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1 Always in crisis, always a solution?

The Nordic model as a political and scholarly concept

Anu Koivunen, Jari Ojala and Janne Holmén

While campaigning for the 2016 US Democratic Party presidential nomination, Senator Bernie Sanders invoked the Nordic countries as a model for future politics. In a debate, he declared, ‘I think we should look to countries like Denmark, like Sweden and Norway, and learn from what they have accomplished for their working people.’¹ Hailing the Nordic countries, especially Denmark, as an example of ‘democratic socialism’,² Sanders’s vision engendered a heated debate, with political opponents critiquing the implied political agenda, the prime minister of Denmark protesting the idea of Denmark as a socialist country, and journalists and pundits presenting corrective views of the economic and social policies of the Nordic countries.³ The critiques notwithstanding, the notion of the Nordic model has continued to circulate in US political imaginary, invoked by both left and centre Democratic politicians. For example, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a Democratic representative from New York, promotes her Green New Deal agenda with references to Nordic countries: ‘My policies most closely resemble what we see in the U.K., in Norway, in Finland, in Sweden.’⁴ In the polarised US political debate of the 21st century, the Nordic countries serve as an imaginary horizon for both a new kind of socialism and a reformed capitalism in the age of accelerated climate change.

However, the idea of the Nordic model as fuel for political imagination and a trope for global comparison and competition is an old one. The Nordic countries – especially Sweden and Denmark – have been invoked by Nordic and foreign actors as a social and economic model for the rest of the world in times of crisis dating back to the Great Depression of the 1930s.⁵ In particular, the interplay between the Nordic Social Democrats and the forces on the left and the centre of the US political spectrum has been a driving force behind establishing the idea that there is a Nordic recipe for how to alleviate the ills of capitalism while avoiding the pitfalls of socialism.⁶ In the Nordic countries, this discourse about a third way has been adopted by both right- and left-wing governments, and the Nordic model has come to serve as a tool in the global competition and regional and national branding of the 21st century. Both policymakers and economists have rebranded the Nordic model as a benchmark for constant renewal and for ‘embracing globalization by sharing risks’.⁷ At the World Economic Forum in Davos, 2011, ‘the Nordic way’ was

touted as a recipe for ‘the new reality’ – that is, the world in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and the Eurocrisis.⁸ A report, released by a think tank and endorsed by the five Nordic governments, paraded the virtues of countries that top global indexes for competitiveness, productivity, growth, quality of life, prosperity and equality. Rejecting the notion of the Nordic countries as a compromise between capitalism and socialism, it defined the Nordic model as a ‘combination of extreme individualism and a strong state that has shaped the fertile ground for an efficient market economy’. The report highlighted social cohesion and broad social trust as key for the Nordic way, enabling resilience through constant renewal.⁹ In 2013, *The Economist* termed the Nordic countries ‘the next supermodel’ for ‘reinventing their model of capitalism’ and ‘a blueprint’ for politicians from both the right and the left of ‘how to reform the public sector, making the state more efficient and responsive’.¹⁰

In these framings, the Nordic model appears to have two sides. On the one hand, it is a set of crisis narratives; the model is perpetually called into question and seen as facing daunting challenges. Furthermore, its economic foundation is threatened by globalisation, an ageing population and the digital revolution. On the other hand, the Nordic model is invoked as a recipe for dealing with these future challenges.¹¹ Both as a set of policies and as self-branding, the Nordic model has had an institutional footing in official parliamentary and governmental cooperation since the 1950s. While the political relevance of Nordic cooperation waned after the Cold War and European integration, the actors involved in the many layers of transnational cooperation – parliaments, governments, academia and civil society – continue to invest in Nordicness.¹²

This book joins in this tradition by asking whether the 21st-century Scandinavian recipe for combining stable democracies, individual freedom, economic growth and comprehensive systems for social security is at a crossroads in the current conjuncture of the global digital economy, geopolitical tensions and changes in political culture, as well as challenges to democracy. The chapters were written in the aftermath of the global financial crisis and the Eurocrisis and amid a sense of accelerating global unrest (war in Syria, the Russian annexation of Ukrainian Crimea in 2014, the continuing war in Eastern Ukraine), threats of European disintegration (Brexit, European Union member states breaching the rule of law) and the intensifying political polarisation and disruption of party structures in many countries, but before the COVID-19 pandemic. In this framework, this book asks how the Nordic economic, social and political model is currently challenged as both an idea and a practice. The underlying question, following German sociologist Wolfgang Streeck’s invocation of Antonio Gramsci, is whether we are living in an age of *interregnum*, an era between systemic changes. In other words, we examine whether we are in ‘a period of tremendous insecurity in which the accustomed chains of cause and effect are no longer in force, and unexpected, dangerous and grotesquely abnormal events may occur at any moment’.¹³ For Streeck and many other commentators of a ‘democratic decline’ in the 21st century, the present reads as a period of dramatic, foundational changes in the global economy and political

systems.¹⁴ According to Streeck, *interregnum* is characterised by a sense of inability to predict the future as ‘disparate lines of development run unreconciled, parallel to one another, resulting in unstable configurations of many kinds, and chains of surprising events take the place of predictable structures’.¹⁵ This book asks how this age affects the Nordic model as a trope of political imagination and a vocabulary for futurity.

This book analyses the Nordic model as an empirical, policy-based phenomenon and as a political idea and a trope for the imagination through the lenses of social scientists and historians. While exploring contemporary economic, social and political challenges, the emphasis is, however, on historicising the presentist narratives of crisis and tracing longer and diverse developments.

The emergence of the Nordic model

Although fluid as a geographical referent, *Norden*, as the Nordic region is called in Scandinavian, primarily refers to the five nation-states of Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden, as well as the autonomous territories of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland islands. However, the Nordic identity has an appeal outside of this traditional core. For example, Estonian youths are more likely to identify as Nordic than as Baltic, and voices emphasising the Nordic identity of Scotland, as well as tangible Nordic-Scottish political cooperation, have been increasing in the last decade.¹⁶ Although the Nordic countries are often regarded as fairly homogeneous from the outside, from within, the notion of a single economic and social model can be called into question. Is there one model? Are there many models, but is the Swedish model the most well known? What is Nordic about the model? What does it entail? And are these national models simple, unique and – moreover – only associated with positive connotations?¹⁷

Nevertheless, the concept of the Nordic model circulates and has political currency internationally, as well as in the Nordic countries, where it operates as a signifier and vehicle for various political goals, a tool of transnational comparison – that is, to examine the policies of neighbouring countries – and a shared resource for regional and national self-branding.¹⁸ The model is a productive and performative concept; it is mediated by histories and imaginaries and mobilised to engender policies.¹⁹

The emergence and development of the Nordic model as a concept in international discussion can be roughly outlined by a quantitative bibliometric analysis using Google Books Ngrams.²⁰ As illustrated in Figure 1.1, there has been a gradual increase in the use of the term, Nordic model, in international discussions over the 1990s and the early 2000s.

Apparently, the Nordic model concept first surfaced in Google Books’ English corpus in the late 1970s. Although Google Books Ngrams presents many challenges, these results are in line with previous research, showing an increase in discussions over the Nordic and Swedish model.²¹ Several hype-cycles can be traced in these discussions; after a first hype during the late 1970s

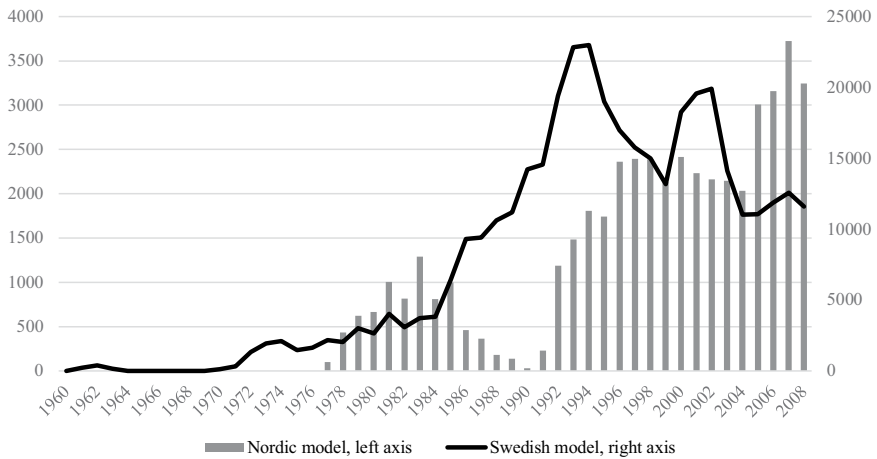


Figure 1.1 Appearance of 'Nordic model' (left axis) and 'Swedish model' (right axis) in Google Books Ngrams from 1960 to 2008 (Index: Nordic Model 1977 = 100).

Source: Google Books Ngrams (<https://books.google.com/ngrams>). Cited 15 September 2019.

Note: Google Books Ngrams traces the relative share of the concept used in the whole corpus. As these shares are relatively small (0.000000145% in 1977), we used an index series (Nordic model 1977=100) instead to show the changes in time. Google Ngrams taps all the texts using the phrases 'Nordic Model' or 'Swedish model'; thus, they include ones that do not have a societal content. Nevertheless, the figures mostly relate to texts that are interesting from the perspective of this book. Furthermore, Ngrams refers in this case only to books published in English; thus, the widespread discussion in the Nordic languages is omitted.

and the early 1980s, the Nordic model faded in discussions, but it rapidly rose again during the early 1990s. These hype-cycles correlate with periods of economic crisis, strengthening the argument that the Nordic model is primarily referenced when there is a perceived need to find alternative ways of organising society and the economy. According to Google Books (Figure 1.1), the Nordic model concept was mentioned over 30 times more frequently in texts in the 2000s than in the late 1970s. As these are relative shares from the whole corpus, the absolute increase in the use of the concept was even more dramatic.

Discussions of the Nordic model have had different emphases during different decades. The earliest books found by Google Books Ngrams used the term while discussing, for example, environmental education in the Nordic countries²² and macroeconomic policies on inflation, whereas afterwards the topic was discussed more in relation with the welfare state.²³ Furthermore, the Nordic model has its roots in the older Swedish model concept; as can also be clearly seen in Figure 1.1, this concept appeared in international discussions in the early 1960s. The Swedish model was far more frequently discussed in the literature than the Nordic model throughout the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and the 2000s. Even though there was a clear declining trend in the use of the term

'Swedish model' and an increase in the use of the term 'Nordic model' in the early 2000s, Google Ngrams found six times more mentions of the Swedish model than the Nordic model.

Although the Nordic model concept is only a few decades old, the common traits it describes from the social models of the Nordic countries have much older roots. Klaus Petersen has shown that the Nordic countries began to synchronise their social policies in the early 1900s through regular meetings of public servants, covering topics such as workers' accident insurance (from 1907), the protection of children (from 1919), general social insurance (from 1935) and unemployment insurance (from 1947). In the 1920s and the 1930s, Denmark was the leader and reference point for the other Nordic countries, a position that was taken over by Sweden after 1945. From 1953, Nordic social policy cooperation was subordinated to the newly founded Nordic Council. From at least the late 1940s, the Nordic countries began to describe their welfare societies as a model for Western Europe. For example, Pauli Kettunen has shown how Nordic delegates to the International Labour Organization during the 1950s depicted their countries as a homogeneous area for social and economic policies.²⁴

Thus, the Nordic model, regardless of how it is defined, has to be seen as the outcome of a century-long process of voluntary cooperation.²⁵ The Nordic countries have influenced each other's policies and have learned from each other's experiences but have been free to apply bespoke national solutions when it suited them. This explains why it is almost always possible to find at least one exception among the Nordic countries that defies any attempt to strictly define the Nordic model. Such a genetic view of the Nordic model is articulated by historians, such as Mary Hilson. She uses the Nordic model as a central concept in her attempt to write the history of the Nordic countries as a *Geschichtsregion* while trying to avoid a traditional national historiographical framework.²⁶

The notion of a distinctive Nordic social model began to attract international attention during the Great Depression of the 1930s. For several decades, it was most commonly referred to as the 'middle way', a term coined by Marquis Childs in 1936.²⁷ As Carl Marklund describes, Sweden was particularly well positioned to benefit from the goodwill bestowed upon the Nordic countries since it had created the American-Swedish News Exchange (ASNE), which actively promoted the country in the United States. High-level Swedish politicians used their country's celebrated position as a middle way in social policies in order to gain acceptance for their less popular middle way in foreign policy after the Second World War, namely their neutrality between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Soviet bloc. In 1949, ASNE published a book called *Sweden – Model for a World*, but, as noted earlier, the Swedish model concept did not come into broader use until the late 1960s and the early 1970s (Figure 1.1).²⁸ A decade later, when the Nordic vision of social organisation was perceived to be under threat, as Bo Stråth has confirmed, the Nordic model concept started to spread.²⁹ In addition, several other concepts have been used to describe the Nordic countries and the particularity of their

societies, most commonly the welfare state and the *folkhem* (literally people's home).

It seems that the Nordic model concept had its breakthrough as a political battle cry at the 29th meeting of the Nordic Council in 1981. There, leading figures in the Nordic Social Democratic parties rallied around the Nordic model in the general debate. The president of the Norwegian Storting, Gutorm Hansen, initiated the debate by urging the Nordic Council to cooperate in order to protect the Nordic social model, which, for the first time, was under threat from unemployment. The prime minister of Denmark, Anker Jørgensen, answered by defining the common core of the Nordic model as democracy, welfare state, peace, solidarity with the Third World and, despite the differences between the Nordic countries, a strong cultural affiliation. The leader of the Swedish Social Democrats, Olof Palme, then described how the Nordic model was under threat from war, economic crisis and conservatism. According to him, the model played an important role in a wider international context. To the list of threats, Finland's Ulf Sundqvist added that the Nordic economies were especially vulnerable to international developments and needed to cooperate in order to adapt to the energy crisis, increasing automation and the rise of the information society.³⁰ Thus, leading figures of the Social Democratic parties in each country not only were active in proliferating the Nordic model concept but also detected threats that would materialise on scale decades later, when they would return in reinvigorated discussions about the crisis of the Nordic model.

Thus, the Nordic model concept was born during a period when the Nordic societies saw their model threatened by an economic recession, the rising tensions in the Cold War and the conservative or neoliberal offensive from Reaganism and Thatcherism. Most of the challenges to the Nordic model identified by leading Social Democrats in 1981 are strikingly familiar to the concerns of today. However, there are also differences. In 1981, inflation was considered a serious threat, while immigration was not mentioned, except indirectly as a question of solidarity. In contrast, inflation was not considered a major threat to the Nordic model in the 2010s, but the impact of immigration was discussed as both an economic and a cultural issue.

Swedish Social Democrats began to use the Nordic model concept more widely during the centre-right government of 1976–1982, which was the first time the Social Democrats slipped into opposition since the 1930s. As the prime minister of Sweden in 1969–1976, Palme actively used the Swedish model as a tool in his foreign policy and as an example of a middle way between Soviet socialism and capitalism. Being in opposition in 1981, he was in no position to conduct official Swedish foreign policy. However, as the head of the Swedish delegation to the Nordic Council, he could advocate for joint Nordic policies. In the process, he used the Nordic model concept as he had used the Swedish model concept as a minister. Therefore, the transition from the Swedish to the Nordic model might be interpreted as having been driven by a need to join forces to combat strong challenges, as well as

a pragmatic adaptation of the political vocabulary from the Swedish to the Nordic arena.

As the political hegemony of the Swedish Social Democrats was challenged by forces from the centre-right in the early 2000s, Sweden's conservative prime minister in 2006–2014, Fredrik Reinfeldt, appropriated the Nordic model in his political rhetoric. The Social Democratic Party countered by registering *den nordiska modellen* as a commercial trademark in Sweden. Objections from the Nordic Council, among others, were rejected by the Swedish Patent and Registration Office. However, the trademark protection does not extend to political use.³¹ It can be claimed that, although Social Democratic parties have generally been on the retreat in the 21st century – even while leading governments in Sweden, Finland and Denmark in 2019 – their championed welfare state model has gained wide acceptance across the political spectrum. In fact, parties on the far right have embraced the basic tenets of the Nordic model. In their opposition to immigration and humanitarian asylum policies, right-wing populist parties employ the rhetoric of welfare nationalism, claiming that immigration is the main threat against the Nordic model.³²

The Nordic model in research

As evident from the Google Books Ngrams data in Figure 1.1, over the decades since the early 1990s, the Nordic model has gained ample attention in social scientific research. An analysis of the appearance of the Nordic and Swedish models in the Web of Science database, as depicted in Table 1.1 and Figure 1.2, further refines this picture, capturing the evolution of the concept in different disciplines.³³

As shown in Table 1.1, the two concepts are favoured by different disciplines. The notion of the Swedish model is most common in business and economics

Table 1.1 Appearance of the Nordic and Swedish models in journal articles.

Research area	Total number of articles	Number of articles on the Nordic model	Number of articles on the Swedish model	Per mil Nordic model	Per mil Swedish model
Business & Economics	961,506	265	1,206	0.28	1.25
Education & Educational Research	492,224	62	204	0.13	0.41
International Relations	119,202	24	34	0.20	0.29
Public Administration	114,571	61	125	0.53	1.09
Social Issues	166,900	37	52	0.22	0.31
Social Work	110,268	37	82	0.34	0.74
Sociology	172,384	45	134	0.26	0.78
History	306,358	29	62	0.09	0.20
Total	2,443,413	493	1,807	0.20	0.74

Source: Web of Science. Cited 15 September 2019.



Figure 1.2 Share of articles using the Nordic and Swedish models as concepts in certain research areas from 1990 to 2019 (per mil from all articles in different time cohorts).

Source: Web of Science. Cited 15 September 2019.

and in public administration. In these fields, the Swedish model is mentioned more than once per every thousand articles published in the Web of Science. The Nordic model concept, in turn, is most frequently used in articles dealing with public administration, education and sociology. Figure 1.2 shows how the use of these concepts in different research areas changed over time. Only in public administration research do both concepts seem to have declined during the 2010s, while the use of these concepts increased in the 2010s in many disciplines, especially in research dealing with social work and social issues.

Most articles analysing the Nordic model in our sample ($N = 493$) deal with voluntary associations, donors interests and globalisation affecting European social models,³⁴ whereas most of the cited articles analysing the Swedish model ($N = 1,807$) analyse customer behaviour in Sweden and Swedish multinational enterprises.³⁵ Thus, the Swedish model is more widely used in terms of corporate strategies; this has also been noted by Michael Porter in his famous book on the competitive advantage of nations.³⁶ Over time, interestingly, we can also see a shift wherein the Nordic model is less associated with international relations and increasingly associated with social policies. In any case, the Web of Science (Figure 1.2) indicates the wide and diversified currency of the concepts across a range of disciplines.

In the Nordic context, scholarship on the Nordic model is a vast and lively field – impossible to subsume in a way that accurately mirrors its diversity and complexity. Scholars across disciplines have investigated the histories and futures of the Nordic welfare state visions and policies, participating in an ongoing discursive construction, de- and reconstruction of the model.

In his book of 1990, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Gösta Esping-Andersen identified what he termed ‘Scandinavian’ welfare system as a distinct model, which he characterised as social democratic.³⁷ Also, in a more recent 2013 account by Nikolai Brandal, Øivind Bratberg and Dag Einar Thorsen, the history of the Nordic welfare state reads as a narrative of Swedish, Danish and Norwegian social democracy. Although there are differences between the

policies of the different Nordic countries, Brandal, Bratberg and Thorsen argue, they are united by a common social democratic ambition to eradicate the evils of industrial capitalist society – namely, ‘want, disease, ignorance, squalor, and idleness’.³⁸ The authors emphasise that centre- and right-wing parties, when in power after 1970, have maintained most of the social democratic policies.

According to Johannes Kananen, summarising an extensive field of welfare and social policy research, the history of the Nordic welfare state developed in three phases. Until the 1960s, increased emancipation and equality were achieved with the help of collectivist means. However, by then, collectivism had begun to be perceived as a constraint, and policies of individual emancipation were conducted in the 1970s and the 1980s. Since the 1990s, the Nordic welfare states have come under pressure from the international competition state paradigm, which places economic goals, such as competitiveness, before social goals, such as equality.³⁹

In *Changing Social Equality. The Nordic Welfare Model in the 21st Century* (2012), Jon Kvist, Johan Fritzell, Bjørn Hvinden and Olli Kangas conclude that support for equality and welfare policies is still high in the Nordic countries, although it is even higher in Southern Europe. While the Nordic countries are still good at mitigating old social risks, such as large families and advanced age, they are less good at managing new risk factors for poverty, such as immigration. Overall, the Nordic countries are still more economically egalitarian than most other countries, except the Netherlands, which is even better in this regard.⁴⁰

Besides economic equality, gender equality has been frequently discussed as an important dimension of the Nordic model. However, this narrative has been problematised as feminist and, more recently, postcolonial scholarship has shown that the self-image of being equal has been a hindrance to addressing gender inequalities and discriminatory practices.⁴¹ As Kari Melby, Anna-Birte Ravn and Christina Carlsson Wetterberg conclude in *Gender Equality and Welfare Politics in Scandinavia: The Limits of Political Ambition?* (2008), gender equality in the Scandinavian welfare model has historically often entailed equality based on gender difference.⁴² At the same time, equality politics has meant ‘empowerment and inclusion of some women, and marginalisation and exclusion of others’ as Nordic welfare states supported gender hierarchies among ethnic ‘others’.⁴³ Diana Mulinari, Suvi Keskinen and other postcolonial feminist scholars in *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region* (2009) and *Undoing Homogeneity in the Nordic Region: Migration, Difference, and the Politics of Solidarity* (2019) have questioned complacent monolithic accounts of gender equality as well as narratives of exceptional homogeneity characterising much scholarship on the Nordic model.⁴⁴

The criticisms notwithstanding, the Nordic model continues to be discussed among scholars as a recipe for the future, such as for how to become best in class in the globalised knowledge economy. In their *Learning Factories: The Nordic Model of Manufacturing* (2018), Halvor Holtskog, Elias G. Carayannis, Aris Kaloudis and Geir Ringen promote the Nordic model of the labour

market and work organisation as a system of wage negotiations between trade unions and employer federations, safety nets of health insurance, welfare benefits, pensions, job mobility and career experimentation combined with job safety, democratic decision-making processes and high employee participation in the organisation of work. This model is depicted as fostering innovation and creativity, allowing high-cost countries to compete on the international market and providing key to the re-industrialisation of the Western world.⁴⁵ As another example, *Sustainable Modernity. The Nordic Model and Beyond* (2018), a volume by scholars from the humanities, the social sciences and evolutionary science, rebrands the narrative of the Nordic model for the age of the climate crisis, presenting it as a recipe for a well-being society. In this account, Norway, Sweden and Denmark stand as icons of ‘socially sustainable Nordic modernity’, combining competition and cooperation – the familiar elements of economists’ accounts – with their resilience in the age of globalisation, cultural collisions, the digital economy, the fragmentation of the work/life division and often intrusive EU regulation.⁴⁶

‘If the strict criteria of social research are applied, it is impossible to say that a Nordic Model has ever existed’, Norwegian sociologist Lars Mjøset contended in a 1992 seminar *The Nordic Model – Does It Have a Future? Has It Ever Existed?* held in Helsinki. However, he continued, ‘the Nordic model has and does exist as a pan-nationalistic idea, and in the context of a regional identity movement, it may gain strength in the future’.⁴⁷ Indeed, the 1990s saw an emergence of a rich, comparative literature on the development of the Nordic welfare state, in both intra-Nordic and European perspectives. As Pauli Kettunen has concluded, discourse of competitive state and ‘the making of a globally competitive “us”’ increased the use of the concept of the model.⁴⁸ In the context of European integration, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the many Nordic research-funding bodies launched networks and research programmes examining the distinctiveness and the new challenges for the Nordic model.⁴⁹ At the same time, historians became interested in historicising the welfare state, and Øystein Sørensen and Bo Stråth discussed the notion of ‘Nordic model’ in the context of culture and identity work.⁵⁰ A special issue of *Scandinavian Journal of History* entitled *Nordic Welfare States 1900–2000* (2001) as well as the 2005 anthology *Nordic Model of Welfare: A Historical Reappraisal* marked a turn to welfare history in studies of the Nordic model as long-term Nordic research networks introduced conceptual history, social movements, religion as well as gender history as interpretive frameworks.⁵¹

The broad and intense scholarly interest in the Nordic model was epitomised in the multidisciplinary, cross-national research project ‘The Nordic Welfare State – Historical Foundations and Future Challenges (NordWel)’, a NordForsk-funded Nordic Centre of Excellence (2007–2012), which studied the social security and service systems, societal patterns and normative value systems of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The Centre published a range of anthologies on workfare, education, bureaucracy, migration,

welfare nationalism and social policies.⁵² In *Beyond Welfare State Models: Transnational Historical Perspectives on Social Policy* (2011), Pauli Kettunen and Klaus Petersen, the directors of the centre, described the comparative welfare state research as ‘a veritable industry’ obsessed with models.⁵³ Questioning the use of models as an analytical framework for research, Kettunen and Petersen discuss the Nordic model as ‘a good case for discussing the analytical limits and political meanings of model comparisons’ and a case for studying how transnational processes influence national policies.

Combining perspectives from the aforementioned strands of research, this volume continues to interrogate the Nordic model as Nordic identity work while making a historically rooted attempt to charter the possible futures of the Nordic model that might be the outcome of the present crisis.

The structure of the book

In this book, we address the Nordic model as political imagination and as policy practice by bringing together three topical debates: the past and future of the Nordic model as a social, economic and political model; the force and effects of populist politics on the political system; and contemporary concern over political instability. Although these debates are usually distinct, the key idea of this volume is to investigate the Nordic model at their intersection. Drawing from the rich interdisciplinary literature on the Nordic model and on the Scandinavian welfare state, we go beyond discussing its economic and financial foundations and detailed policies to focus instead on its democratic legitimacy and questions of political efficacy and social cohesion.

In Chapters 1–5 of the book, the Nordic model is discussed in terms of democratisation and forms of governance.⁵⁴ Henrik Meinander analyses the challenges to the Nordic model posed by the globalised economy, geopolitical tensions and national political cultures. Next, in her investigation of how the *land of bliss* concept has been used in visions and nostalgic memories of the welfare state, Ainur Elmgren approaches the Nordic model as a foundational yet changing social narrative. What used to be a progressive project of the future has become the lost golden age of the past. Then, while worry over the future of the welfare state dominates the public sphere, the question of whether the Nordic countries have actually experienced a regression from equality does not have a simple and straightforward answer, as illustrated by Petri Roikonen, Jari Ojala and Jari Eloranta, who compare economic data on equality with the debate on equality in academia and major daily newspapers. The geopolitical landscape is discussed in the light of NATO debates by Matti Roitto and Antero Holmila.

Chapters 6–10 of the book focus on the key developments within politics, the party structure and the mediated public sphere. Kjell Östberg discusses the development of social democracy, describing how the Nordic Social Democratic parties have experienced losses in influence and electoral support for

decades and how they have fundamentally reformed their old welfare policies. Torbjörn Nilsson analyses how Nordic conservative parties have reacted to the challenge from right-wing populism, comparing the threats and available strategies during two distinct periods in the development of the Nordic welfare state: the 1930s and the first decades of the new millennium. The current wave of populism in the Nordic countries is also analysed by Emilia Palonen and Liv Sunnercrantz, who trace the transformation of populist parties from opposing welfare statism to promoting an anti-immigration agenda, sometimes with welfare chauvinist undertones. Pasi Saukkonen discusses how cultural policies in different Nordic countries address the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity and how neo-nationalist political ideas influence Nordic cultural policies. Anu Koivunen's chapter focuses on the language of politicians and journalists in identifying the public debate and social media in particular as key sites and agents of polarisation, division and extreme opinions.

Chapters 11–13 of the book focuses on policies that envision a renegotiation of the Nordic model. Johanna Kantola analyses gender policies, highlighting the paradoxical gap between progressive gender discourses and policies in the Nordic countries, and, for example, their gender-polarised labour markets and high rates of domestic violence. She also discusses the effects of recent waves of neoliberalism, conservatism and nationalism on Nordic gender policies. Pursuing the question of Nordic distinctiveness, Heikki Hiilamo investigates how the Nordic societies are preparing for unemployment caused by automation, yet another emerging risk factor. In the final chapter, Janne Holmén analyses how government planning in Norway, Sweden and Finland envisions the adaptation of the educational system to the challenges and possibilities posed by rapid technological advances.

At the threshold of the 2020s, the Nordic model is once again perceived to be in crisis, and once again it continues to have political currency as political imagination, surfacing as a reference point both in the Nordic countries and abroad. Beyond connoting something valuable yet threatened or something to be reformed and defended, it is difficult to predict where the Nordic model will be heading in the coming decade. It is also too early to assess the effects and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the one hand, the Nordic model embodies a political vision of a society in which consensual decision-making engenders policies that are able to alleviate social and economic inequalities. On the other hand, it highlights its inherent adaptability, underlining its ability to accommodate and survive change and crises.

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Notes

- 1 *Washington Post* 13 October 2015.
- 2 Moody 2016.
- 3 See e.g. Yglesias 2015, Tassinari 2015, Swanson 2015, Tharoor 2015. On the Nordic response, see Acher 2015.
- 4 Cooper 2019.
- 5 Rom-Jensen 2017, Marklund 2010, Marklund & Petersen 2013.
- 6 Andersson 2009, Andersson & Hilson 2009, Lloyd 2011, Brandal, Bratberg & Thorsen 2013.
- 7 See the title for Andersen et al. 2007.
- 8 WEF 2011.
- 9 Ibid., 3. Similarly, a group of Finnish economists named globalisation and the rapidly ageing population as unprecedented threats to the welfare state but described the virtue of the Nordic model as its 'ability to reconcile risks and uncertainties with openness and the market economy' (Andersen et al. 2007, 156). See also the 2014 report by Nordic economists for the Nordic Council that, while downplaying the distinctiveness and uniformity of the model, hailed its capacity 'to reform and adjust' as the key feature of the Nordic model: 'The Nordics have a strong track record in adjusting to the pressures of structural change' (Valkonen & Vihriälä 2014, 348).
- 10 Wooldridge 2013, *The Economist* 2013.
- 11 Kettunen 2012.
- 12 Götz & Haggrén 2009, Strang 2016.
- 13 Streeck 2017, 14.
- 14 'Is Democracy in Decline?' was the title of the twenty-fifth anniversary issue of *The Journal of Democracy* (Plattner 2015). See also Krastev 2017, Norris 2017, Mounk 2018, Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018, Runciman 2018. For Nordic discussions, see Forsgård (ed.) 2017, Gelin & Åsard 2019.
- 15 Streeck 2017, 14.
- 16 Estonian Human Development Report 2016/2017, Widman 2013, Scottish Government 2017.
- 17 On a 'Finnish model', see Andersson, Kosonen & Vartiainen 1993, Saari 2006, Bergholm 2009.
- 18 Regarding branding, see Marklund & Petersen 2013, Harvard & Stadius 2013c.
- 19 Regarding the notion of the Nordic region as 'a mediated region', see Harvard & Stadius 2013a, 2013b.
- 20 Due to linguistic variety, this method is not suitable for analysing domestic discussions on the Nordic model in the Nordic countries nor does it tap all texts written for an international audience. Furthermore, Google Books Ngrams registers all conceivable uses of the search term, some of which are unrelated to the social and economic Nordic model. Nevertheless, they can be used to track the general trends in the discussions.
- 21 For example, Stråth 1993.
- 22 Nordic Council of Ministers 1977.
- 23 Lundberg 1978, Paunio & Haltunen 1976.
- 24 Petersen 2006, 67–71, 86, Kettunen 2013.
- 25 A recent overview of different aspects of this cooperation can be found in Strang 2016.
- 26 Hilson 2008.
- 27 Childs 1934, 1936.
- 28 Marklund 2013a.
- 29 Stråth 1993.
- 30 Nordiska rådets svenska delegation 1981, Nordisk råd 1981, 64, 72, 120.
- 31 Patent och Registreringsverket.
- 32 For Nordic welfare nationalism and its 'others', see e.g. Pyrhönen 2015, Keskinen, Tuori, Irni & Mulinari 2009; Keskinen, Norocel & Jørgensen 2016.

- 33 The database has its shortages, including linguistic ones since it consists of articles published in established journals in English. Nevertheless, a search identified 2,735 articles using the Nordic model concept and 10,507 articles using the Swedish model concept. Web of Science traces concepts from titles, abstracts and keywords only. The Nordic model concept has become so successful in attracting interdisciplinary attention that it has even been adopted by the sciences, such as through the ‘the Nordic model of dairy cow metabolism’ (Danfær et al. 2005), which is far removed from its original use in labour market policies. To identify the social, economic and political content we wanted to study, our analysis was limited to eight partly overlapping research areas representing 17%–18% of all articles in the database. A single article can be included in several categories in Web of Science, such as in both history and economics. In the total column in Table 1.1, these overlaps have been removed.
- 34 Curtis, Baer & Grabb 2001, 783–805, Berthélemy 2006, Sapir 2006.
- 35 Fornell 1992, Andersson, Forsgren & Holm 2002, Anderson, Fornell & Rust 1997.
- 36 Porter 2011.
- 37 Esping-Andersson 1990, 26–29.
- 38 Brandal, Bratberg & Thorsen 2013, 188.
- 39 Kananen 2014, 163–164.
- 40 Kvist, Fritzell, Hvinden & Kangas (eds.) 2012, 61–62, 177, 204.
- 41 E.g. Allén 1992, Melby, Ravn & Wetterberg 2008, Mulinari, Keskinen, Irni & Tuori 2009.
- 42 Melby, Ravn & Wetterberg 2008, 1.
- 43 Ibid., 15, Mulinari 2008.
- 44 Mulinari, Keskinen, Irni & Tuori 2009, Keskinen, Skaptadóttir & Toivanen 2019.
- 45 Holtskog, Carayannis, Kaloudis & Ringen 2018, 2–3.
- 46 Witoszek & Midttun 2018.
- 47 Mjøset 1992, 652.
- 48 Kettunen 2011a, 16. See also Kettunen 1998, 2006, 2012.
- 49 For important anthologies summarising comparative Nordic research projects, see Kautto et al. 1999, 2001.
- 50 Stråth 1993, Sørensen & Stråth 1997.
- 51 Christiansen & Petersen 2001, Christiansen, Petersen, Edling & Haave (eds.), 2006. For conceptual history of the welfare state, see Edling 2019.
- 52 Blomberg & Kildal 2011, Suszycki 2011, Jönsson, Onasch, Pellander & Wickström 2013, Buchardt, Markkola & Valtonen 2013, Marklund 2013b, Jönsson & Stefánsson 2013, Kettunen, Kuhnle & Ren 2014.
- 53 Kettunen & Petersen 2011, 6. See also NordWel 2007–2012.
- 54 For context, see Aylott (ed.) 2014.

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