country skiing as something that was connected to a certain kind of Nordic masculinity. While the occasional female Nordic victories were indeed celebrated, they were largely treated as anomalies.

Given the Cold War animosity expressed by many in Norden towards the Soviet Union, it is surprising that post-war Soviet athletes could be linked to Nordic skiing culture. This became especially clear towards the end of the 1960s when the map of cross-country skiing was yet again redrawn, this time by athletes from Europe's Alpine region, such as the Italian Franco Nones who won the 30 km race in the 1968 Olympics. Nordic newspapers treated Nones as an outsider to a much greater extent than his Soviet counterparts. For instance, his being portrayed as the "first non-Nordic Champion" despite previous Soviet victories indicated that the Soviet Union could be perceived as part of a "Northern" universe. In general, both continental and Soviet ascendancy caused Norden's share of cross-country medals to dwindle during the 1970s and 1980s, causing the press, in turn, to indulge in nostalgic visions of a Nordic past that was forever lost.

The ascendancy of Norway, 1980–2001

In the grand narratives of Norwegian skiing, the 1980s constituted a particularly severe period of crisis, despite the country faring only marginally worse than its Nordic neighbours in major events. Firstly, success for the Norwegians mainly occurred in the women's races during this decade and was often overshadowed by discussion about their male counterparts being defeated. Secondly, the winners were predominately Swedes which – according to the logic of Nordic rivalry – made the Norwegian losses particularly painful. Lastly, the stark symbolism of the lack of any Norwegian gold medal in the 1988 Olympics prompted many Norwegians to demand action.

With the 1994 Olympics to be held on home ground in Lillehammer, Norway's Olympic committee in 1989 launched an expansive programme

aimed at restoring Norway's place as a winter sports superpower. These efforts were to bear fruit earlier than expected as Norway went on to win a record number of 20 medals at the 1992 Winter Olympics, nine of which were in cross-country skiing. Similar success at the home games in Lillehammer meant the period embodied a particularly high point in the history of Norwegian self-evaluation. This was also spurred on by what was going on outside the field of sports and the general optimism in Norway about the country's economy and culture.

Unfortunately for the Swedes and Finns, the Norwegian cross-country revival did not translate into a Nordic revival. For Sweden especially, the 1990s were akin to a dark age, and being defeated by both Norway and the Alpine nations reinforced the perception that Sweden was falling behind its western neighbours and a loosely defined "Europe" after the fall of the Berlin wall.

For Finland, disaster struck when, during the 2001 World Ski Championships hosted on home soil in Lahti, anti-doping staff and Finnish police forces revealed that almost all the top Finnish ski stars had been using illegal, performance-enhancing drugs. While Finnish audiences expressed unprecedented grief and shame over the revelations, the shockwaves also spread to Norway and Sweden. Doping was not an unknown phenomenon in the world of cross-country skiing, but a neighbour being caught red-handed clashed heavily with the perceived links between cross-country skiing and an innocent and sound Nordic sports culture. During the years that followed, Finland completely lost its status as a major cross-country skiing nation – especially for the men. For the following 20 years, male intra-Nordic rivalry played out primarily between the Swedes and Norwegians.

Nordic hegemony 2002–2024

The Finnish Lahti debacle was soon followed – and arguably overshadowed – by new doping scandals during the 2002 Olympics, when Spaniard Johann Mühlegg and Russians Larissa Lazutina and Olga Danilova were caught with performance-enhancing substances in their blood samples after having won Olympic medals. These scandals enabled Swedes and Norwegians to position doping firmly as something "non-Nordic", but still produced uproar and grief among the sport's Nordic fans. Inside and outside Norden alike, many believed that the sport urgently needed to change.

In an attempt to reach new television viewers, the International Ski Federation promoted the mass start format. Throughout the twentieth century most races had been decided through individual timing, where each athlete started 30 seconds apart with their own clock running. Mass start saw instead all competitors starting at the same time, with the first one to cross

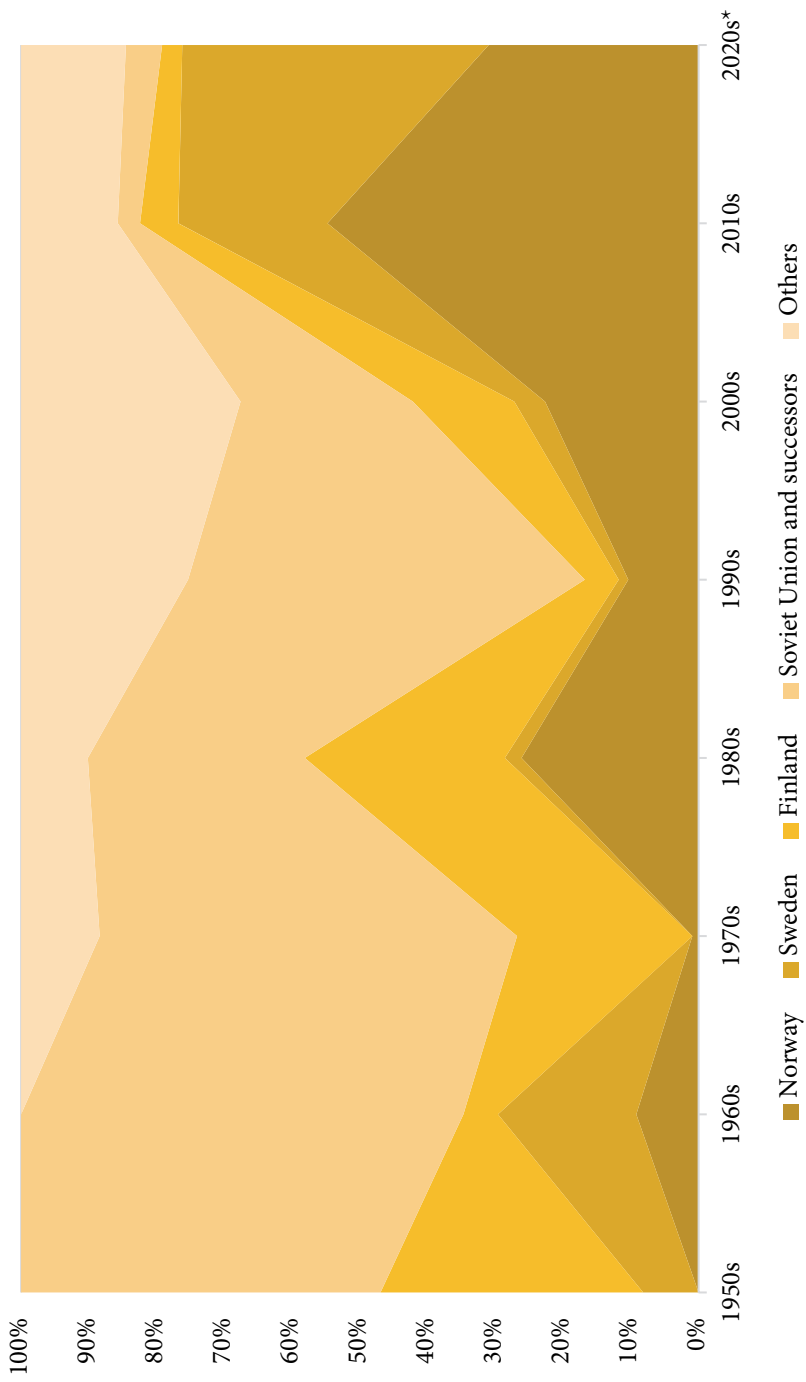
the finish line winning the race. This practice makes it easier for television viewers to follow and understand the competition. The downside of the mass start, however, was that it made it harder for racers to break away from so-called pelotons, meaning that the races often remained close and uneventful up until the final stretch, when explosivity rather than stamina tended to decide the outcome. As such, mass starts ran counter to notions of perseverance and individual agency in the skier – attributes that were allegedly emblematic of a Nordic (male) skier – and it was in Norden that the mass start found its strongest detractors. However, the International Ski Federation remained adamant that mass starts were the future of cross-country skiing and openly cited its interest in attracting viewers from continental Europe as the reason.

Ironically, mass starts did not “de-nordicise” the outcome of the races. Instead, mass start races in the 2010s would be dominated by Nordic skiers as Norway continued its hegemony and Sweden started to win medals again during the 2000s and 2010s. From 2009 in particular, the rivalry between various Swedes and Norwegian mass start specialist Petter Northug became a recurring feature at championships and in the media. While it was the Norwegians who mostly emerged victorious, it sparked an enormous interest in both countries.

Nordification of women’s cross-country skiing

While Nordic and Norwegian dominance in men’s cross-country skiing during the 2010s was not a novelty, the results in the women’s races were truly unprecedented. The Soviet Union and its successor states had remained the superpowers of women’s cross-country skiing up until the doping scandals of 2002. After that year, however, Norwegian skiers like Marit Björgen and Therese Johaug began to dominate the podiums in a way that no other female athlete – Nordic or beyond – had done before.

Then, in 2010, Sweden, previously undistinguished in women’s cross-country skiing, got its first gold medal in 40 years. That winter, Charlotte Kalla’s victory paved the way for a new, even more successful generation of female cross-country skiers. Duels between Swedish and Norwegian women skiers came to feature heavily in media narratives, and Nordic rivalry could no longer be said to be exclusively about men. The feminisation of Nordic skiing, or rather the Nordification of women’s cross-country skiing, continues to challenge, and to a certain extent appropriate, age-old visions of the connection between skiing, competition, masculinity and Nordic identity.



Graph 1: Share of weighted Olympic and World Championship medals (women only) per decade from 1950–2025. A gold medal is awarded twice the weight of a silver medal, while a silver medal is awarded twice the weight of a bronze medal. *represents ongoing decade (updated in 2025).

Cross-country skiing and Nordic identity

Due to its ability to embody notions of nature, history, geography and physicality through media narratives, cross-country skiing lends meaning to Nordic identity, perhaps even to a larger extent than some of the sport's proponents might wish. For those who would like the sport to become a more global phenomenon, it must be frustrating to see the increase in Nordic victories during the twenty-first century.

Whether this re-emergence is due to doping revelations, Norwegian training programmes or simply a lack of interest elsewhere remains debatable, but it cannot be explained without taking the constitutive potential of Nordic rivalry into account. Put another way, it seems that the yearning to become the most “Nordic” by defeating your neighbour in cross-country skiing provides Nordic countries with a particular kind of impetus that other nations may lack.

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“Socialist” Suicide in Scandinavia: An Historical View of a Common Myth

28 November 2019 by Byron Zachary Rom-Jensen

Summary

High rates of suicide are often connected with the Nordic countries and their “socialist” policies. Interest in high suicide rates in Scandinavia can be traced back to at least the 1960s when foreign observers attempted either to undermine or legitimise the welfare states in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. These characterisations forced Scandinavian commentators to respond in diverse ways, sometimes invoking the spirit of regional solidarity against criticism from outside the region, other times acting competitively. In the process, the enduring myth of the extraordinarily “suicidal” Scandinavian citizen was born.

Suicide plays a key role in the Scandinavian states’ international image, an intriguing paradox given their concurrent reputation for prosperity and stability. In this image, suicide is often purportedly linked with the political structures of the Nordic countries, especially the existence of a universal, redistributive welfare state.

Drawing upon this image in a 2015 article, the *New York Post* sought to convince Americans about the undesirability of Scandinavian political lessons given the countries’ issues with alcoholism, use of anti-depressants and suicide. This view posits suicide as the natural outcome when individual freedom and initiative are sacrificed for social and economic security, making suicide a particularly Nordic phenomenon to the extent that these countries are still treated as being uniquely “socialist”, usually in contrast to the Anglo-American countries.

Myth and reality

The circulation of this dreadful image has led commentators to frequently question the Nordic countries' high rank in happiness surveys. Yet most studies do not indicate a particularly strong tendency towards suicide in the Nordic region. In OECD data on suicide rates from 2014 to 2017, the Nordic countries appear around or under the median, with only Finland in the top – at number ten. In all five Nordic countries – with the possible exception of Iceland, where a small populace leads to a great deal of annual variance – suicide rates have fallen over the last 40 years.

These statistics have not unravelled the image of suicidal Scandinavians. Suicide is certainly an important public health issue in the Nordic region, especially for vulnerable groups like teenagers, the elderly and LGBTQ+ individuals. Loneliness, often misunderstood and undiagnosed, and addiction to drugs and alcohol are furthermore major contributors to suicide rates and extremely complicated to resolve. Yet, struggles with stress, isolation, and addiction highlights that Scandinavian suicide cases are not special: the causes are often universal, and rates in these countries are neither particularly high nor low. However, the focus on these themes in a Nordic context suggests the image of Scandinavian suicide has taken on a reality independent of, and even in contrast to, actual conditions – ergo, a myth.

The myth of socialist Scandinavian suicide dates back at least a half century. Self-perpetuating and difficult to disprove completely, this myth has the ability to influence how outsiders view the Nordic region – as well as how Nordic citizens view themselves.

Reputation for suicide takes hold

Before the twentieth century, perceptions about the causes and acceptability of suicide fluctuated in Scandinavia. In the Norse eddas, the institution of honour regulated attitudes towards suicide, which was seen as an acceptable response to “the shame of not fulfilling an expected duty”. Viking-era permissiveness contrasted with the Christian ethics of the Middle Ages, where suicide was considered a moral failing and socially unacceptable. This conception of suicide as a wicked act linked with other elements of vice, most notably the consumption of alcohol, encouraged nineteenth-century Scandinavian governments to measure suicide rates as a means of assessing immoral activity. However, the censoring of suicide began to change in the pre-modern era with the maturation of more scientific norms, which encouraged a view of suicide as the product of a medical disorder and consequently curable.

In the early twentieth century the Scandinavian countries gained a reputation for being particularly suicidal. To some extent, this reflected reality as

suicide rates increased in Scandinavia – or more accurately in Denmark and Sweden – from the 1930s onwards and at a higher rate than in other countries. Culturally, the films of Ingmar Bergman in the 1940s and 1950s also gave international moviegoers access to bleak and pessimistic images of Sweden, which fit well with a supposed regional propensity to suicide. However, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that this image became politically charged.

The early twentieth century witnessed the development and alteration of Scandinavia's international profile. While the depression-era desperation of the 1930s led many to fawn over the economic and political stability of these "middle way" societies, a countermovement took hold in the 1950s, especially amongst conservative politicians and journalists.

Scandinavian social services in this period expanded, as social democratic governments created mandatory and voluntary programmes to equitably redistribute resources and guarantee social services like housing, education and pensions. In response, conservative rhetoric, both inside and outside the region, increasingly characterised the Scandinavian countries as welfare states gone amok. According to such portrayals, the result was a rise in "welfare criminality", as the conformity and uniformity of the welfare state drove desperate citizens to acts of defiance: petty theft, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide. The latter was justified by the higher recorded rates of suicide in countries like Denmark and Sweden – although notably not in Norway – than in the United States or the United Kingdom.

The rise of "socialistic" suicide in the mid-twentieth century

United States President Dwight Eisenhower captured this new dystopic vision of Scandinavia during the final year of his presidency in 1960 while supporting his Vice President Richard Nixon's presidential campaign. As a means of decrying the Democrats' planned expansion of government programmes, Eisenhower lobbed a vague denouncement at "the experiment of almost complete paternalism in a friendly European country" while speaking at a Republican National Committee Breakfast, in Chicago in July. Thanks to the country's "socialistic philosophy," the "rate of suicide has gone up almost unbelievably and I think they were almost the lowest nation in the world for [sic] that. Now, they have more than twice our rate." (Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Remarks at the Republican National Committee Breakfast, Chicago, Illinois," *The American Presidency Project*, 27 July, 1960). A similar fate, Eisenhower implied, awaited Americans if they strayed from the "middle of the road" into the "gutters" of socialistic experimentation, presumably by voting for John F. Kennedy.

Although not the first to express a connection between suicide and the Scandinavian welfare state, Eisenhower's prominent position ensured it became an international sensation. Initially, Scandinavians responded with solidaristic messages that sought to refute what was viewed as an attack on the entire Nordic region. When the Danish newspaper *Berlingske Aftenavis* put together a list of possible candidates that would fit the "friendly European country" in an article called "Eisenhower i Vinden" (Eisenhower in the wind), it concluded that the president could be referring to Sweden, Denmark, Norway, or Iceland. Scandinavian leaders responded with indignation, as Swedish Prime Minister Tage Erlander defended the politics of Sweden, Denmark and Norway, while Norwegian Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen called for an intervention by the US Congress. Such solidaristic responses exposed a belief in the shared international profile of the region.

Solidarity did not last long. Soon after the statement, Scandinavian reporters began comparing suicide rates and "socialistic" tendencies in the three Scandinavian countries to determine the *true* target of Eisenhower's vitriol. The reports took on a flavour of attempting to find the most suicidal Scandinavians. Eventually, a general consensus was reached that Eisenhower was referring to Sweden, which led to frequent rebuttals from Swedish politicians and media figures for years afterwards.

Socialist suicide would remain a compelling piece of imagery for foreigners seeking examples of the consequences of the welfare state. In a 2005 book, American political scientist Richard Rose credited Eisenhower's speech with helping to prevent the importation of Swedish-style social democracy to the USA. Enhancing the suicide myth was a mid-century Scandinavian exoticism. In 1968, the image captivated audiences watching the American trailer to the Italian mondo film *Sweden: Heaven and Hell*, which promised: "See the Stockholm strip, where Sweden's liberated youth, bored with sex, bored with drugs, bored with life itself, drop out...for good." The narration, accompanied by an image of a sprawling woman having ostensibly jumped to her death, bundled the suicide myth as part of the (outlandish) repercussions of an exaggerated welfare state.

Blaming the mothers

Different voices also emerged during the 1960s, including those aiming to rebut the socialist suicide thesis. In 1964, Herbert Hendin, a US psychologist, published *Suicide and Scandinavia: A Psychoanalytic Study of Culture and Character*, which went on to become a foundational work on suicide in northern Europe. The first attempt at a comparative examination of the role of national characteristics in suicide across Scandinavia, Hendin intended his

book to disprove that Scandinavian suicide was linked to “character defects” of social democracy as argued by “opponents of economic planning and social welfare measures”. Instead, Hendin proposed that the Nordic states’ various psychosocial characteristics defined their proclivity to suicide.

According to him, Danish mothers, having driven their husbands out of the child-rearing process, instilled guilt and dependency in their children, making Danes vulnerable to loss and fantasies of gratification after death. Swedes likewise suffered from “too much maternal control”, but also maternal rejection, as Swedish mothers demanded independent children in order to pursue their own careers. The result was emotional distance amongst Swedes, who turned to sexual contact to bridge the gap. Norway, which boasted a lower suicide rate, avoided such extremes by maintaining a “view of the woman’s role as that of a mother rather than a wife”, making for closer relationships, less dependency and greater emotional freedom.

While Hendin disputed that the welfare state led to suicide, his book credited social and economic security with reinforcing suicidal tendencies. In Denmark, the expansive social programmes fit with a Danish “desire to be taken care of”, leading to a lack of competitiveness and individual responsibility. Meanwhile, Swedish government sponsored daycare contributed to the separation anxiety of its citizens, who lost contact with mothers pursuing individual freedoms. Hendin thus indirectly blamed the country’s initiative to bring women into the workforce for the absence of “good motherhood” and the suicidal tendencies of its citizens, even while expressing hope that these institutions could exist without the psychological cost.

Hendin’s book made a worldwide splash upon its release, winning the Association for Psychoanalytical Medicine’s 1964 book award and being invoked by conservative critics like British writer Roland Huntford to explain how the same society that led to the welfare state also pushed guilt upon its inhabitants.

Hendin’s book also left a mark on the self-understanding of Nordic citizens. The Norwegian translation of the book lured readers with a provocative question on its front cover: “Why do we commit far fewer suicides than the Danes or the Swedes?” (*Hvorfor begår vi langt færre selvmord enn danskene og svenskene?*). Conversely, Danes responded negatively to Hendin’s assertions by trying to discredit Norwegian statistics. Leftist newspaper *Information*, for example, implied that Norway had as many suicides as Denmark but did not report them as such (“Danmarks Rygte” (Denmark’s reputation), 25 February 1964). Similarly, on the political right, newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* claimed Danish citizens were in fact more satisfied with

life than their Norwegian counterparts (see “Litterært Selvmord” (Literary suicide), 25 March 1964).

While national ego trumped regional fellowships, Danish journalists were also willing to turn their pens against the United States. Hendin’s inaccurate reporting, *Information* concluded, was due to Americans’ obsession with the Scandinavian countries and their welfare states. In any case, “well-disciplined and well-raised” Scandinavian children were surely better than those “small monsters” found in the US, as reported in “Skyldfølelse og Selvmord” (Guilt and suicide) in Danish newspaper *Aktuelt*, 11 January 1961.

Scandinavian suicide today

The influences of the 1960s on the Scandinavian suicide myth reverberate today, both directly and indirectly, within the international reputations of the Nordic countries. Eisenhower’s condemnation of the socialist state is regularly included in portrayals of suicide in Scandinavia, while the region retains a “socialist” label amongst conservatives. Meanwhile, the idea that career-driven women in Sweden contribute to suicide amongst their children remains a way of criticising both the welfare state and the Nordic countries’ promotion of a dual-breadwinner household. And while international portrayals of socialist suicide usually no longer induce widespread rejoinders, the events of the 1960s remain a demonstration of the extent that foreign opinions can spark Scandinavian acts of solidarity and disassociation.

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Children's Broadcasting in the Nordic Region, 1960–1990

28 June 2023 by Helle Strandgaard Jensen & Nicola Witcombe

Summary

Children's broadcasting in the Nordic countries in this period was characterised by seeing the child as a competent citizen in their own right and the philosophy that children have their own culture, separate from adults, and should be empowered to question authority. The US show *Sesame Street*, which started in 1969, was ground-breaking and each of the Nordic Broadcasting Corporations considered buying it. While several adapted versions were aired in some of the Nordic countries, the *Sesame Street* team's approach to education and the child-adult relationship was ultimately deemed too different for a combined Nordic *Sesame Street* to be commissioned.

The child as a competent citizen

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a change in the way children were perceived in the Nordic countries. Although approaches and policies differed across each country, children came to be seen more as competent citizens in their own right.

This sea change came about for various reasons, but the cultural revolution of 1968 was decisive. In response to this – and following the publication of Gunilla Ambjörnsson's book *Skräpkultur åt barnen* (1968, Trash culture for children) – there was debate about children's culture across Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Some believed that equality and welfare for all, the classic focus of the 1968 movement, also extended to children. In her book, Ambjörnsson criticised virtually all the products available to Swedish children, arguing that historical and contemporary plays, literature, television programmes and films all failed to give them a handle on reality and thus did not take them seriously as individuals.

As a result of these debates, in 1969 the Nordic Council of Ministers organised a conference in Sweden entitled "Children and Culture", where ten principles were formulated. They stressed above all children's equal worth as

human beings and their right to be treated as such in all aspects of life. Children's interests should be taken seriously, value should be placed on children's culture (their way of living), and they should participate in making decisions over their own lives.

The people who worked in children's television at the national broadcasting corporations (SR in Sweden, NRK in Norway, YLE in Finland, RÚV in Iceland, and DR in Denmark) were also influenced by the idea of the child as a competent citizen. Many of them attended the 1969 conference or were part of the Working Group for Children and Young People in the Nordic Broadcasting Union (Nordvision, founded in 1959). Public service broadcasting aimed to inform, educate, and entertain its viewers. The broadcasting institutions were independent institutions funded by licence fees with only limited oversight by boards of governors. This financial model gave the broadcasting institutions freedom to develop independently as they did not have to act on behalf of political institutions or sell commercials to finance their content.

The vision established at the 1969 conference was carried over to the 1970s (and arguably later on), and the Nordic broadcasting corporations sought to emphasise children's culture as something different from adult culture. Children should not be addressed as subjects of their family or the educational system, but should be empowered and emancipated.

The wish to use television in a positive, structured manner to support a variety of goals, including greater equality, a better-educated workforce and ultimately higher living standards, was not that different from the rest of Europe. Child-centred trends could also be found in the UK and West Germany at this time. But comparative studies strongly suggest that the Scandinavian ideas were somewhat more radical in the inclusion of children's voices, promoting a utopian form of progressivism where children were treated as equal to adults.

The US production company behind *Sesame Street* had its own social aims, but analysis of the similarities and differences between its approach and that of Scandinavian broadcasters illuminates their different approaches to both the younger generation and children's broadcasting. To some extent these differences continue today.

The story of Nordic Sesame Street

Studies of the relevant meeting notes from the time have found that the idea of a Nordic Sesame Street started in 1970. *Sesame Street* was a very popular and well-regarded show in the US, and the UK and West Germany regional stations began to air some parts of the show and its format in 1971 and 1973

respectively. The Nordic broadcasting corporations were all contacted by the Workshop, the team behind *Sesame Street*, with a view to buying the format for their state channels or creating a joint programme, and they were impressed and interested to find out more. Full co-production between the Workshop and other channels was financially attractive for the Americans because they had to make money elsewhere if they wanted to stay commercial-free in the US.

The idea of a specific Nordic *Sesame Street* arose after a representative from the Workshop had visited DR and Sweden's Television (SVT) in late 1970. Though somewhat concerned about the show's educational approach, the Nordic broadcasters wanted to try out the aesthetic format because children found it very attractive. A pilot was produced in Swedish and Danish in 1972, and a Norwegian one was planned too, but, in the end, the *Sesame Street* team's approach to education and the child-adult relationship was deemed just too different to be adaptable to a Nordic context.

From the late 1960s, co-productions of *Sesame Street* were made in French, Spanish, West German, Flemish, Latin American and pan-Arabic versions. Ultimately, however, only the national broadcaster in Sweden actually aired a generic variation of the original *Sesame Street*, called Open Sesame (*Sesam*), in 1976. In 1980 and 1981 SR ran a version where a third of the content was produced in Stockholm. It was not until 1991 that Norway began airing a co-production, *Sesam Station* which ran for eight years and 198 episodes. In Denmark, a spin-off known as Elmo's Corner (*Sesamgade*) ran for three seasons from 2009 to 2013, but it was not a big success. In Finland, YLE showed a programme called *Sesamtie* from 1997–2000. Only Iceland did not make its own version of the programme.

The lack of success – and the fact that a combined Nordic *Sesame Street* never happened – highlights two important points. First, from an early stage, Nordic broadcasting corporations worked together and exchanged ideas formally and informally. Secondly, the corporations had, and still have, a shared tradition of child-centred broadcasting. The tradition of collaboration and the child-centred approach made the Nordic broadcasters different from *Sesame Street's* American producers, and provides a useful case study in cultural differences to television and childhood at the time, some of which arguably filters down to today.

There were of course differences across the Nordic countries, but there were similar reasons for why Nordic *Sesame Street* did not come to be a reality, as follows:

The purpose of pre-school TV was interpreted differently: Sesame Street first aired in the United States in 1969. The company that produced *Sesame Street*

wanted the show to be for school-like, educational purposes, whereas the Nordic TV producers wanted to distance their programmes from the educational system and be more anti-authoritarian, encouraging children to take control of their own lives. For example, one of the primary aims of *Playroom (Legestue)* on DR at the time was to inspire children to do a range of activities away from the screen, particularly arts and crafts and outdoor games, giving them a sense of themselves and their surroundings that would enable them to explore the world on their own. It was a much slower-paced programme, made on a shoestring budget.

Commerciality and how it was addressed: The Workshop was actually well known for their stance against the commercial system in the US. They also had a particular aim of targeting underprivileged children in urban areas and they wanted to help pre-schoolers who were not exposed to education due to their family or social circumstances. Yet, their modes of working still appeared to be more commercial than their Nordic colleagues. The Nordic broadcasters thought *Sesame Street* was too long and fast-paced – keeping children passive while they were glued to the screen. The Workshop was also unavoidably a commercial entity, which needed to make money through merchandise and international sales – exemplified by the effort they put in to trying to sell the format to the Nordic countries – which also put the Scandinavians off.

The experimental approach: *Sesame Street* had a strong focus on the universal need for television to teach a specific set of skills and this contrasted sharply with the much more experimental Scandinavian approach. In Scandinavia, education was seen as political, and orthodox views and research – including that carried out by the well-paid researchers at the Workshop – about children and education were questioned. National broadcasters in the Nordic countries experimented with ways in which their programmes could empower children by supporting their sense of self, their understanding of the world around them, and their confidence to challenge adult authority. This even meant that older children were invited to write and produce television and there were also policies spelling out that television was to be children's spokesperson. The more structured and regimented production modes in the Workshop did not fit this experimental model where learning was not guaranteed, but encouraged through play.

Practical considerations: Over and above the ideological differences between the US and Nordic approaches, there were fundamental practical issues that played a part in the decision not to make a Nordic *Sesame Street*. There were few television channels during the 1970s and in some cases only one. Each of the Nordic countries had already developed their own pre-

school programmes, and some of them like DR had large children's departments. SVT1 had *Titta leka lära* (Look, Play, Learn, started in 1965), DR had *Legestue* (Playroom, started in 1969), and NRK had *Lekestue* (an adaptation of the BBC's *Play School*). The Nordic television producers did not want these initiatives to be overshadowed by *Sesame Street* or resources diverted away from their own programmes.

The Nordic broadcasters strongly admired the Workshop's budget, the size of its research team, the agreement on a fixed set of production rules, *Sesame Street*'s high aesthetic value and the Muppets' popularity amongst children. Their staff generally agreed that the quality was very high, and the use of music was impressive. Most believed the show's success was due to teamwork, where everyone at the Workshop seemed to have a designated role corresponding to a specific part of the show. The show's popularity was attributed to its decoration and the fixed cast of humans and Muppets, which children would recognise and become attached to. But ultimately, *Sesame Street* did not seem right for the Nordic broadcasting corporations.

Are some of these differences still alive today?

The complex broadcasting and media landscape of the 2020s would be almost unrecognisable to the TV production teams of the 1970s. However, some contemporary principles can be traced back to that time to a greater or lesser extent. During the 2010s there was international commentary on the dissection of a baby giraffe in front of children at Copenhagen Zoo, the DR programmes *Ultra smider tøjet* (Ultra [a children's channel] Throws Off Their Clothes), and *John Dillermand* (John Willyman). These examples show that there still can be a culture clash between TV programmes in the Nordic region that challenge perceptions of children as innocents who need to be protected and expectations elsewhere.

Popular and academic literature try to identify what is specifically "Nordic" about childhood and growing up. Despite globalisation, there are some characteristics that are more similar across the Nordic countries than elsewhere. There is arguably still an intention to stimulate children's sense of themselves and their everyday lives, and to help them to see and challenge social power structures – including the assumption that adults have a natural authority. With some important exceptions, most Nordic children's television remains less obviously didactical than the US.

This article is based on a chapter of the author's book, *Sesame Street: A Transnational History* published by Oxford University Press in 2023.

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Nordic Crime Fiction

5 March 2019 by Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen

Summary

Since the 1990s, Nordic crime fiction has been a significant sub-genre within global crime fiction. Usually characterised by social realism, gloomy locations and morose detectives, crime novels and TV series from across the Nordic region provide thrilling stories that use the crime plot to investigate the state of justice, equality, vulnerability and current debates specific to the Nordic welfare societies. The genre includes modern TV classics such as the Danish *Forbrydelsen* (*The Killing*, 2007–2012), the Danish/Swedish co-production *Bron/Broen* (*The Bridge*, 2011–2018) and global bestsellers by the Norwegian Jo Nesbø and the Swede Stieg Larsson, but it also extends further back, including literary works from the nineteenth century.

In the twenty-first century, Nordic crime fiction is a literary genre and a publishing phenomenon which has maintained its local socio-critical potential in a global marketplace for books and entertainment. The success of the genre is increasingly reinforced by film adaptations and series made for television. Arguably, Nordic crime fiction only became recognised as constituting a common “regional genre” when crime novels from the Nordic countries started to be translated and TV series subtitled, dubbed or remade into a wide range of languages. The reasons for the international success of Nordic crime fiction abroad are many, ranging from the ability of authors and screen writers to blend regional particularities with widely recognisable international forms, to Nordic publishing and media industries’ growing internationalisation since the 1990s.

In some countries outside the Nordic region, the twenty-first century crime boom coincided with a wider fascination with the apparently successful Nordic welfare states and stereotypes including happiness, quality designer furniture and New Nordic food. The publishing and media industries have benefitted greatly from the global interest in the Nordic

countries and participated in stimulating a desire for “all things Nordic” abroad. Nordic crime fiction as an intermedial genre and a twenty-first century global brand is often referred to as “Nordic noir”.

Origins of Nordic crime fiction

Crime fiction in the Nordic countries has a long history with early examples being the Danish Steen Steensen Blicher’s *Præsten i Vejlbye* (1829) (*The Pastor of Vejlbye*, 1991) and the Norwegian Maurits Hansen’s detective story *Mordet på Maskinbygger Roolfsen* (1839) (*The Murder of Engineer Roolfsen*). It is in the period since the Second World War, however, that Nordic crime fiction has contributed a particular regional variant and a growing number of globally successful authors to a predominantly Anglo-American genre.

Nordic crime fiction since the Second World War is indebted to the British Golden Age of crime literature in the 1920s and 1930s, with writers such as Dorothy L. Sayers and Agatha Christie, and shares many traits with the American hard-boiled private detective stories of Raymond Chandler and the police procedurals of Ed McBain. However, it was with the Swedish author duo Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö’s ten-volume series about Martin Beck (1965–75), collectively known as *Roman om ett brott* (*Report of a Crime*), and the new wave of crime writing in the 1990s, that Nordic crime fiction added to the various sub-genres of crime fiction an emphasis on social realism and criticism, gloomy Nordic locations and the figure of the morose detective.

The success of the Nordic police procedural

In the 1960s, Sjöwall and Wahlöö translated into Swedish several of Ed McBain’s “87th precinct” novels which were pioneering police procedurals. This inspired the use of a formula wherein the private lives and personal struggles of police officers are mirrored in the larger socio-political landscape of Sweden’s *folkhem* (People’s Home), the particular Swedish version of the Nordic welfare state. Sjöwall and Wahlöö went on to write the “Report of a Crime” series, which is often cited as the single most influential work of socio-critical crime fiction to subsequent writers in the genre across the Nordic region and beyond.

From their Marxist-Leninist perspective, Sjöwall and Wahlöö explicitly aimed to use their crime novels as a means to analyse the Swedish welfare state, to relate crime to its political and ideological doctrines, and to reveal its perceived fascist nature. The subtitle of the book series, “Report of a crime”, was then both an indicator of the genre and a programmatic statement criticising the “criminal” subservience of the welfare state to capitalism. From

Roseanna (1965) (*Roseanna*, 1967) to *Terroristerna* (1975) (*The Terrorists*, 1976), Sjöwall and Wahlöö's crime novels follow Martin Beck and his homicide squad from the sex murder of an American tourist to the murder of the prime minister of a Swedish police state, anticipating the murder of prime minister Olof Palme by a decade. In their investigations, Beck and his team are constantly faced with an impenetrable police bureaucracy, a metonymy for a brutal society that gradually overshadows the idyllic post-war welfare state.

Less politically radical in his critique of society, Anders Bodelsen from Denmark similarly used the social realistic thriller to explore new realities of the welfare state in his *Tænk på et tal* (1968) (*Think of a Number*, 1969). Bodelsen insisted that collective conflicts should be understood through the private; and in his breakthrough novel the personal conflict of a bank cashier, who is tempted to hide the loot from a bank robbery, is reflected in society's balancing act between materialism and social responsibility.

In the late 1980s and the 1990s, the Nordic thriller gained international attention with the Swede Jan Guillou's Coq Rouge series (1986–2006) featuring the spy Carl Hamilton, a nobleman with socialist leanings, and with the work of Danish Leif Davidsen, whose political thrillers focused on Russia and the new Europe, for example in *Den russiske sangerinde* (1988) (*The Russian Singer*, 1991) and *Den serbiske dansker* (1996) (*The Serbian Dane*, 2007). Like Bodelsen and later Stieg Larsson (Sweden), these writers were already well known and, in the case of Guillou, a controversial journalist, used the sub-genre of the thriller to criticise and reflect on the changing national and global socio-political climate towards the end of the twentieth century.

1990s' wave of Nordic crime fiction

It was the police procedural in the style of Sjöwall and Wahlöö that would ride the cusp of the new wave of Nordic crime fiction in the 1990s. Henning Mankell's (Sweden) Inspector Kurt Wallander, Åke Edwardson's (Sweden) Chief Inspector Erik Winter, Arnaldur Indriðason's (Iceland) Detective Erlendur, Matti Yrjänä Joensuu's (Finland) Detective Sergeant Timo Harjunpää and Håkan Nesser's (Sweden) Chief Inspector Van Veeteren have all become synonymous with the Nordic police procedural's male anti-hero investigator.

From *Mördare utan ansikte* (1991) (*Faceless Killers*, 1997) to *Den orolige mannen* (2009) (*The Troubled Man*, 2011), Mankell's Wallander series takes place in and around the provincial southern Swedish town of Ystad on the shore of the Baltic Sea. Mankell intended the Wallander series as an invest-

igation into the deterioration of the often-celebrated Swedish social consciousness infected by a growing sense of insecurity and xenophobia. While set in a provincial borderland, Mankell's crime fiction is global in scope, confronting the attitudes of a Swedish microcosm towards border-crossing phenomena such as:

- immigration (*Mördare utan ansikte*, 1991; *Faceless Killers*, 1997);
- organ trafficking in the developing world (*Mannen som log*, 1994; *The Man Who Smiled*, 2005);
- human trafficking (*Villospår*, 1995; *Sidetracked*, 2000);
- Swedish mercenaries in the Congo (*Den femte kvinnan*, 1996; *The Fifth Woman*, 2001); and,
- an international conspiracy to destroy the financial system to right the wrongs of worldwide economic inequality (*Brandvägg*, 1988; *Firewall*, 2004).

Rather than focusing solely on crimes and their investigation, Mankell's texts devote much attention to Wallander's thought processes, his poor habits, ailing body and deteriorating relationships. Throughout the series, Wallander, with his psychological and bodily wounds, becomes a complex reflector of a society unable to commit ethically and with solidarity to the challenges of a globalised world.

Nesser's Van Veeteren series is less explicitly critical of contemporary society and less interested in international affairs than Mankell's, as its setting in the fictitious European country Maardam suggests. However, a recurrent theme that Nesser's crime fiction shares with several other Nordic crime novels is the abuse of women by men, most explicitly explored in *Kvinna med födelsemärke* (1996) (*Woman with Birthmark*, 2009).

It was arguably with the Dane Peter Høeg's *Frøken Smillas fornemmelse for sne* (1992) (*Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*, 1993) that the Nordic crime novel broke through to the international market as a global brand and blurred the boundaries between high and popular culture. Offering a highly critical view of Denmark's colonial exploitation of Greenland through the eyes of Greenlandic-Danish scientist-protagonist Smilla Jaspersen, the novel also contributed to discussions of cultural belonging, gender and identity in a globalised, postcolonial era.

Although not exclusively writers of genre fiction and focusing to a larger extent on the psychological and communal effects of crime, Swede Kerstin Ekman and Norwegian Karin Fossum have similarly explored the geographical and cultural peripheries of late-modern Scandinavia in internationally acclaimed crime novels. Examples are Ekman's *Händelser vid vatten* (1993)

(*Blackwater*, 1996) and Fossum's series about Konrad Sejer, including *Se deg ikke tilbake!* (1996) (*Don't Look Back*, 2002).

Key themes of Nordic crime fiction

Female protagonists: Dominating the debates about Nordic crime writing in the 1990s, and to a large extent the bestseller lists, was what first became known in Sweden as the *femikrimi*, crime novels with a female protagonist, written by women and often from a feminist perspective. This new wave of women crime writers includes Liza Marklund and Camilla Läckberg (Sweden); Gretelise Holm and Sara Blædel (Denmark); Anne Holt (Norway); and Leena Letholainen (Finland). While indebted to the (often masculine) conventions of the genre and the Nordic social realist tradition, including the focus on gender and sexual politics, these writers reverse the traditional depiction of women in the genre as passive, asexual and inferior. From an explicit feminist perspective, Liza Marklund's series with the journalist Annika Bengtson, beginning with *Sprängaren* (1998) (*The Bomber*, 2000), recounts the struggles facing an ambitious female crime reporter, juggling family responsibilities in her everyday life in a male-dominated world, and solving crimes that include domestic violence.

Violence against women, the corruption of the welfare state and moral bankruptcy of capital: These were central themes in Danish Jussi Adler-Olsen's Department Q series, including *Kvinden i buret* (2007) (*Mercy*, 2011), and Swedish Stieg Larsson's posthumously published international blockbuster the Millennium Trilogy: *Män som hatar kvinnor* (2005) (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, 2008), *Flickan som lekte med elden* (2006) (*The Girl Who Played with Fire*, 2009) and *Luftslottet som sprängdes* (2007) (*The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest*, 2009). The global success of Nordic crime fiction in the new millennium is indebted to the unprecedented sales and global reach of these three novels (and their later film adaptations and additional instalments written by David Lagercrantz). However, the Millennium Trilogy also shares a more local and critical interest in critiquing the culturally suppressed influences of right-wing ideologies and the legacy of the Second World War on contemporary society with novels such as Arne Dahl's (Sweden) *Döds-mässa* (2004) (*Requiem*), Gunnar Staalesen's (Norway) *I mørket er alle ulver grå* (1983) (*At Night All Wolves are Grey*, 1986), and Jo Nesbø's (Norway) third Harry Hole novel, *Rødstrupe* (2000) (*The Redbreast*, 2006).

Twenty-first century success of Nordic noir

In the twenty-first century, Nordic crime fiction is a literary genre and a publishing phenomenon which has maintained its local socio-critical potential

in a global marketplace for books and entertainment with strong traditions and publishing catalogues in all of the Nordic countries. The success of the genre is increasingly reinforced by adaptations into film and series made for television, as well as original TV drama productions. For instance:

- Mankell's Wallander series was made into a TV series produced by Svensk Filmindustri and Yellow Bird (2005–2010);
- Yellow Bird also produced a UK remake of Wallander (2008–2016);
- The Danish television drama *Forbrydelsen* (*The Killing*, 2007–2012) was produced by DR (Danmarks Radio, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation);
- The US remake of *The Killing* (2011) was produced by Fox Television Studios and Fuse Entertainment;
- The series was also novelised by the British writer David Hewson; and,
- The Danish/Swedish co-production *Bron/Broen* (*The Bridge*, 2011–2018) has been remade for several regions including the French-British *The Tunnel* and the US-Mexican *The Bridge*.

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Pop Culture, Vikings and Historic Nordic Gender Equality

24 March 2021 by Barbora Žiačková & Saga Rosenström

Summary

Gender equality is a fundamental part of the Nordic self-understanding, and right-wing political actors as well as extremists use ideas of gender equality in support of anti-immigrant and racist agendas. The pop culture image of Viking women as “independent” and “equal to men” provides one way in which gender equality as an aspect of Nordicness has gained historical legitimacy. Periods with little or no written records are more easily used as settings for a heroic past, particularly within pop culture and the media. This sometimes creates a tension between what people consuming these media expect to see based on their existing knowledge and preconceptions, and the results of academic research.

The Viking Age (ca. 750–1050 CE) has provided a rich palette of cultural symbolism adopted into Nordic branding. Finding expression in political and consumer advertising targeting both Nordic and global consumers, Vikings provide perhaps the most widely recognised symbolic shorthand for the Nordics. Partly as a result of the historic success of Sweden in marketing the idea of Nordicness abroad, Viking symbolism has gained relevance in all of the Nordic countries – even if it is perceived as somewhat of a caricature. Viking imagery has become ubiquitous, communicating traits and ideals associated with the Vikings – and by extension the Nordics – such as strength, adventurousness, wilderness and nature.

At the same time, progressive values such as gender equality are a fundamental, ideological part of the Nordic brand, and Nordic countries tend to score highly on international gender equality indexes. The reality is, of course, far more complex, and much more work remains to be done for gender equality in all of the Nordic countries. Important in this context is the understanding that gender equality is essential to Nordicness. This offers the

opportunity to exclude people, cultures or religions perceived *not* to embody gender equality from being Nordic.

Recent high-profile research into female Viking warriors, alongside a global rise in interest in Viking-themed media, has exposed romanticised notions of apparently historical Scandinavian gender equality. Portrayals of conventionally attractive, strong, independent women in Viking-themed marketing seek to create links between modern Nordic women and their ancient counterparts. Together, these ways of creating, showing, repeating and disseminating seemingly “historical” narratives continually re-establish the idea of gender equality as an essential Nordic characteristic, through its perceived historical basis.

The Vikings of nineteenth century Romanticism and pop culture

Gender equality has become an essential characteristic of Nordic identities through its integration into historical narratives. This can be done in a formal way, for example through state education, or in how research is presented to the public through news media, documentaries and museums. It can also be informal, through representations of the past in popular media such as historical fiction, video games, music, movies and TV shows.

During the nineteenth century, the idea of nationhood bloomed across the European continent. National Romantic ideas were employed to give nations an emotional core, legitimising them as nation states through the creation of an historical people, with one language, one culture and one heritage. Nations themselves were reimagined as female figures, in need of protection from external threats. A revival of interest in folklore and the common people ran alongside the creation of formal national histories. In Scandinavia, these narratives often focused on the Viking Age: a period lacking a contemporary written record, allowing it to be more easily used as a setting for a heroic past. The image of the horned helmet, for example, originates from this time.

Many of the characteristics that became associated with the Scandinavians imagined by National Romanticism already predated the nineteenth century. Ideas of physical strength, courage, honesty, strongly connected to the physical effects of cold northern climates on the body, were already developed in the middle of the eighteenth century by Montesquieu in his *De l'esprit des lois* (The Spirit of the Laws, 1748). As national histories became more clearly codified, these characteristics came to be seen as “essential” to present-day and historical Nordic people. They would become formative of the Romantic image of the Viking. Similar ideas would continue to be repeated in European race theory and eugenics, further establishing perceived connections between cultural traits and genetics or physiology.

Warrior women and feminist Vikings

The early Romantic images of the Vikings focused on masculinity. The position of women, though still considered to have been respected, was largely limited to holding power in the domestic setting. Nevertheless, they were conceptualised as more liberated, holding more authority than their Christian contemporaries.

Viking women as mistresses of the home who ruled in the absence of men, can be rehabilitated to fulfil the need for a retrospective feminism distinct from other contemporary historical societies. However, the idea of Viking *warrior* women has gained increasing media attention, particularly following the 2017 publication of the re-assessment of grave Bj 581 from Birka, Sweden, that showed that the deceased buried with a full set of warrior gear was genetically female. Female Viking warriors have also featured prominently in pop culture, from Lagertha and her “warband” in the popular TV show *Vikings*, to the female Eivor players can choose to be in the video game *Assassin’s Creed: Valhalla*. Besides allowing women to appear empowered through taking on a traditionally masculine role, popular depictions of Viking warrior women also give them sex appeal. Playing into longstanding tropes of comic book-esque warrior women, the fictive or marketing portrayals inspired by Viking Age women become more acceptable to male consumers.

Credible research can be used to support a feeling of “authenticity” experienced by the consumer when engaging with historically inspired media. However, research can be rejected when it deviates too far from what the consumer expects to see based on their existing knowledge and preconceptions. Neither archaeological and historical research, nor fictional portrayals of Viking warrior women, have escaped criticism from the public – or, indeed, researchers!

Personal identities and the Viking brand

For an individual, heritage can provide a sense of belonging, it can also be harnessed in political discourse or used to create in-groups by those wishing to exclude people who, according to them, do not fit in. Ethnic belonging is flexible and largely self-defined, with aspects of ethnicity having shifting meanings across different contexts. Groups of people created through shared ideas of heritage can actually be very heterogeneous. Nevertheless, they are held together by self-identification as a group, and the group’s recognition by others as being distinct. How individuals construct the features defining the group can be quite different from what an outsider might consider important.

In 2019, we asked anonymous internet users, mostly from the Nordic countries, how they view Viking women and present-day Nordic women. The adjective most used to describe both was “independent”. Other expressions commonly used to describe both were “respected” and “equal to men”, as well as physical traits such as “blonde” and “white”. At the same time, most of the Nordic respondents stated that they saw no continuity between Viking women and present-day Nordic women. In contrast, almost two thirds of non-Nordic respondents believed that the image of a Viking woman was important for present-day Nordic identity.

Even though Nordic respondents did not personally believe their image of Viking Age women affected their view of present-day Nordic women, their responses suggest that the “Viking brand” forms part of their social context: the symbolism that Nordic countries and Nordic businesses use to market themselves, and how the rest of the world tends to view them. The evident undercurrent was the image of tall, strong, blonde people, situated in wide landscapes that form the (untouched, natural) setting of their independence and freedom. Similar National Romantic ideals are effectively timeless and can be identified in almost any time period, but their most recognised and understood deployment has been as part of the creation of the Viking image.

Right-wing “Vikings” and feminism

These results, along with other interdisciplinary research in gender studies and ethnic relations, suggest that gender equality is often framed as inherently Nordic. Its idealisation has allowed far-right groups and political parties to use it to discriminate against others. While the far right generally do not support the rights of women or minorities in other circumstances, they will defend idealised Nordic gender equality against perceived foreign others.

The political party *Sverigedemokraterna* (Sweden Democrats) in Sweden or the Soldiers of Odin (SoO), a street patrol group started in Finland in 2015, among others, have stressed the importance of women’s rights. They portray gender equality as incompatible with immigrants with a different ethnic background, or with Islam explicitly. Islam has for a long time been constructed as Europe’s “Other”: if Europeaness, or Nordicness in this case, has “modern gender equality”, then Islam is believed to be unable to have it – and vice versa. Similar views were expressed by a minority of respondents to our survey, who directly associated skin colour with Nordicness, and positioned Islam or Muslims as threatening to Nordic women. In these cases, racist ideas are being disguised by supposedly feminist rhetoric.

In the Nordic countries, Nordic women's perceived "essential" qualities boil down to independence and self-determination. These qualities have been given an imagined historical lineage to pre-Christian times and are easily placed in opposition to another Abrahamic religion: Islam. At the same time, the association of a particular skin or hair colour with both historical and present-day Nordic women by some allows these to be seen as ethnic – rather than cultural – traits. This is not to suggest, however, that most people who conceptualise Viking and/or Nordic women as independent and equal to men support extreme right-wing ideas. Rather, it means that the idea of a distinctly Nordic historical gender equality has become appropriated into the underpinnings of racist and anti-immigrant ideologies in Europe and North America. Many of the proponents of these same ideologies have inherited Viking-themed symbolism from early twentieth-century fascism.

Global stakeholders in the Viking brand

Despite the appropriation of Viking imagery by the far right, Vikings are relevant to a huge variety of stakeholders, in and outside the Nordic countries. Some groups have reclaimed the image of the Vikings and taken publicly anti-racist positions, campaigning actively against discrimination and social injustice.

The success of Viking-themed pop culture and media has meant that the idea of *being* a Viking has expanded beyond the Nordics. DNA testing companies market the possibility of genetic connections to Scandinavia. Such links are considered to be "authentically" Viking in a context where some (mythologised) genetic backgrounds appear to have greater value than others. Regardless, people all over the world can buy into the visual symbolism of the Vikings. Heavy metal and folk music fans can wear museum replicas of Thor's hammer pendants, buying into the aesthetic of what Will Cerbone has called the "exotic past". Some may choose to shave and braid their hair like the heroes of the *Vikings* TV show. Avid gym-goers and amateur athletes might adorn themselves in Viking-themed clothing whilst training for the Tough Viking obstacle race (held around Scandinavia and Finland every year): They may be seen embodying the physical strength associated with the Viking of Montesquieu's essentialism. Likewise, they are buying into the modern "Viking" identity being sold to them by the clothing designers or race organisers and the like.

While Vikings may not ostensibly be that important to Nordic people's self-image, they form a part of their social context, both through branding and how the Nordics are imagined by others. Not all stakeholders in the "Viking" image are Nordic, nor do they all have a strong political agenda.

However, essentialist ideas about the Vikings repeated in popular culture can perpetuate particular racial ideas about Nordicness and are often appropriated by right-wing ideologies. The use of Viking imagery and symbolism by fascist and racist groups has a long history that continues to the present.

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This collection of 40 articles provides critical analysis of the society, history and culture of the Nordic region in an international context. The book includes research-based overviews of topics such as humanitarianism, Sámi literature, colonialism, childcare provision, crime fiction and populism – as well as more detailed articles on specific subjects or events, like the dancing ban in Finland during the Second World War, food delivery workers in twenty-first century Denmark or the historical development of the Öresund bridge.

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