



Working | paper

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Nation Branding and Policy transfer: Insights from Norden

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Introduction

Recent years have seen an interesting development in practices and policies of nation branding. Alongside an emphasis in which nation branding programmes seek to activate desires of conspicuous consumption in consumers, or to use branded messages to attract investment, there has also been a growing emphasis placed on policy transfer as a part of nation branding strategies. Thus, we see countries emphasising the possibility of exporting (amongst others) their educational, environmental, gender, criminological and even administrative policies, models and approaches. Instead of jealously guarding points of possible competitive advantage the message is instead apparently benevolent, a declaration that such countries may have something to offer that they are willing to share for the greater good.

To date, this shift towards the incorporation of policy transfer within nation branding practices has received only limited analysis (e.g. Marsh and Fawcett 2011a; 2011b). Questions that arise, therefore, include: why are countries increasingly shifting their nation branding programmes in this direction? What do they seek to gain by engaging in such exports? And should we take the ostensibly beneficent nature of such practices at face value?

The aim of this working paper is therefore to consider what the shift to policy transfer may tell us about the developing politics of nation branding, with particular focus placed on how policy transfer can be seen as a form of branded identity politics that arguably belies its apparently benevolent intentions by reaffirming hierarchical geopolitical imaginaries that remain premised on a politics of leveraging perceived competitive advantage. However, while the paper indicates why such a shift in nation branding strategies may be attractive, it also considers the potential pitfalls and limitations of such an approach.

The working paper first discusses the shift towards nation branding through policy transfer at a general level, before ending with a discussion that draws on examples from Norden – the countries of which frequently populate the upper echelons of numerous nation branding and benchmarking indices, which have historically presented themselves as a model for export, and which, following an extended period of post-Cold War identity crisis and doubt, have more recently rediscovered a sense of self-confidence and self-identity, not least manifest in a resurrection of ideas of Nordic knowledge exports and policy transfer that re-instantiates more historical notions of Nordic exceptionalism.

Nation Branding's Implications for International Politics

To start, it is necessary to first consider how nation branding is often seen to be impacting upon understandings and practices of international politics. In this respect, it is often argued that more recent forms of nation branding are indicative of a shift of international politics away from geopolitical logics of war and conflict between enemies in an anarchical international system, towards more geoeconomic logics premised on market competition between rivals in a more hierarchical system (van Ham 2001: 4; Browning and Oliveira 2017: 484-7). The war-prone Hobbesian state, it is argued, is transforming into the Lockean 'competition state' (Moisio 2008; Fougner 2006), and where prestige, status and standing in international politics is no longer gained through military victories and territorial conquest, but through success in market competition, through enhancing one's attraction to others, and through placing highly on the increasingly numerous benchmarking league tables and indices.

To this extent nation branding is one part of the emergence of a broader hegemonic discourse that has sought to reshape states and international politics in terms of logics of capitalist competition. As Sum and Jessop (2013: 268) note, over the last 30-40 years three powerful economic narratives (or

imaginaries) have emerged that have come to have an important constitutive effect on how we perceive the nature of the world and the forms of subjectivity and behaviour that have come to be viewed as appropriate for acting within that world. These economic imaginaries are interwoven and are connected to ideas of 'globalization', 'competitiveness' and the rise of the 'knowledge based economy'.

Sum and Jessop's argument is that these grand hegemonic narratives have been steadily normalised through the work of academics, consultants, politicians and business leaders in seeking to demarcate its core elements and distinguishing features. As they note, this hegemonic paradigm has essentially been created 'through the compilation and repetition of statistical indicators, [and] through the development of benchmarks and league tables' (Sum and Jessop 2013: 279).

Insofar as such economic imaginaries have become embedded, they have in turn become the bases for targeted forms of action. Sum and Jessop therefore argue that academics and consultants have not only been crucial in producing such global economic imaginaries, but they have also transformed them into various policy paradigms concerned with how best to succeed in the world the economic imaginaries describe. In short, apparent descriptions about the nature of the world have in turn been 'translated into management/consultancy knowledge about how to "get the competitiveness right"' (Sum and Jessop 2013: 299). When this happens a marketable 'knowledge brand' can emerge, which they describe as:

'a resonant hegemonic meaning-making device advanced in various ways by "world-class" gurus-academics-consultants who claim unique knowledge of a relevant or strategic policy field and pragmatically translate this into (trans-)national policy symbols, recipes and toolkits that address policy problems and dilemmas and also appeal to pride, threats and anxieties about socio-economic restructuring and changes' (Sum and Jessop 2013: 305).

A knowledge brand therefore operates as a set of marketable policy ideas that are understood as offering 'simple, user-friendly, problem-oriented' solutions to common problems, anxieties and dilemmas and that are understood to be useable, saleable and transferable largely irrespective of context. Much consultancy work, Sum and Jessop (2013: 301) note, essentially involves leveraging and trading in 'knowledge brands'.

Understood this way, nation branding itself looks like a good example of a knowledge brand. For example, the archetypal guru-academic-consultant here is Simon Anholt, who first coined the phrase in 1998 and helped institutionalise it through writing policy papers and books, and through setting up the journal of ***Place Branding and Public Diplomacy***. Subsequently many other academic-consultants have come on board, re-theorising the nature of international politics and the role of the state precisely by drawing on economic imaginaries related to globalisation and the competition state, and academising and scientising this through publishing handbooks creating nation branding associations and institutions, and not least creating various nation branding indexes, the best known of which is the Anholt-GFK Roper Nation Brands Index. The end result of this has been the creation of an industry in which consultants propose largely generic solutions to governments that are proclaimed will help them solve the problems their countries face as a result of globalisation.

Three Forms of Nation Branding

At the same time, it is important to note that not all forms of nation branding are the same. Following Mordhorst (forthcoming) it is possible to identify at least three different points of emphasis in nation branding programmes as they have evolved over the years.

- i. First, there has been an emphasis on the proclaimed '***Country of Origin***' effect, which he notes is actually a form of co-branding. In this form, nation branding is understood in

terms of trying to encourage consumers to purchase products as a result of the reputation associated with the country in which they were made (Anholt 2002: 232-3). This is a form of co-branding in that it rests on the assumption that the meanings and values associated with one brand can be passed on to another brand. As he notes, 'In this semiotic way, entities are linked together that would otherwise belong to different categories, like products and nations' (Mordhorst forthcoming). However, in a world of increasingly dispersed transnational production chains the country of origin effect is being challenged – indeed, the branding consultant Wally Olins (2003: 131) has even argued it is in 'terminal decline'.

- ii. Second, then, we have instead seen considerable focus emerge on the idea of '**Place Branding**' in nation branding campaigns. Instead of seeking to sell products, the focus of place branding is on trying to attract resources to the nation, be that in the form of investments, investors, tourists, students or highly skilled labour. The underpinning argument of consultants in this respect is that with globalisation having turned the world into a single global marketplace in which everyone is competing with everyone else for market share, the fundamental task of governments is to cultivate and pass down the nation's reputation and image intact and preferably enhanced (see Anholt in Aronczyk 2013: 70). As van Ham (2008: 131) puts it: why would anyone invest in or visit a country, let alone pay any attention to its political or strategic demands, if they know nothing about it. Failure to develop a coherent and attractive place branding policy is therefore depicted as a failure to undertake a basic responsibility of government in an era of globalisation. Of course, one of the difficulties for nations in this respect is developing coherent strategies. As Mordhorst (forthcoming) notes, various sectors (tourism, companies, educational institutions etc.) may agree that a nation branding strategy is desirable, but when it comes to the content of the message opinions tend to differ. Moreover, since nations are emotional and ideological constructs rebranding them is very difficult.
- iii. Third, more recently we have also seen increasing moves to recast nation branding in terms of '**Corporate Branding**'. Corporate branding shifts the attention from trying to appeal directly to consumers and investors, to instead inculcating the brand throughout the internal organisation of the corporation. In other words, from the highest CEO to the lowliest employee, the emphasis is placed on getting all to 'become the brand', to 'live the brand' through emphasising their role as 'brand carriers' (Aronczyk 2008: 54). The idea is essentially to reinforce external branding messages communicated to consumers and investors by demonstrating that 'we really are who we say we are' (Mordhorst forthcoming). Of course, when applied to nations certain problems arise. Not least, corporate branding implies a considerable dose of governmentality as it signals to citizens what behaviours are considered sufficiently 'on brand' and which other behaviours are therefore in some sense deemed unpatriotic (Weidner 2011; Browning 2015: 205). As Mordhorst (forthcoming) notes, while that may be okay for corporations – who can reasonably get rid of employees who fail to share the company's vision – a nation cannot reasonably strip someone of their citizenship because of their perceived failure to sufficiently embody the nation's core brand values and identity. And that, of course, is also to presume that such core values and identity can be agreed upon in the first place.

Towards Nation Branding through Policy Export/Transfer

However, alongside *Country of Origin, Place Branding, and Corporate Branding* an emerging fourth form of nation branding can also be identified related to ideas of *policy export and transfer*. Some of the credit for this can once again be identified with Simon Anholt (2007a: 74), who has criticised nation branding campaigns that prioritise images and narratives over a more sustained engagement with

developing policies that might lead to more fundamental political, social and economic changes. Essentially aligning with much academic analysis, he argues that nation branding campaigns that focus on the former (which constitutes most of them) have very little impact on improving national images or in contributing to their success (Browning 2016: 57). In turn this has seen him shift his focus to the concept of 'competitive identity', which itself might be viewed as just another rebranding of nation branding by nation branding's pre-eminent academic-guru-consultant (Anholt 2007b).

One of his key messages, however, has been to shift the focus of his consultancy advice. Nations, he argues, should focus much less on what others can do for them (i.e. buying products, investing) and focus more on what 'they can do for the world'. A key point of his focus is therefore on encouraging nations to identify global problems and to establish a competitive identity based on marketing their ability to solve those problems (Anholt 2012). This formulation has now become increasingly common in nation branding campaigns, with various countries, for instance, emphasising in their nation's branding programmes their ability to contribute to peace and conflict resolution (e.g. Colombia, South Africa, Turkey), or to solving other global problems, be they related to health, the environment, education etc. For instance, Finland was a notable early mover in this regard, subtitled its nation branding report of 2010: 'How Finland will solve the world's most intractable problems' (Country Brand Report 2010).

This formulation shifts the rules of the game. States are now to compete with each other in terms of how 'good' they are, thereby refiguring nation branding in terms of a competition between states as international citizens. Anholt has himself sought to further embed and institutionalise this discourse with his subsequent creation in 2014 of a new benchmark, '**The Good Country Index**', which ranks countries in terms of their 'global contribution' in respect of a range of areas (Science and Technology; Culture; International Peace and Security; World Order; Planet and Climate; Prosperity and Equality; Health and Wellbeing).¹ For what it's worth, the current top ten comprise the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Sweden, Ireland, UK, Austria, Norway. Bottom of the list are Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Chad.

This discursive shift in the nation branding discourse is notably one that resonates closely with the economic imaginary of the Knowledge Based Economy identified by Sum and Jessop mentioned earlier. In this framing knowledge becomes an asset to be mobilised for development. However, when filtered through benchmarks of competitive identity like **The Good Country Index**, such knowledge can in turn be repackaged as a knowledge brand and where countries increasingly seem to be trying to compete with each other in terms of their proclaimed expertise in issue specific areas.

'Knowledge brands', then, increasingly appear evident at two levels in nation branding discourse. First, the idea of nation branding itself has been crystallised into a knowledge brand that is sold to countries by consultants claiming to know the relevant techniques and strategies for countries to succeed in a globalising world. Second, countries themselves are now beginning to undertake nation branding through the development of knowledge brands in sector specific areas – like education, the environment, health and criminal justice. Nation brands are therefore increasingly being promoted through neatly packaged policy-focused knowledge brands for export.

As Marsh and Fawcett (2011a) note, policy brands emerge when particular policies or policy frameworks and associated administrative processes are branded and franchised. They argue that there are several attractions for why different actors would do this. With respect to business actors, branded franchising may be attractive insofar as a business sees the potential to make a profit out of it. As they note, in a business model the benefit to the franchiser is that franchising can aid them in spreading their business model at limited cost, while it can also be argued that the franchisee in turn has greater incentives than normal employees to make the brand work (Marsh and Fawcett 2011a: 247). The risk is that the franchiser loses a certain amount of control over the process, since

¹ The Good Country Index, <https://www.goodcountryindex.org/results>.

franchising grants the franchisee more leeway than a normal employee would have. For franchisees the attractions lie in being able to draw upon the knowledge, expertise, training and brand power of the franchiser – which they pay for through rents and a share of profits.

However, when it comes to policy branding and policy transfer as a form of nation branding it is not clear that the profit motive is the key underpinning factor – which is not to discount the fact that (state-backed) consultancies specialising in particular policy areas might not be able to ride on the back of these processes. However, when a country like Finland, for instance, advertises itself at the World Economic Forum as having one of the best education systems in the world it is not clear that the aim is to capitalise on this economically.² Offering up ‘Finnish lessons’ in education rather seems to be about image and reputation building.

To this extent, Marsh and Fawcett (2011a: 253-4) argue that countries may increasingly be driven towards adopting a branding and franchising approach to policy export in order to ensure that policy transfer is done in a consistent and comprehensive manner, thereby protecting the brand and preventing failures of poor implementation that might otherwise reflect badly on the country brand and reputation. In other words, if others are going to adopt your approach to education, criminal justice etc. – or at least claim to be doing so – then branding those approaches (and providing follow on advice and training) can become one way of ensuring they do it properly and do not sully your reputation through poor or selective implementation. For instance, the so called ‘Nordic prostitution model’ is often held up and promoted by campaigners in other countries,³ but this despite the fact that the very existence of a common ‘Nordic prostitution model’ is questionable and attempts to implement it elsewhere often problematic (Skilbrei and Holmstrom 2014). This can create a perceived need to protect the nature of the policy brand, even in instances (such as this) when the reality of the brand is contested.

A flip side to this, though, is that nation branding through policy export may also be a way of fighting political battles at home by wrapping up particular policies in the sentiments of patriotism and national values and thereby protecting them from assault by political opponents. Understood this way policy branding could also be a way of disciplining citizens towards accepting particular approaches to the provision of public goods, thereby delimiting the level of ideological diversity (Marsh and Fawcett 2011b: 517).

Policy Transfer as Virtuous Difference

However, from an identity perspective something else can also be seen to be going on in this cultivation of policy-focused knowledge brands in nation branding strategies and where Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of *distinction* is instructive. Bourdieu uses the concept of distinction to refer to the temptations people feel to establish a sense of virtuous difference towards others, and where doing so can help them generate positive self-concepts, pride, status and self-esteem. In this respect – and contrary to presumptions in much political theorising where difference is all too easily analysed merely in terms of its potential to operate as a form of constitutive threat – here, difference is more benign and something to be cultivated. Indeed, it is the erasure of difference that is instead what becomes problematic and unsettling. For example, much of Bourdieu’s analysis focuses on class politics and where he notes that the appeal of class attributes lies precisely in their exclusivity and (sometimes) rarity. One example of this is how the upper classes gravitated away from some initially upper class sports (like football and rugby) once they were perceived to have become too popular with the masses (and therefore sullied), instead switching to other more exclusive sports (Bourdieu 1984: 212). Thus, we might consider why people enjoy belonging to exclusive clubs or why we place high

² e.g. ‘Finnish Lessons’, *World Economic Forum*, <https://twitter.com/wef/status/952935161531912192?lang=en>

³ e.g. see Nordic Model Now, <https://nordicmodelnow.org/what-is-the-nordic-model/>

monetary value on rare gemstones even though they often have limited utility. For Bourdieu, therefore, difference is potentially a source of enjoyment to be cultivated, especially when difference takes the form of being exclusive or rare.

Of course, the enjoyment of distinction is itself dependent upon others recognising, admiring and valuing one's difference. Insofar as they do status is attributed with this helping to affirm one's own sense of self-esteem and a positive view of self-hood. Such a sense of virtuous difference therefore requires that the subject perform their distinction in front of others, and which can often stimulate those others to attempt to imitate that which distinguishes the subject from them. Indeed, distinction may even require that we encourage others precisely to engage in such acts of imitation, while we refrain from imitating them. We see this, for example, in the realm of fashion, in the form of cheap high street imitations of expensive chic designer garments. While the purchase of the former indicates admiration for the latter – a desire to be 'like us' – such cheap substitutes themselves do not have the same effect and as such reaffirm existing hierarchies of distinction and class (Bourdieu 1984: 50). In this respect it is the act of exclusion, and very sense of exclusivity, that is seen to activate desires in others to imitate what we have and that in turn reinforces a positive sense of selfhood. The point then is that subjects 'do not possess distinction on their own or simply by claiming it, but only in a relationship where recognition comes from the outside' (Chernobrov draft).

Arguably, then, the shift towards cultivating policy-based knowledge brands in nation branding practices might also be understood to be driven by similar motivations of cultivating a sense of virtuous difference by emphasising one's distinction, especially when this is premised on being pioneers (i.e. rare) in at least some areas of activity. In a context in which nations are increasingly being urged to brand themselves and compete with each other in terms of their sense of international civic duty – of how 'good' they are – offering up policy solutions to global problems becomes one way of standing out from the crowd and climbing the relevant benchmarking tables. Offering up global solutions to problems of the environment, education, gender equality and criminal justice, for instance, may therefore be one way through which states may be able to (re)assert a sense of their distinction as 'good', 'humane' and 'beneficent' actors, in turn fostering a sense of self-esteem and pride at what this is presumed to mean for the nation's international standing – a standing that can of course be evidenced through performance in benchmarking tables of good citizenship.

Policy Branding and the Politics of Nordic Exceptionalism

To illustrate some of the points raised so far we can consider how they may help explain certain developments in the nation branding practices of the Nordic countries (and the Nordic region as a whole) in recent years. In this respect, it is worth noting that Nordic branding is presently going through something of an unexpected renaissance. Following the end of the Cold War there were widespread claims about the death of Norden and the Nordic model of exceptionalism. Key elements that lay at the heart of the Cold War Nordic brand (the emphasis on being peaceful societies and bridge builders, on internationalist solidarity, on egalitarian social democracy, and on environmentalism) either appeared increasingly irrelevant with the end of the Cold War conflict, or no longer appeared to be particularly exceptional and distinctive. The future, it appeared, had moved away from the progressivist modernist north towards the progressive but more avowedly postmodernist project of European integration (Wæver 1992; Mouritzen 1995).

Seen in Bourdieuan terms, the apparent threat facing conceptions of Nordic identity and the Nordic brand, was not the existence of difference, but rather the perceived loss of distinction. Nordic exceptionalism, simply no longer appeared to be particularly exceptional, with this generating a certain amount of existential angst in the region. Reflecting on these developments Browning (2007) therefore posed the question of whether or not this apparent loss of exceptionalism mattered? Or phrased a little differently, there was a question in the air concerning how essential the idea of

exceptionalism is to Nordic identity and the Nordic brand and whether or not it is possible to (re)narrate Nordicity in non-exceptionalist ways?

Over the last decade, however, notions of Nordic distinction and a sense of Nordic self-confidence have returned. Discussions of Nordic models, a Nordic perspective and a rejuvenated Nordic brand have become widespread, and which in 2015 resulted in the Nordic Council of Ministers (2015) publishing a ***Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region 2015-2018***, and which has more recently been developed through a website devoted to the 'International branding of the Nordic Region'.⁴

The developing collective Nordic branding project includes much that one would expect to find in a typical nation or region branding programme. That is to say there is the requisite (and largely interchangeable) proliferation of inspiring and beautiful images (of people, places and food), an emphasis on education, science, technology and culture, and where a 'Nordic perspective' is described as one focused on 'openness, trust in each other, new ways of thinking, sustainable management, compassion and tolerance'.⁵ However, and in line with more recent developments in nation branding strategies discussed above, there is also a notable emphasis on Norden as a region of solutions for more pressing global problems, in particular of environmental, economic and social sustainability. For example, under the rubric of 'What the Nordic region can offer the outside world' an emphasis is placed on the Nordic governance and welfare model which is seen to have distinguished itself following the 2008 economic crisis, with the Nordic region also presented as a 'knowledge society', as such further evidencing the extent to which the hegemonic economic imaginaries identified by Sum and Jessop have become internalised (Nordic Council of Ministers 2015: 16-17). And as already noted, the policy-oriented and solution-focused approach to nation branding is also evident in the countries' respective nation branding strategies.

Arguably, this shift towards policy branding by the Nordic states – be that with respect to energy and environmental policy, gender politics, education, or criminal justice (amongst others) – if only inadvertently has served to resurrect notions of Nordic exceptionalism that reaffirm exceptionalism as a core part of the Nordic brand. A couple of points might be made in this regard.

First, it seems notable the Nordic country and region branding campaigns have been somewhat obsessed with benchmarking indices – the Finnish country brand report from 2010, for instance, lists literally dozens of them – and where the emphasis is usually on highlighting their positions near the top of these benchmarks. The obsession with benchmarking indices seems to have two functions. On the one hand, they are used as benchmarks for assessing the utility/impact of nation/region branding activities and where nation branding strategies will be deemed successful insofar as they result in an improved ranking. On the other hand, insofar as they also appear as part of nation/region branding campaigns they are also being mobilised precisely as evidence of Nordic distinction. Deployed this way the benchmarks are themselves used to cultivate the idea that the Nordics possess expertise in specific policy areas. Reference to benchmarks is thus used to help construct an image of themselves as knowledge gurus with marketable policy-based knowledge brands in particular areas – hence we then see attempts to market these policy brands in venues like the World Economic Forum.

One element of this, of course, is that the emergence of such forms of Nordic policy branding arguably operates to preserve the notion that there is such a thing as a Nordic model for the 21st century after all. Policy branding, in this respect, reaffirms a geopolitical imaginary that emerged during the Cold War. Linked to this, however, is the fact that the content of such policy branding means that once again the Nordic brand is coded as green (through the focus on environmental policies), humane

⁴ The Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, 'International branding of the Nordic Region', <https://www.norden.org/en/international-branding-nordic-region>.

⁵ The Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, 'Det Nordiska Perspektivet', <https://www.norden.org/en/news-and-events/videos/the-nordic-perspective>

(through the focus on criminal justice and humanitarian policies), and egalitarian (through the focus on educational and gender-based policies).

In this respect, Sum and Jessop (2013: 319) have noted how in the face of criticisms and attempts to name and shame, firms have responded by moving to a pro-active strategy of reinventing the 'hegemony of competitiveness discourses' precisely by recoding meanings of competitiveness by now emphasising competition over one's 'environmental sustainability', 'resilience' and 'responsibleness'. Thus, what perhaps marks out current forms of Nordic branding from that of the Cold War, is that the latter was often undertaken under geopolitical logics of securing recognition in the Cold War context. In contrast, today the emphasis has shifted towards logics of the competition state. One of the ironies then, is that when seen through the prism of 'knowledge brands', Nordic efforts at policy branding that once again serve to reaffirm an image of these as being 'good states' do so precisely by re-entrenching the 'hegemony of competitiveness' discourses that reassert a sense of their own distinction at the expense of others whose own distinction is essentially to be denied or deemed less worthy of imitation.

This is evident, for instance, in how notions of exceptionalism continue to be traded upon. For instance, we see this in ideas of there being an 'exceptionalist' Scandinavian approach in the policy field of criminal justice (Pratt 2008), or notions of the 'Nordic prostitution model' or Sweden's exceptionalist 'feminist foreign policy'.⁶ Of course, claims to exceptionalism are potentially fraught, if it turns out that Nordic exceptionalism is not actually that exceptional after all, or if it turns out that the exceptionalist policies being offered are not as successful as claimed – for instance, if it turns out that in reality there are some deeply problematic elements to Nordic criminal justice systems, or if it turns that gender equality at home falls short on some dimensions (e.g. note the prominence of the **#MeToo** phenomenon in Sweden⁷).

However, the exceptionalist tone to these efforts of policy branding and attempts to create what can be termed knowledge brands in particular policy areas is one that seems to link well with Bourdieu's conception of distinction, which emphasises that notions of exclusivity are fundamental to how claims about self-distinction are able to foster a sense of pride and self-esteem. Of course, insofar as this is the case with respect to Nordic nation and region branding then it reaffirms for Nordic citizens long-standing discourses that these societies are ahead in respect of gender, education, environmentalism, criminal justice etc...

This leads to a second point. As noted earlier, nation branding is generally understood as underpinned by a logic of trying to entice others into wanting what you have and offering this to them. Bourdieu's concept of distinction, however, suggests that there are perhaps limits to this in a nation branding context. While one is certainly seeking to encourage desires of imitation, distinction requires that one ultimately remains out of reach. The point is that distinction requires recognition, it needs to be performed to others, and where it is also important that the other shows due recognition of desiring that which one has. Thus, Nordic exceptionalism is precisely enhanced by imagining that the other envies us and what we have and as such wants to be like us – but where this exceptionalism is preserved because contextual differences and structural inequalities (like level of development, cultural practices) means that Norden's rarity and exclusivity is likely to be preserved (even enhanced).

Indeed, there are parallels here with how states (like India and South Korea) seeking to cultivate a 'developed world' status and image have also sought to initiate their own 'development aid' programmes which they further cultivate in their nation branding marketing – a nation branding strategy which is actually premised on the preservation of structural inequalities between donor and

⁶ Government Offices of Sweden, 'Feminist Foreign Policy', <https://www.government.se/government-policy/feminist-foreign-policy/>

⁷ The Local, 'Metoo', <https://www.thelocal.se/tag/metoo>

recipient nations (Browning 2016: 16-19). Put differently, one of the problems with nation branding as a discourse – and certainly as a strategy for solving various global problems, including those of development – is that nation branding is largely blind to the structural inequalities of resources; inequalities that essentially entrench the position of certain states at either the top or bottom of benchmarking indices, irrespective of the corporately deduced nation branding strategies they implement (Schwak no date).

One further consequence and potential pitfall of this is that there is also a potential for the nation branding of policy transfer to backfire. This is to say that ostensibly positive brands can easily turn negative, especially if the claimed 'knowledge brand' appears arrogant or smug. For instance, the Nordic countries proselytising about all things gender has sometimes left an impression that they are actually rather sanctimonious 'know it alls' (Moss 2018). Norden, of course, is no stranger to this, with foreign perceptions of the region generally alternating between visions of utopia and dystopia. The point, then, is that insofar as knowledge brands and attempts at nation branding through policy transfer can generate a certain amount of resentment and resistance then questions also arise as to whether embedding policy transfer within nation branding frameworks may actually be sub-optimal to solving global problems because – despite claims to benevolence – nation branding is ultimately premised on logics of competition.

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