2 Images of the Nordic welfare model

Historical layers and ambiguities

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Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to historicize ‘the Nordic model.’ Historicizing does not simply mean demonstrating that notions of a Nordic societal model existed prior to the more recent launch of this expression, but more importantly, to study the actual processes of representing Nordic specificities as a kind of model. The notion of a Nordic model was constructed during the gradual transformation of the five Nordic nation states into welfare states. More recently, the Nordic model has been subject to a (re-)branding as a combination of competitiveness and social investments, associated with contests about the political ownership of the model. We outline the dynamics and periods of these developments and discuss the ambiguities included in the images of a Nordic model.

Welfare states did not develop within closed national containers. They evolved through the interaction of domestic factors, cross-border transfers of ideas, and transnational interdependencies (Haas, 1992; Conrad, 2011; Kettunen and Petersen, 2011; Obinger et al., 2012). A key feature of this process was comparison as a political practice that played a major role in political agenda setting as well as in the production and transmission of social knowledge (Kettunen, 2006; Ogle, 2015: 4–9). This topic is especially important in connection with research on the Nordic welfare states (Petersen, 2006). The transnational attribute ‘Nordic’ implies a frame of reference, institutionalized in Nordic cooperation, for comparisons among the Nordic countries as well as between them and the rest of the world. Such meanings of the Nordic become especially evident in a historical analysis of both national and international social policy debates. On the one hand, it is reasonable to argue that ‘the Nordic element has never lastingly gone beyond national frameworks’ (Sørensen and Stråth, 1997: 19); on the other hand, ideas of the ‘Nordic’ have functioned as an important transnational reference point for national institutions and identities. This duality of the Nordic in relation to the national appears in concepts such as ‘Nordic Democracy,’ ‘Nordic Society,’ and ‘Nordic Welfare State.’ These concepts have functioned as referential frames for national societal developments,

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making it possible for the Nordic societies to be different and similar at the same time.

At least from the 1920s, the Nordic countries have periodically joined forces to establish Nordic political influence, projecting an image of the progressive *Norden* bringing new ideas to the international scene (Petersen, 2006). In this process, ideas of the Nordic were promoted, circulated, transformed, and returned to sender. Both the intentions and the intensity of these circulations changed significantly over time as the Nordic specificities were successfully 'modelized' in comparison with social policy arrangements elsewhere. As a political practice, comparison involves both positive and negative diffusion as well as the construction of narratives, stereotypes, rankings, hierarchies, and eventually models. Different comparisons display different dynamics. In intra-regional comparisons, the Nordic countries occupied different stages of development. Thus, being a Nordic welfare laggard became a part of Finnish and Icelandic national identities. In Finland, experiences of a conflictual history, including the Civil War of 1918, contributed to an identity of a Nordic exception. As a framework of intra-Nordic comparisons, at the same time, a notion of the Nordic group of countries representing a front-runner model of welfare was developed in wider international comparisons, both by Nordic and foreign politicians and experts.

We argue that this can be described as a 'modelization' process driven by national and regional interests articulated in an international context. We argue here that the attribution of 'Nordic' to what gradually became a societal model had two major consequences. First, it boosted the attention given to the small Nordic states on the international scene. Second, transforming national policies and ideas into distinctly Nordic characteristics was a means of legitimizing national welfare states that pacified political resistance against social reformism, resistance that came from both the left and the right.

We focus on four historical phases: The formative phase of modern social policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the interwar period, the Cold War period, and the ongoing post-Cold War era. In the concluding discussion, we suggest a framework for understanding the historical resilience of the images of a Nordic model. The ambivalence of the images of a Nordic model, appearing in several dualisms in the uses of the concept, allowed not only for the settling of conflicting interests but also for the continuation over a century of both continuities and discontinuities.

Images of Nordic problems in the formative period of modern social policy (1880–1914)

Notions of Nordic (or Scandinavian) society can be traced back to at least the nineteenth century, associated with ideas of Scandinavism, Nordism, Nordic culture, and later in the early twentieth century a unique Nordic democracy and governance (Sørensen and Stråth, 1997; Musial, 2002; Janfelt, 2005; Hemstad, 2008; Kurunmäki and Strang, 2011). Within welfare state

historiography, the origins of the Nordic model are usually located in the late nineteenth century when social reforms and modern social policy arrived onto the political scene throughout the Western hemisphere. As Daniel T. Rodgers (1998) has demonstrated, social policy was a trans-Atlantic discussion, with ideas moving both within and between nation states. Even though Denmark, Sweden, and Norway later became known as forerunner countries with respect to modern social legislation, 'Nordic' developments were heavily influenced by ideas coming from other areas.

This early wave of social reforms was in most countries closely related to nation-building, war, and societal modernization. During the nineteenth century, international comparisons, oriented toward the horizon of expectation associated with modernization, became an important factor in the construction of national politics, national economies, national societies, and their collective actors. The comparison was a political practice that informed and framed national decisions (Kuhnle, 1996; Åmark, 2005; Kettunen, 2006; Petersen et al., 2010, 2011). In the Nordic countries, we can point to the early well-established (regional) Nordic cooperation between key professions connected to social reforms, such as lawyers, economists, educators, and other groups of public servants (Wendt, 1959; SAMAK, 1986; Edling, 2006; Petersen, 2006). Such specialist networks were supported by initiatives toward closer political cooperation, such as the Nordic monetary union of 1872 and the *Nordic Inter-Parliamentary Association* from 1907.

This Nordic epistemic community (cf. Haas, 1992) developed through common definitions of social problems and openness toward the flourishing market for social policy innovations around 1900. Rodgers (1998: 8–32) illustrates this point by examining national demonstrations of social policies at the 1900 Paris World Exhibition. In the pavilion for 'social economy,' each country was profiled with something that their social policy experts supposed to express their particular inventions for solving the so-called social question: consumers' cooperative movement in Britain, state-administered social insurance in Germany, mutual assistance and insurance in France, and welfare capitalism organized by private companies in the United States. Yet as Rodgers remarks, all these social policy ideas had already been mixed in different eclectic and contradictory national combinations.

Images of a distinctly Nordic approach to social policy were not widespread around 1900 and were mainly deployed for domestic legitimation. Only from the 1920s and 1930s did the Nordic countries move from a peripheral position in international social policy debates toward the center of attention.

The interwar period: from the social policy periphery to the center of attention

In the 1920s and, especially, 1930s, international attention directed to the Nordic region increased, as illustrated by a growing 'social tourism literature.' American and British authors such as Marquis Childs (1936) and

Frederic Howe (1936) reported about Nordic societies having successfully transformed themselves, now offering high levels of coordination and social security without sacrificing traditions, social cohesion, or (from the 1930s) democracy (Musial, 2002). Both Howe and Childs, discussing, respectively, Denmark and Sweden, referred to national developments rather than any kind of Nordic model, with books entitled *Denmark – the Progressive Way* and *Sweden: The Middle Way*. However, the usage of the 'way' – metaphor in the book titles signals a temporality and the potential of Nordic countries as models of development for other countries. As summarized by the historian Peter Baldwin 'Where Scandinavia had earlier attracted notice mainly from those interested in, say, pig farming or temperance movements, it suddenly found itself the center of international attention' (Baldwin, 1990: 59).

The Nordic countries themselves became aware of this international attention. At the Second Nordic Travel Meeting in 1937, representatives of the Nordic tourist organizations discussed 'Touristic Nordism,' arguing that 'In our propaganda, our social development must also be considered. We have in Norden much to offer and it is not wise always to talk about ourselves as being the small ones' (Petersen, 2009). A cursory review of Nordic tourist brochures from the 1930s and 1940s reveals that democracy, social stability, and social welfare were used to attract tourists. In a Danish tourist brochure from 1938, it was even emphasized that Denmark could, indeed, serve as a model for the world:

> For those interested in social problems, Denmark is a land of greatest interest. Danish social legislation and the Danish cooperative system … are known everywhere. They serve indeed as models to the world.

The trigger for generalizing the Nordic experiences into some kind of 'model' (what we refer to as a process of 'modelization' whereby generalized characteristics gradually become a model in its own right) was the interplay between concrete developments in the Nordic countries and the international circulation of 'Nordic' images. In the following, we look more closely at two important and interrelated cases: The regional cooperation between the Nordic Ministries of Social Affairs and the Nordic cooperation within the International Labour Organization (ILO). Both cases demonstrate how the idea of a Nordic welfare model was an outcome of the interplay between the national and transnational components.

Nordic social policy cooperation: regionally and internationally

In June 1918, at a Scandinavian meeting for national parliamentarians in Copenhagen, Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish politicians agreed on the need for closer social–political cooperation.[1] This meeting was followed up nine months later by the first Nordic social–political meeting held in Copenhagen in April 1919.[2] The delegations included national experts, civil

servants, representatives of interest organizations, and welfare agencies, as well as politicians including the Ministers for Social Affairs.

This first Nordic meeting established common goals and agendas for successive talks. First and foremost, there was an agreement to coordinate national Nordic policies toward the newly founded ILO and its first conference in Washington later the same year (see below). Second, the countries agreed to strengthen existing traditions of mutual orientation on national social policy developments. Third, and more wide reaching, they expressed a common wish for 'uniform guidelines and forms for social development and mutuality concerning social rights and duties, in so far as this is found in accordance with specific conditions within the different Nordic countries.'[3]

In the 1920s, the degrees of modernization, economic and political capacities, and the existing social policy legislations clearly varied between the Nordic countries. Consequently, more uniform social legislation was not an uncontroversial goal (Petersen, 2006: 67–98). By the late 1920s, however, Nordic social policy meetings were being held on a regular basis for politicians, civil servants, and experts, and these meetings became the platform for a Nordic social policy epistemic community (cf. Haas, 1992). This resulted in intensified streams of knowledge transfer between the countries as well as strengthening ideas about a transnational Nordic social citizenship. The first steps in this direction were several mutual social policy agreements between the Nordic countries, and the most important of these, the Nordic Poverty Treaty (*Den Nordiske Fattigdomskonvention*), was signed by Finland, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway in October 1929. The treaty ensured all Nordic citizens who settled in another Nordic country social rights and established a system for reimbursement of expenditures between the countries.

A key issue for this epistemic community was the coordination of Nordic policies toward international organizations such as the League of Nations and the ILO. This desire for a united Nordic front on the international scene was important for the development of a Nordic (or Scandinavian) model as an international 'brand' in the following decades. Since its founding in 1919 as an autonomous organ within the League of Nations, the ILO has been a forum for developing and demonstrating a Nordic pattern of international cooperation and a Nordic model of national society, not least due to its tripartite structure of representation, with delegates representing governments, workers, and employers. In its very structure, the ILO came to reflect a notion of a modern society in which organized capital and organized labor, together with the government, generated social regulations, ameliorating the tensions between the international economy and national society. The ILO also introduced a model for international cooperation in which intergovernmental and inter-societal dimensions would intertwine (Kettunen, 2013).

Nordic cooperation very early achieved a recognized status in the administration of the ILO. The Nordic countries assumed common mandates in

the governing body and in various ILO committees. All three participating groups – governments, workers, and employers – also established their own practices of Nordic cooperation within the framework of the ILO, such as preparatory meetings in Geneva at the beginning of labor conferences. Soon after the foundation of the ILO, the Nordic employer organizations established their own office for ILO activities in Brussels, where the international employers' federation was situated. H. C. Ørsted from Denmark acted as the chief of the Nordic employer's office from the early 1920s until the early 1950s (Sjöberg, 1958: 78–80).

For Nordic cooperation in the workers' group of the ILO, the preconditions were much more limited in the 1920s. The Finnish and Norwegian trade unions were more leftist than the Danish and Swedish ones and had deep suspicions toward the ILO, considering it to be an organization of class compromise. Until the early 1930s, the Norwegian central organization of trade unions refused to nominate a worker representative to international labor conferences (Heldal, 1996). It took until 1936 before the Norwegian central organization of trade unions finally joined the reformist trade union international, the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), which coordinated the workers' group within the ILO. Joining the IFTU also opened the door to the Joint Committee of the Nordic Social Democratic Labour Movement (SAMAK). When the Norwegians joined the IFTU and SAMAK in 1936, the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish trade union confederations also came to an agreement about their intensified cooperation in the ILO. The practice of advance negotiations on issues coming onto the ILO agenda was established (Valkonen, 1987: 185).

While Denmark, Sweden, and Norway were at the top in the international statistics of unionization in the 1930s, Finland had remained one of the least unionized countries in Europe. However, this difference ended up contributing to a deeper Nordic identification among the Finnish trade unionists. In their efforts to make the unions stronger and influential, the Finnish trade union leaders exploited both the ILO's tripartite principle of representation and the criteria they claimed governed 'Nordic democracy.' The concept of Nordic democracy, as defined in the cooperation among the Nordic Social Democrats in the 1930s and further demonstrated at forums such as the Days of Nordic Democracy in the late 1930s, included a combination of parliamentary political democracy and institutions of collective negotiation and agreement on labor markets. It thus became easy for the Finnish trade union leaders to combine the Social Democratic interpretation of Nordic democracy and the ideals of the ILO (Kettunen, 2009, 73).

In reports of the ILO General Director during the 1930s, the Scandinavian responses to the Great Depression, notably the novelties of employment policies, were praised as an excellent model.[4] They were also discussed in the International Federation of Trade Unions. According to a report by the IFTU secretariat to the IFTU general council meeting in Copenhagen in 1935, the Scandinavian countries had 'decisively shown what good fortune

can be brought to the whole nation by the activities of a democratic Labor Government.' This had an encouraging effect 'on other democratic countries, where progress has also been made with Trade Union propaganda for economic planning on a democratic basis.'[5]

The engagement of Scandinavian labor parties and trade unions to national political decision-making also limited their possibilities to act as agenda setters within the IFTU and the ILO workers' group. This was the case, for example, in their cautious view on options to reduce working hours in the early 1930s (Kettunen, 2013). On the other hand, the ILO's tripartite structure implied that no member country or group of countries (such as the Nordics) spoke with one voice in the ILO. For example, the Nordic employers opposed the presentation of Scandinavian employment policies for use as an international model. When the British General Director of the ILO, Harold Butler, in his annual report to the international labor conference in Geneva in 1936, once again raised the Swedish employment policy as a model for other countries, both the Swedish and Finnish employer representatives felt themselves compelled to reject such a recommendation.[6]

During World War II, the officials of the ILO began to plan for the post-war period as early as the spring of 1940, even though the war had made the ILO's work – now relocated from Geneva to Montreal – considerably more difficult. The concrete result of this post-war planning was the Philadelphia Declaration in the spring of 1944, a document that, in conjunction with the charter of 1919, now constitutes the definitive statement of the ILO's principles, a part of its Constitution. The core of the Philadelphia Declaration consisted of guidelines for social and economic policy at the national level: full employment, the interdependence of social equality and economic growth, the principle of collective agreements, and the participation of both employers and workers in the formulation and implementation of social and economic policy.

As sources of inspiration for national post-war planning in the Nordic countries, the ILO and the Philadelphia Declaration were less significant than the British Beveridge Plan and various intra-Nordic initiatives (Wium Olesen, 2002). In any case, the post-war development of Scandinavia, especially in Sweden, was perceived not only by some Nordic citizens but also by many outside the Nordic region, as uniquely consistent steps along a universal pathway to progress, envisioned in the Philadelphia Declaration. The Nordic social policy cooperation seemed to promote this vision and confidence in a virtuous circle of social equality, economic growth, and enhanced democracy.

The Nordic 'middle way': universalizing Nordic experiences during the Cold War

The period from 1945 to 1980 is generally considered the Golden Age of the welfare state. This was also the case in the Nordic region. Social rights were

expanded in terms of coverage and benefit level, and new programs were introduced. Social expenditures and taxes skyrocketed, both in absolute and relative terms. Even though the Nordic welfare states had long institutional legacies and underwent an incremental change, it is in the decades from the 1950s through the 1970s that they take on the classical characteristics highlighted by comparative welfare state research; features such as universalism, social citizenship, high levels of redistribution, tax financing, gender equality, and strong states. Building on the image of a Nordic model established during the interwar period, the Nordic welfare states during the Cold War became a model both within the Nordic region and internationally.

The Cold War context had a decisive impact on ideological debates on social policy and social policy models (Petersen, 2013). The Cold War consolidated the split within the left between Communist and Social Democratic movements, and this division on the Left served as an impetus for coalitions between Centre-Right and Centre-Left against the larger evil of Communism and the Soviet threat. An observer at the time, Klaus Knorr, argued that the welfare state could be considered the 'most constructive defense of the free world against Communism' (Knorr, 1951: 448). Furthermore, the Cold War meant that international social policy debates became structured along the lines of the general East-West divide, and systemic competition was a *Leitmotif* both on the international scene and at the domestic level.

The ability of the Western European democracies to develop various ideological forms of social capitalism created room for the expansion of social security. In Germany, the *Soziale Marktwirtschaft* tried to balance the two sides (Zinn, 1992; Ptak, 2004), and the Nordic countries went even further, launching the idea of Nordic welfare state as a 'middle way' between capitalism and socialism (Nelson, 1953). In many ways, this image of a model was based on ideas promulgated in the interwar period such as 'Nordic Democracy' and Childs' 'middle way.' In the Cold War era, however, the social policy became even more salient. The successful incarnations into a Nordic welfare model were the subject of heated debates, both domestically within the Nordic societies and internationally. Within the black-white logic of the Cold War, the Nordic welfare model became a realistic utopia for center-left progressives, whereas those on the center-right characterized it as a dystopia of state paternalism or as a thinly disguised socialism (see also Chapter 4 in this book by Carl Marklund).

The attribution of 'Nordic' to the national experiences of the Nordic welfare states was important for several reasons. First, it projected the Nordic societies as democratic, peaceful, etc. Second, it created a platform for Nordic cooperation in terms of both policy formation and a more generalized Nordic 'branding.' Third, it gave a stronger voice and position to the Nordic countries (and related actors) in international debates. Finally, even though the Nordic countries held very different formal positions during the Cold War – three countries being members of NATO, two being neutral – the

Nordic framework allowed for a joint profile, including even neutral Finland despite its special relationship with the neighboring Soviet Union.

We cannot elaborate on all these aspects here. We will instead focus on the international circulation of the image of a Nordic welfare state model. This was not simply the result of Nordic actors who, with their intentions and strategies, sent out messages that were then received, interpreted, and domesticated outside the Nordic region. The process was rather a continuous recirculation and revamping of images that were projected and then reimported in different forms. Furthermore, the construction of the idea of a Nordic welfare state model happened through numerous channels and was facilitated by a multiplicity of mechanisms. One of these channels was cultural institutes – national semipublic institutions intended to promote the language, culture, and literature of the individual Nordic country. Although nationally grounded, these cultural institutes, dispersed in many countries around the world, promoted the Nordic–Scandinavian brand both on their own and in close interstate cooperation (Christiansen, 2009; Glover, 2011). Another formative platform was the initiatives of the Nordic countries for development assistance. After 1945, the Nordic countries became leading spenders on foreign aid. Recent studies in the history of foreign aid show how ideas about the Nordic welfare state played an important role in this respect (Bach et al., 2008: 75ff). In a volume from the early 1950s discussing Nordic aid to the developing world, the Danish social policy expert Henning Friis talked about the Nordic countries as 'frontline soldiers of peace, freedom, and social policy,' arguing that the national welfare state should be projected into the international level (Bach et al., 2008: 75). Finally, the idea of a Nordic model of welfare – building on traditions established in the earlier periods – was constructed through cooperation and comparison, based on a Nordic epistemic community with a shared value system, resulting in a projected Nordic identity or hegemonic frame of reference (Lægreid and Pedersen, 1994). This projection of a unique Nordic value system had a significant impact within the Nordic countries as well as influencing the Nordic approach to the outside.

Freedom and welfare

Influenced by international attention (positive and negative), Nordic politicians and experts placed themselves at the top of the international social policy hierarchy. From this summit, it was only a small step to universalizing the 'unique' Nordic experiences into a general model that should be applied to other aspiring welfare states. It is noteworthy how this universalization process also allowed for the development of a concept that could bridge differences in social policy development within the Nordic region. An illustration of this somewhat arrogant, missionary way of thinking occurred in 1947, when the Icelandic Minister of Social Affairs, Stefánson,

argued that even though Iceland lagged behind the general Nordic social–political development, the Nordic Ministries should jointly produce

> … a comprehensive account for the social political development in the Nordic countries, which could be comparative, and other countries might benefit from. I, for my part, believe that the Nordic countries are the highest ranking when it comes to social political legislation.
>
> (Petersen, 2006)

Six years later, Stefánson's suggestion was realized as a book with the ambitious title *Freedom and Welfare* was published as a joint enterprise of the Nordic Ministries of Social Affairs. In the preface to the volume, the Ministers of Social Affairs modestly stated:

> All five countries are parliamentary democracies and they are free democracies dedicated to the basic humanitarian rights they have worked and are working today to promote the welfare of their peoples. They do not claim to have found any final solution to the many and intricate social and economic problems with which our industrialized age is beset. It is hoped, however, that this account of the experience gained by the Northern countries in dealing with a number of these problems will be accepted as a modest contribution to the cause of promoting mutual knowledge and understanding among the peoples of the world.
>
> (Nelson, 1954: II)

The book is not only illustrative of Nordic self-confidence, exemplifying how identity construction and international branding came together. A close reading also reveals that the target audience was in the United States (Marklund and Petersen, 2013). It would be tempting to see evidence of this audience targeting in the use of terms such as 'the Northern countries of Europe' instead of 'the Nordic countries' since the adjective 'Nordic' was contaminated in the specific US context because of its frequent use in the early twentieth century by defenders of racial hierarchies.[7] However, a risk of anachronism would be obvious because in Nordic self-descriptions in general, 'Northern countries' were replaced with 'the Nordic countries' only later in the 1950s. A more persuasive sign of the targeting of a US audience was the avoidance of the term 'welfare state.' An American review praised the book for demonstrating 'the broad implications that are attached to the term "welfare" in northern countries.' She was apparently satisfied that the term in its Nordic usage did not evoke 'the connotations associated with the welfare state.'[8]

Indeed, the term 'welfare state' was used only once over more than 400 pages of text. While this indicates that the concept had not yet achieved such a central role in Nordic self-descriptions as it would later on (Edling, 2018), the absence of reference to a 'welfare state' also demonstrated a branding

strategy: in the US context, 'welfare state' had a very bad press in the early Cold War. In 1949, President Truman had thus warned his political allies against using the term 'welfare state' as it was becoming a 'scare word' (Petersen, 2013). This was the result of an intense campaign from opponents of rising taxes and 'big government,' attacking the term itself as being a stepping stone toward Communism. 'Reactionaries hunted around for a new phrase,' stated George Meany, secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of Labour in a speech to the US Congress in April 1950 (Procter, 1950: 115). Whereas the branding was designed for a specific context, the book clearly – although with a rhetoric of modesty – proclaimed the Nordic experiences to be a model for the rest of the world. Obviously, *Freedom and Welfare* did not dramatically change the nature of the US welfare state, however, and despite the general American skepticism vis-à-vis the Nordic welfare model, Nordic policies and policymakers occasionally served as inspiration for US policy makers (Rom Jensen, 2017).

A more receptive context for generalizing Nordic experiences was the ILO, which in the Cold War era turned more attention to decolonization. In 1956, the *International Labour Review*, a journal of the ILO, published a detailed overview on the social–political cooperation between 'the Northern Countries of Europe.' The article was written by Kaare Salvesen, an official in the Norwegian Ministry of Social Affairs and Chairman of the United Nations Social Commission. Salvesen had recently, as an invited UN adviser at a social policy conference of Arab countries, informed them about Nordic cooperation. Concluding his overview, Salvesen noted that:

> These five countries follow one social policy in its broadest sense: they introduce successively, and try to co-ordinate, national programmes consistent with a common view of the responsibility of the community towards those in distress, upon the necessity to give everyone fair and equal opportunities, upon the relation between the State and the individual, and upon the interrelationship between economic and social progress. The result is that the pattern of social legislation is, although differing in details, more homogeneous over the Northern area than it is in many federal States.
>
> (Salvesen, 1956: 357)

The Nordic countries were thus represented as both a model of regional international cooperation and a model of national society, and both models were found relevant also in the context of decolonization.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the conditions in the colonies, then in the throes of liberation, were brought to the forefront in the discussion of international social norms and in the activities of the ILO. Changes also appeared in the interpretations of the Cold War intersystemic conflict (cf. Halliday 1994) and the role of different societal models. The French chair of the employers' group, Pierre Waline, argued in 1961 for employers' active participation in

the ILO in order to defend progressive capitalism to confused Asian and African trade unionists and employers, who would have to choose between East and West. According to Waline, the system of industrial relations that had been perfected in the Netherlands and in the Scandinavian countries provided the key to the future. According to Waline, the technical assistance programs of the ILO could then spread this gospel, and together with strong support for the principle of freedom of association, this approach would defeat the appeal of Communism (Haas, 1964: 206). Obviously, not all employers shared this view. Nevertheless, acting as representatives for the tripartism model became an important aspect of Nordic identity in the context of the ILO after World War II. In the Nordic participation in the ILO, the idea of international cooperation as a comparative learning process was consciously combined with the traditional Nordic confidence in popular education. The ILO launched programs of 'workers' education,' aimed to train the workers of former colonies to become 'active and responsible partners in the nation-building process,' and within these programs, the Nordic modes of tripartite participation were promoted by the governments and trade unions of these countries.[9]

One cannot talk about any generally shared appraisal of the Nordic welfare model in the 1950s and 1960s. Controversial views appeared both outside and inside the Nordic region. Social democrats and social liberals embraced the idea of a progressive Nordic model, while left-wing critics saw it as an empty promise, a tactical integration of workers into capitalism; as for the center-right, they were sceptic or even outright hostile towards an idea of comprehensive state-organized social security. However, the circulation of the Nordic approach to welfare and the more intense debate during the Cold War had long-lasting effects: First, the growing attention and contestation regarding a specifically Nordic approach to social problems contributed to the modelization of the Nordic welfare state; second, building on the historical layer from the interwar period, the Cold War cemented the image of democratic progressiveness as a viable alternative to Soviet-style Communism and US-style capitalism. Third, mobilized by a Nordic epistemic community, the image of a Nordic model, in its own right, gained traction within the Nordic countries.

Since the late 1950s, forecasts of a convergence between capitalist and socialist paths of modernization emerged within the expanding social and political sciences (see, for example, Tinbergen, 1961; Aron, 1963; Galbraith, 1967). Among the candidates for the resulting universal societal model was the 'functional socialism,' elaborated by the Swedish social scientist Gunnar Adler-Karlsson (1967). Support for the essentially Western idea of convergence could be found in various notions of a 'Third Way,' including the images of a Nordic 'Middle Way.' However, convergence theories lost much of their premises after the 1970s. In the 1970s, it was easy to develop interpretations based on a crisis of capitalism. However, it became more and more difficult to refer to the economic and social developments in the Eastern

bloc as attractive models or powerful potentials. Since the 1980s, the metaphor of the Third Way no longer came to mean an alternative between capitalism and socialism but was instead applied to economic and social politics bridging between Keynesianism and neo-Liberalism, i.e., between different modes of regulating capitalism.[10]

The popularity of the Nordic model in the post-Cold War era

Cross- and trans-national 'comparative imagination' (Frederickson, 2000; Sluga, 2004), inspiring comparisons as political practice, was an integral part of what we retrospectively can interpret as the long history of a Nordic model of welfare. However, it was only in the 1980s that the expression 'Nordic model' came into wider use. The comparative discussion on 'models' – now limited referring to different patterns of regulating capitalism – gained impetus from the end of the Cold War inter-systemic conflict and from the encounters between globalized capitalism and nation-state institutions.

Since the 1980s, crucial aspects of the notion of national society that were associated with the expanding welfare state and parity-based negotiations and agreements in the labor market have been severely challenged in the Nordic countries, as elsewhere. The transformations associated with globalization increased the economic and social asymmetries concerning the role of spatial ties. The increased mobility and increased asymmetries between different actors in terms of their mobility reinforced and, still more, changed the role of economic competitiveness in the definition of national political agendas. In a new way, competitiveness came to refer to potentials of a national society to offer an attractive operational environment to globally mobile economic actors: companies, investors, and people belonging to the 'creative class.' Since the millennium, the concept of 'branding' has frequently been invoked to denote these efforts to make countries attractive to market actors, indicating a kind of commodification of national societies.

In the Nordic countries, changes have taken place under conditions of relative institutional continuity. 'The Nordic welfare state' – often interchangeably used with 'the Nordic welfare society' – is a very popular term in the Nordic countries (Edling, 2019). No political party can expect to gain electoral success by declaring itself to be in opposition to the welfare state. The arguments for a radical deregulation that emerged in the 1980s have been pushed to the margins. Today, everyone seems to be in favor of the welfare state.

With varying emphases in different Nordic countries, rescuing the welfare state became one of the most widely shared arguments in the politics associated with concerns about the aging of the population and the so-called sustainability gap from the 1990s, and the financial crisis that began in 2008. Those concerned about economic competitiveness or advocating austerity politics have motivated these concerns with the necessity of creating or maintaining resources that can sustain the welfare state. Maintaining

a viable welfare state is used as an argument for restrictive immigration policies as well as for the promotion of labor immigration. Those defending the welfare state against the pressures of globalized capitalism argue that the welfare state, through its security networks and risk-sharing systems, generates competitive advantages. Rescuing the welfare state seems to be a goal that legitimates many different means, and a means that legitimates many different goals (although one may question how well the Nordic welfare state succeeds in coping with its various rescue operations).

Are we witnessing the end or a new beginning?

In January 2011, Sweden's New Conservatives released a document for the World Economic Forum in Davos. The document, called *The Nordic Way*, sought to rebrand the Nordic Model as a model of liberal economic growth with a social conscience in a time of financial crisis (World Economic Forum, 2011; Swedish Institute, 2012). This document was considered an attempt to claim ownership to a reinterpreted version of the Nordic model, and the reaction by Swedish Social Democrats came promptly: they applied to protect the concept of 'Nordic model' as a registered trademark. This again fueled protest from Nordic Council of Ministers in an affidavit to the Swedish Patent and Registration Office: 'The Nordic Model belongs to the cultural-political heritage of all the Nordic countries and their citizens.' However, after several rounds of discussion, the Patent and Registration Office decided in favor of the Swedish Social Democrats, who were thus granted, for the next 10 years, a privilege of using 'The Nordic Model' (Kettunen et al., 2015: 87–88).

One can safely conclude that the Nordic welfare states have changed as a result of their responses to the challenges of globalization and Europeanization. However, the idea of a model appears to be very flexible. In the decades of expanding welfare states, the Nordic model of welfare was developed and promoted as a consistent pattern of social reform and change. Since the 1990s, the Nordic model has regained international attention due to its capacity to reform and restructure itself in the era of flexible capitalism. This kind of capability and flexibility has become a key component of the Nordic model concept itself. It has increased the possibility to make widely varying interpretations of the Nordic model, all equally legitimate, as well as expanding opportunities to commit oneself to the model and to the battle over its ownership.

Concluding reflections: the ambiguity of the Nordic model

In this chapter, we have traced the history of the idea of Nordic welfare for well over a century, through to our day. Naturally, it is not possible to offer a complete mapping of this process of 'modelization' within a book chapter. However, our survey demonstrates that the notion of a Nordic welfare

model has been both durable and capable of continuing reconfiguration. The long-term perspective underscores the historical layering of different elements in the ideas of Nordic welfare, resulting from a complex process of circulation between national, regional, and international experiences and identities. In the following, we will offer a framework for interpreting this historical layering and its ambiguities.

In public and scholarly discourses after the 1980s, 'the Nordic model of welfare' appears as a historical interpretation connecting the past, the present, and the future. It grasps and mixes the different historical layers discussed in this chapter. It also includes dualisms that imply either divergent views or inherent paradoxes in one and the same view concerning the contents of the model. In the following, we distinguish between five partly overlapping dualisms.

First, a dualism of nostalgia and actuality is involved in the terms *Norden* and 'Nordic' in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. The nostalgia may be for the 'people's home' that was at one time sheltered from the outer world, for the role of the exceptionally consistent representatives of universal moral norms, for a society that was the object and subject of rational knowledge, or for a unique type of peace-loving popular internationalism. However, alongside or combined with nostalgia, there are the efforts toward the actualizing of 'Nordic.' They appear in the discussion about the future-oriented competitiveness of 'the Nordic model.' Attempts to unite nostalgia and actuality also appear, most obviously in varying combinations of enduring characteristics and creative innovativeness constructed in Nordic branding.

In assessments of national adaptations to globalized capitalism or European integration, we find a *second dualism* in the usages of 'the Nordic model.' Here the term 'model' may refer to either an old structure now threatened through globalization and European integration or to an effective way of responding to the new challenges. The Nordic model that is perceived as a target of threats is usually identified with the welfare state. A newer concept, the 'competition state,' is usually used by critical scholars, describing a move away from the Nordic model of welfare. There are occasional signs of adopting 'competition state' as an affirmative concept for how to respond to the new challenges of globalization by reforming the Nordic welfare model and giving first priority to one of its old ingredients, the goal of greater competitiveness.[11]

However, the Nordic model as a response is most often associated with positive economic consequences of the (somehow reformed) welfare state (Andersen et al., 2007). This implies an economization of social policy in two different senses: as an argument for the recognition of the economic importance of social policy and as an argument for reforming social policy in a way that could meet the requirement of its being a productive factor, providing 'social investments' and increasing 'social capital.' As far as the Nordic model of welfare is developing into a 'social investment welfare state' (Morel

et al., 2012), we can talk about an institutional conversion in which the old welfare-state institutions are modified to serve new competition-state functions.[12] Seen as a capacity for self-reform, this kind of change appears to be a crucial part of the 'new super-model' brand of the Nordic model.

In the world of different models, the concept of model remains ambiguous, also in a way that implies a *third dualism* of the Nordic model. On the one hand, 'model' refers to deep-rooted, persistent cultural beliefs, norms, and values that have given rise to and uphold different kinds of welfare policies and institutions. On the other hand, the concept of model refers to best practices and comparative transferable knowledge to be utilized in cross-border policy learning. At the level of policy formulations, this dualism has been actualized in discussion on the preconditions and limits of exporting or importing elements of another model, for example, to what degree and how the Nordic model could inform welfare policies in China (Kettunen et al., 2014). In efforts to ensure national competitiveness, attempts to combine universal 'best practices' with a particular competitive advantage, 'niche' or 'edge,' have been a way of linking the two understandings of 'model.'[13]

Focusing on the exceptionalism of the Nordic model, a *fourth dualism* can be identified. Our historical analysis indicates that the Nordic pattern of reforming society was often interpreted as a uniquely consistent way of advancing on the universal path of social progress. The aforementioned books by Childs in 1936 and by the Nordic social ministries in 1953, as well as the role of the Nordic countries in the ILO, exemplify this merging of the Nordic and the universal, and it is expressed both from Nordic and outsider perspectives. However, another, newer way to describe the Nordic uniqueness also appears. From a perspective of a completed construction of the Nordic model, commentators have characterized it as a unique combination of principles and practices that seem incompatible (e.g., high taxes and competitive economies) but nevertheless works as the bumblebee that flies against all odds.

Oxymoron-type expressions are used by scholars to represent essential features of the Nordic model. One of them is 'statist individualism.' It was coined by the Swedish historian Lars Trägårdh with Swedish references, but it has gained political influence as a characterization of the Nordic model in general. Originally, in the 1990s, the argument was targeted against the right-wing critique of the allegedly patronizing welfare state. However, the way 'statist individualism' has been recently used in the branding of the Nordic model seems to focus on a combination of confidence and social capital with individualism as the essence of the model. This idea can be used in center-right politics, not only for contesting Social Democratic claims to ownership of the welfare state but also for arguing that the extension of individual choice through market-based solutions is the most appropriate policy for implementing the principles of the Nordic model (see especially World Economic Forum, 2011).

The fifth dualism concerns a longer-term ambiguity in the roles and meanings of 'Nordic.' In the Nordic discourses we have examined in this chapter, 'Nordic' has referred to a transnational regional framework of international cooperation, including intra-Nordic relations and Nordic contributions to wider international collaboration. At the same time, it has also referred to a mode of change and reform in a national society, appearing in national 'Nordic welfare states.' Both these aspects are included in the nostalgia associated with 'Nordic.' They appear in a narrative of unique, peace-loving popular internationalism and in a narrative of shaping the nation states into uniquely universalistic welfare states. However, not only Nordic nostalgia but also historical welfare-state research, including this chapter, has contributed to bridging these two narratives. The Nordic ideational and institutional framework of cooperation, comparison, and competition played a significant role in the making of five different national welfare states. The idea of a Nordic model of welfare was developed and demonstrated in the acts of Nordic cooperation that took place in wider international contexts, and the model took on different meanings in each national context.

At the same time as the popularity of 'the Nordic model' has greatly increased, Nordic cooperation in welfare policies, one of the old core areas of Nordic collaboration, has considerably diminished (Kettunen et al., 2015). The Nordic model of welfare has become more nationalistic. This does not mean that differences between the 'five exceptions of one model' should increase. This kind of nationalism may entail more similarities as it is associated with attempts to meet the imperatives of globalization that are conceived as national challenges. When 'the Nordic model' is discussed as a target of threats associated with globalization, the notion of a model has often been constructed by means of a nostalgic welfare nationalism, sometimes associated with protectionist or xenophobic nationalism. When 'the Nordic model' is discussed as a response to the challenges of globalization, the notion of a model is associated with national competitiveness. In these ideational constructions of the Nordic model, mythical ingredients of Nordicness seem to play a significant role, while the history of Nordic social policy cooperation does not.

Notes

1 See VPM, September 16 1918, ILO-Commission (National Archives Sweden), FI:1; Minutes 'Nordic social political cooperation', November 7, 1919, Department of Social Affairs (National Archives Denmark), International Department, 1929, record 23.
2 Protocol and supplements for the Nordic Social Policy Meeting in Copenhagen April 1919, ILO-Commission (National Archives Sweden), FI:1.
3 Quoted from the Minutes 'Nordic Social Political Cooperation', 11 November 1919, Department of Social Affairs (National Archives Denmark), International Department, 1929, record 23.

4 Especially at the International Labour Conference. Seventeenth Session. Geneva 1935. Report of the Director. Geneva 1935, 18–19; International Labour Conference. Sixteenth Session. Geneva 1936. Report of the Director. Geneva 1936, 24–27.

5 Report of Secretariat on the Activities of the International Federation of Trade Unions during the period from 1st April, 1934, to 31st March, 1935. IFTU Nr 94. International Institute of Social History (IISG), Amsterdam.

6 International Labour Conference. Twentieth Session. Geneva, 1936. Report of the Director. Geneva 1936, 24–27; International Labour Conference. Twentieth Session. Geneva, 1936. Record of Proceedings. Geneva 1936, 127–128, 134–135.

7 The term 'Nordic' was frequently used to denote racial hierarchies in the interwar period. This was strongly criticised in reviews of the literature in leading academic journals referring to this as 'Nordomaniac', the 'Nordic Guard', 'Nordic superiority', 'the Nordic alarm again', 'the Nordic Propaganda', and as 'occasional outbursts from the Ultra-Nordics'.

8 Review by Helen Fisher Hohman in *Social Service Review*, 1956, vol. 30 (2), 229–232.

9 For example, 'An International Experiment in Workers' Education.' *International Labour Review*, 1958, vol. 57, 186–194.

10 Concerning the revised 'Third Way' among the Swedish Social Democrats, see Åmark (1992) and Andersson (2007).

11 In Denmark, the Social Democratic minister of finance, Bjarne Corydon, in 2013 acknowledged 'competition state' as a good concept for up-to-date national politics ('Corydon: Konkurrencestat er ny velfærdsstat', *Politiken*, (23 August 2013). Scholarly support for this view is provided by Pedersen (2011).

12 On conversion as a form of institutional change, see Thelen (2003); for studies importing 'competition state' into scholarly discussion, see Cerny (1990), Streeck (1998), and Palan and Abbot (1999).

13 This mode of thought and action was influentially advocated by Porter (1990).

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