

Continued. IKEA in German

definition of signs: “Signs define the world we live in”; a sign is the correlation between expression and content, and this brings us to the heart of culture, for expression and content can be modified within a given culture. Then the author differentiates between everyday culture and culture in research; she has expressed her understanding of culture with the quote from Malinowski that she has set as the slogan for her study: culture “as the widest context of human behavior” – where the emphasis on behavior is at best annoying, for culture is also the expression of a way of thinking and of political self-image; political culture is more than political behavior. How can it be otherwise – and the author does not attempt to solve this puzzle – that in German there is a *Kulturbeutel* (a *culture bundle*), in English simply a *toilet bag*, in French a *trousse de toilette*, in Spanish *el neceser*? In the language of semiotics, culture is (and I quote) “collective knowledge, system of signs, order, structure”. Thus, in reality, culture extends far beyond “behavior”. This is in reality the essential prerequisite for being able to investigate the IKEA commercials in terms of an analysis of semiotic culture.

THE GENESIS AND CONSTRUCTIONS of the respective national cultures are of central importance for an examination of this sort: we have already recently learned that Scandinavians’ image of Scandinavia has been significantly influenced by the German image of the North: the Germans had constructed their ideal picture of an idyllic North and had taken it to Scandinavia, where it became established as their own image. If I translate that correctly into semiotic language, over decades the German Alter-culture of Scandinavia became the Swedish Ego-culture. To that extent, Sweden sells Germans their own original image of Sweden, the German Alter-culture as Swedish Ego-culture: this is the company’s “Swedish solution” – which can function so successfully only in Germany. The two-way paths of image and identity construction are thus not only of the immaterial world but are also entirely tangible, economic ones.

Der Spiegel puts together this list of stereotypes from 1969:

“Drugs and pornography, prisons without doors and girls without morals, boredom and short skirts, hot love and cool people – that is the average German’s image of Sweden.”

Stereotypes like this always have a funny, lighthearted side; they make it possible for us to see that they can change: the “Swedish film”, which came into fashion in the 1950s as an umbrella term for films considered pornographic, had a quite different connotation

in the 1930s – it meant the filmic depiction of nature! “Swedish film” stood for “nature film”, or, as the case may be, scenes that took place in free, primordial nature.

The “Swedish solution” – the description, deciphering, and evaluation of five IKEA commercials – is the climax of the dissertation; the author gives them each their own title: “Frankenstein”, “Knut”, “Froschkönig der Mittsommerzeit”, “Eine gewaltige Gardenparty”, and “Neuheiten bei Oma”. She examines the commercials minutely, describing the techniques and the content. Her summary, “The Swedish Solution”, is an “IKEA solution”; it has as much to do with Sweden as the Germans permit – and that is a lot! IKEA has cult status for its southern neighbors with a construction of Swedishness that no doubt is entrenched in a good part of Germany.

But what is happening with IKEA in France, in Russia, in England? As far as furniture is concerned, IKEA has at least managed to modernize the German living room – if it were to manage that in Russia, too, that would also be a cultural revolution. At the same time, however, we must remember that the sorcerer’s apprentices from time to time have the upper hand and can no longer be put back behind bars, or, as Helmut Schmidt put it: If “Billy” does not return, you will be stuck with all your pine junk. The wit and irony that has fascinated the Germans for nearly 40 years is not a Swedish specialty; Swedes are just as serious and humorless as the Germans – nevertheless, we would really like to believe that they are not.

JENNIE MAZUR’S *Die “schwedische” Lösung* provides a good example of a scholarly critical investigation of Self- and Other-images in terms of culture. In connection with the use of concepts such as highlight or headline, we should return to the term “icons”, in this case “iconic films”. Aby Warburg’s treatment of popular-culture techniques and nomenclature could also be of use in this connection and would complete the semiotic analyses. On the basis of a large amount of evidence, the dissertation illuminates just how ubiquitous the heterostereotypical and autostereotypical constructions of the National – or of what is considered the National – have become. It has long been known in the context of national product branding that making money is not the only thing that can be done with these constructions; this study demonstrates that a lot of money can be made. ✖

bernd henningsen

Union, federation, or “merely” Norden as a product of 1814

Jóhann Páll Árnason and Björn Wittrock (eds.)
Nordic Paths to Modernity

New York: Berghahn Books 2012

Bjørn Magnus Berge and Anders Björnsson (eds.)
Skandinaviska vägval
[Scandinavian crossroads]

Stockholm: Atlantis 2008

Max Engman and Nils Erik Vilstrand (eds.)
Maktens mosaik:
Enhet, särart och självbild i
det svenska riket
[The mosaic of power: Unity,
peculiarity, and identity in
the Swedish realm]

Stockholm & Helsinki: Atlantis
and the Swedish Literary
Society in Finland 2008

Rasmus Glenthøj
Skilsmissen:
Dansk og norsk identitet
før og efter 1814
[The divorce: Danish
and Norwegian identity
before and after 1814]

Odense: University Press
of Southern Denmark 2012

Henrik Meinander
Finlands historia
[The history of Finland]

Stockholm: Atlantis 2006

Niels Kayser Nielsen
Bonde, stat og hjem:
Nordisk demokrati og
nationalisme — fra
pietismen til 2. Verdenskrig
[Farmer, state and home:
Nordic democracy and
nationalism, from pietism
to the Second World War]

Århus: Aarhus University Press
2009

Gunnar Wetterberg
The United Nordic
Federation

Copenhagen: Nordic Council of
Ministers 2010

The year 1814 was a watershed in Nordic history. In the glare of hindsight, we can see that it was on the whole fortunate that Denmark and Norway separated in an almost bloodless manner

without sparking conflict between the two peoples. Norway did not become wholly independent with the Treaty of Kiel on January 14, 1814, which Frederick VI reluctantly signed at Hindgavl. It did eventually become independent after the signing of the Constitution of Norway at Eidsvoll on May 17 of the same year, and after almost ninety years of imposed union with Sweden. The circumstance that the Norwegian struggle for political emancipation was directed at Sweden, while cultural emancipation from Denmark proceeded quietly throughout the 19th century, was a blessing for everyone. If both of these emancipations, together with economic independence, had taken place within the confines of the multinational state and under continued Danish rule, it is easy to imagine the legacy of bitterness the struggles would have left to present-day Scandinavia.

The outcome would probably have been the same, but with a stain of hatred between the peoples. There would have been a genuine basis for Norwegian anti-colonialist repudiation of all things Danish, otherwise propounded only by the anti-Danish Henrik Wergeland and the protagonist of Henrik Ibsen’s dramatic poem *Peer Gynt* of 1867, in which the characterization of the history of the union as “four hundred years of darkness” was first minted. The line “Twice two hundred years of darkness brooded o’er the race of monkeys” (where the monkeys are the Norwegians) is uttered while Peer Gynt is in a madhouse in Cairo. Ibsen did not, as is popularly believed, subscribe to this interpretation of the shared history of the countries. On the contrary, this was a confrontation with his countrymen and their mentality and probably a reckoning with himself and his earlier, more national-romanticist works on subjects borrowed from the age of the sagas. *Peer Gynt* was a confrontation with a mentality Ibsen believed was typically Norwegian and the poem should be read as a satirical fantasy about a boastful egotist, the feckless and irresponsible Peer, a character of Norwegian folklore.¹

AS THINGS WERE after the loss of Norway, everyone in the Nordic countries² managed to get used to living in small independent nation states, especially after Norway and Sweden peacefully dissolved their union in 1905, Finland achieved independence in 1917, and Iceland became largely independent in 1918. It was by no means a given that things would turn out this way, but when they did, the foundation was laid for today’s good relations among the countries and especially the peoples. So, in the long view, it was probably best that things went as they did in 1814. But this was not easy to imagine at the time.

From the Danish point of view, the break was so enormous that it was psychologically repressed. A half-century later, 1814 paled in the light of the total defeat in 1864 – but the critical step on Denmark’s journey to becoming a small nation was the loss of Norway in 1814. This is probably why the year has been forgotten or at any rate ignored in Denmark. The surrender was simply too painful. This began with Frederick VI himself, who considered the defeat and the loss of Norway so ignominious that he later forbade any mention of it. And the Danes by and large followed his lead to such a degree that Norway was essentially written out of Danish history. In 1954,

European cooperation.

Georg Nørregård examined the Treaty of Kiel in January 1814 from a traditional foreign policy angle, a subject upon which he gave a lecture to a group of supremely uninterested history students in Århus – including the present author.

APART FROM TRADITIONAL diplomatic history, the separation between Denmark and Norway has largely been passed over in silence, even in the massive work on the history of Danish foreign policy, *Dansk Udenrigspolitikshistorie*.³ The meager focus on the consequences of the separation was due to the structure of the work, where 1814 was the cut-off year between Volume II and Volume III. This structure, not inherently unreasonable, causes Norway to vanish from the Danish horizon as a result of the impossible position of the multinational state in the European conflict after 1807–1814, given that there is no further analysis of the long-term consequences. Nor was this shortcoming definitively corrected in Ole Feldbæk's final volume of the Danish-Norwegian depiction of the shared history of Denmark and Norway from 1380 to 1814.⁴ Brilliant works of cultural history like John Erichsen's *Drømmen om Norge* and an anthology entitled *Norgesbilleder* published in connection with an exhibition on the common history of the two countries at the Danish Museum of National History in Hillerød in North Zealand in 2004,⁵ call attention to important elements of the shared culture, but these, too, fail to definitively rectify the mutual ignorance of the two countries' shared history. Only in recent years has a young Danish historian, Rasmus Glenthøj, provided a comprehensive analysis of the background and consequences of the separation from both the Norwegian and Danish perspectives in a series of exciting and thoroughly documented works. His contribution has culminated in *Skilsmissen: Dansk og norsk identitet før og efter 1814*.

THE DESCENT OF the Danish state, or more accurately the Oldenburgian state, from a mid-sized European power to a helpless small nation happened in 1814, although the fate of the nation was not finally sealed until the total defeat of 1864. The political amateurism that continued until 1864 can be explained as a consequence of 1814. That year entailed not only the loss of one third of the nation's population and an even larger proportion of its territory, but also a change in the demographic composition from about one third Danish, one third Norwegian, and one third Holsteiners (and Schleswigers) to a situation in which the German-speaking 40 percent ruled the Danish-speaking 60

percent, when they formerly had made up only about 25 percent of the population of the entire realm. This led almost inevitably to national conflict and a civil war in 1848–1851, which culminated in the Danish defeat by Prussia and Austria in 1864. It is difficult to determine today whether things necessarily had to go this way, but the conflict was lying in wait, especially since the Holstein elite had retreated to their estates in Holstein after the attempt to centralize the state following the incorporation of Schleswig-Holstein in the wake of the disintegration of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806. The economic hardships of the war culminated in a national bankruptcy in 1813; the loss of agricultural exports to Norway and tax revenues from that country, so rich in natural resources, transformed the Danish Monarchy into a small, poor country, albeit still a multinational one by virtue of Schleswig-Holstein and the islands in the Atlantic. The fateful year of 1814 dealt a nearly insurmountable blow to the Danish state that, after total defeat in 1864, took a new, nationally and socially homogeneous shape. That new Denmark is embraced with great satisfaction today, just as the foundation was laid for good relations among the modern Nordic states. But this occurred at the expense of a larger and more multinational state formation, which we now remember only vaguely and which was until recently either ignored or disparaged.

Denmark – or rather the Oldenburg Monarchy – suffered critical defeats between 1645 and 1660 at the hand of its hereditary enemy, Sweden, which had been ruled by kings of the House of Vasa since 1523, after Gustav Vasa severed the country's ties with the Danish-dominated Kalmar Union. But the state survived as a composite of four realms and a number of dependencies in the Atlantic, augmented by an overseas colonial empire that made it possible to engage in the profitable triangular trade of slaves and sugar cane, albeit at a far more modest level than Britain or France. In addition to the Kingdom of Denmark, made up of Northern Jutland, the Islands, and Norway, the state comprised the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, which were gradually incorporated

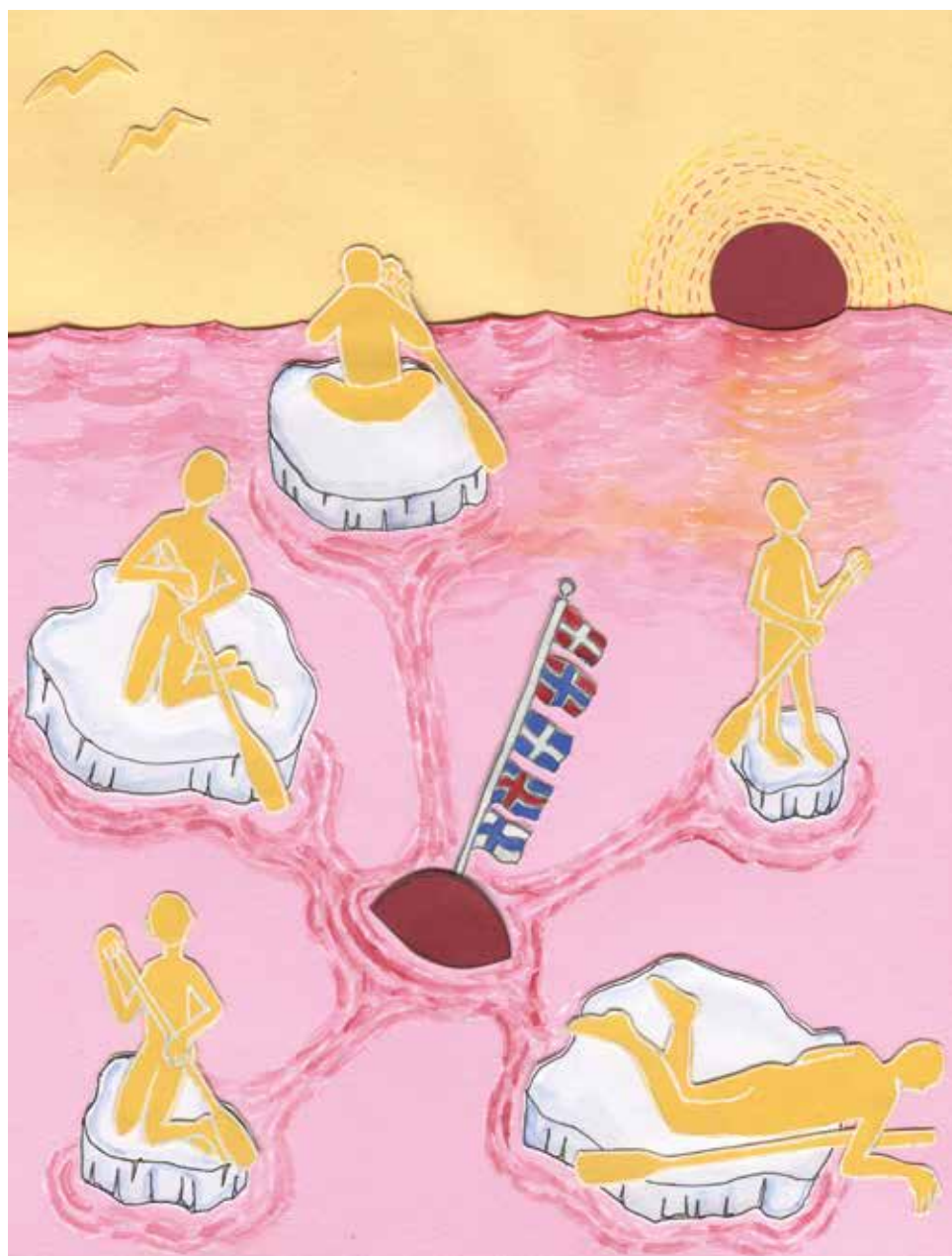


Illustration: Ragni Svensson

into the state after 1721. Ever since the dissolution of the medieval Kalmar Union, which most closely resembled the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the same period (*Rzeczpospolita* in Polish, from *res publica*), Denmark and Sweden had been embroiled in savage competition for dominion over the Baltic – *Dominium Maris Baltici* – which ended in victory for Russia. But the two Nordic states remained multinational states – called composite states by historians – until 1809, when Sweden was compelled to cede the Finnish part of the realm to the Russian tsar. The Swedish-Finnish state was recently analyzed in a fascinating anthology from Åbo Akademi University, edited by Max Engman and Nils Erik Vilstrand, *Maktens mosaik*. After

Continued. Union, federation, or “merely” European cooperation



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this painful loss, a nearly united Sweden sought compensation in the form of Norway, successfully after the election of Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte as heir to the throne and the Danish monarch's defeat alongside Napoleon in 1813, which resulted in the Treaty of Kiel in January 1814. At one stroke, an entirely new geopolitical situation was created in the Nordic region: one which by way of 1905, 1917, 1918, and 1920 led to the modern-day balance between virtually equal nation states that are in the main mutually sympathetic.

THE EXISTENCE OF FIVE national homogeneous states in the Nordic region became possible because the interests of the great powers of northern Europe had held each other in check; apart from isolated threats against Denmark and Finland, the countries were never in immediate jeopardy. Especially in the Cold War era of 1948 to 1989, peace reigned in the Nordic region by virtue of the firmly established Iron Curtain that cut through the Baltic. At the time, we did not know how safe we were, but it became clear to many after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The actually peaceful and predictable nature of international politics explains why public enthusiasm for the Nordic alternative was at its peak between 1945 and 1989. During this period, Sweden could play the neutrality card, while Denmark, Norway, and Iceland could be on the winning NATO side without having to foot the bill. Finland is the Nordic exception: the country demonstrated its will to survive in 1939–1944 and thus escaped the cruel fate of Estonia – annexation by the Soviet Union. That is why the country wholeheartedly joined the European Community in 1995 and has embraced the euro, in contrast to the more hesitant Sweden and Denmark.⁶

Seen in the longer historical perspective, the Nordic countries are not as different from other European countries as the ideology of Scandinavianism and the Scandinavian model would lead us to believe – but they are Lutheran.⁷ It wasn't the Reformation of 1536 that was fundamental, but rather the pious revivalist movements of the 1700s that took hold of the populations of all the Nordic countries, a development that continued with the political and economic movements and the 20th

century's leftwing/environmental alliances in the democracy of farmers and the working class. This process is brilliantly described in the late Niels Kayser Nielsen's major synthesis on

Nordic democracy, *Bonde, stat og hjem*. Nielsen describes the rationale for the Nordic welfare state as stemming less from a distinctly Nordic social structure than from the homogeneous Lutheranism of the countries. Other Lutheran communities are part of larger state formations (Germany and the United States) or have been conquered by other realms (Estonia and Latvia), but in the Nordic countries, the Lutherans dominate entire states. The link has not yet been systematically studied, but from the perspective of the history of mentalities, it seems plausible. If the hypothesis proves correct, the consequence would be that Nordic social democracy, regardless of what is said in party platforms and by generations of party members, is the result of secularized Lutheranism rather than democratized socialism. This explanation of the distinct character of the Nordic region is one of the explanations discussed in a recently published anthology in English edited by Jóhann Páll Árnason and Björn Wittrock, *Nordic Paths to Modernity*. The book consists of five pairs of chapters covering various explanations of the development of the Nordic countries written by Nordic historians and sociologists, which are supported by a general essay on Nordic modernity.

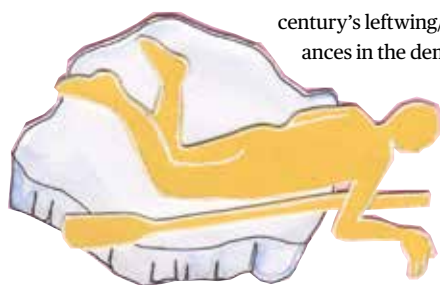
THE RELATIVELY SMOOTH course of democratization in the Nordic countries was paved by peace, since the countries were spared involvement in international conflicts. They were in the right place at the right time. To the extent that they no longer are, it becomes difficult to live high on the Nordic myths and braggadocio of yesteryear. There is much to indicate that the Baltic Region is on the verge of reclaiming its former place as an economic and civilizational axis in northern Europe, as I described in 1998 in a book on European identity.⁸ In that position, however, the region is attracting international attention, with no guarantee that the superpowers will constrain each other as they did during the Cold War. To the extent that this occurs, it will be difficult to bridge the antagonism between the Atlantic part of the Nordic sphere facing the oceans in one direction and the land-based Nordic region facing the Baltic Sea in the other. Not to mention the Arctic, where Denmark-Greenland – or the “Kingdom”, as it is called when the Commonwealth of the Realm engages in international politics – in alliance with Iceland and the United States is pursuing a different policy from that of Norway, Russia, and Canada with regard to national control over the shipping routes that are opening in pace with global warming.⁹ Herein lies the potential basis for future conflicts of interest that will make the historical battles between Denmark and Norway over the right to East Greenland seem like small potatoes.

The lesson history teaches us is that there is no objective law that binds the Nordic peoples to a common fate. But the historical and cultural raw materials for building such an identity do exist – if, mind you, the nations wish it. While there are no economic and geopolitical regularities at stake, the political and cultural opportunities are so much the greater. In a cooperating Europe, it is important to hold on to the strengths in the arena of civil society that Nordic cooperation does in fact have – this in order to assign value to these strengths, but also to ensure they are not lost in a misguided attempt to turn the Nordic countries into a state proper or a federation. Economic and political cooperation has always failed at the broader level, but succeeded at the narrower level, that of the civil society.

The root of both the strengths and the weaknesses of this cooperation is that the countries were organized early on as relatively small and homogeneous nation states.¹⁰ And that is a product of 1814. The history of this process is, however, considerably less familiar to the Nordic peoples than it should be. On the other hand, there is a widespread but vague sense that we have a great deal in common, although we simply do not know each other well outside of a narrow elite of politicians, civil servants, and prominent figures in the arts. Nevertheless, judging by opinion polls, Nordic cooperation is viewed favorably by the people of the Nordic countries. But this positive interest in their neighboring countries is losing ground fast, especially among the young and the youngish. This is particularly evident in the language, where Swedish and Danish are often considered, even by university students, mutually unintelligible. Norwegian might perhaps be understood but is considered, at least by Danish students, as a peculiar form of Danish, littered with spelling errors and amusing neologisms – or as utterly mysterious, should they happen to stumble upon a text written in New Norwegian. To top it off, most people do not consider Finnish, Icelandic, Faroese, Greenlandic, or Sami to be Nordic languages at all.

As a result, conferences outside particularly committed Nordic circles are increasingly being held in English. This is why, when a group of Nordic historians published a cross-Nordic presentation of important themes in the countries' histories, we chose to do so in English.¹¹ Differences in VAT rules have unfortunately made the book almost prohibitively expensive in Denmark, but in the rest of the Nordic countries – and especially outside them – it has gradually gained an audience due to its novel cross-national analysis of these themes. The usual procedure in inter-Nordic publications is to assemble a team of authors and have each write about their own country. The good books are coordinated and involve Finland and Iceland; the poorly edited books – sadly, most of them – omit both.

There are several reasons for this unfortunate state of affairs, including the countries' various approaches to European cooperation. Before diving into the lamentations, so common among dyed-in-the-wool Nordists, who decry the EU as an enemy of the Nordic countries, it is important to acknowledge that this situation is a logical consequence of the arrangement of Nordic cooperation, which is grounded in the sovereignty of the national states. Successful Nordic cooperation was not a result of the romantic Scandinavianism





rife in Denmark and Sweden in the mid 19th century. In reality, these currents had to do with an attempt by Sweden to muster assistance against Russia, which had conquered the eastern part of Sweden in 1809 and established the Grand Duchy of Finland, while Denmark was seeking assistance against the expanding Germany, which was on the verge of unity – considerably helped along by the foolhardy policies of the Danish National Liberals in 1863–1864, without which it is by no means certain that Bismarck would have succeeded in uniting Germany in 1871.¹² Norway and Iceland were primarily interested in their own independence, while Finland successfully became Finnish under relatively benevolent Russian suzerainty. These considerations were obviously irreconcilable and it all came to nothing. Cultural Scandinavism on the other hand, especially in literature, remained a vigorous force throughout the 19th century, although it rarely included Finland and Iceland.¹³

THE NORDIC REGION as a model of regional partnership is mainly the outcome of practical and pragmatic cooperation in a long list of professional areas that developed in the second half of the 19th century – but the necessary prerequisite was that the countries were independent. Thus the Nordic Association could not be established until 1919 after the dissolution of the union between Sweden and Norway in 1905 and Iceland's de facto independence from Denmark in 1918 (completed in 1944). Finland likewise became independent in 1917, but was at first and for many years preoccupied mainly with its own internal conflicts and relations with Russia, as one of the successor states of the Russian Empire. In reality, Finland did not embark upon the Nordic path until the end of the 1930s and not definitively until after its defeat by the Soviet Union in the Winter War of 1939–1940 and the Continuation War of 1940–1944, so brilliantly described by Henrik Meinander in *Finlands historia*.

Nordic cooperation as formalized in the Nordic Council in 1952 (expanded with the accession of Finland in 1955) is unusual in being at once far-reaching in numerous areas of the civil society yet weak on the governmental level. For a long time, Nordic cooperation was run primarily by the parliaments, not the governments. Lack of interference with national sovereignty was the prerequisite for this success. The Nordic approach to international coordination of legislation has worked extremely well, except in the critical areas of economic policy, foreign policy, and defense. The Nordic countries have failed at every attempt in these areas, from the Scandinavian

Defense Union in the late 1940s to Nordek in 1970.¹⁵ This is not surprising in light of the geopolitical placement of the Nordic countries. But for precisely that reason, it is also no wonder that the peoples have drifted apart linguistically and thus, over time, psychologically as well.

WELL INTO THE 1950S and 1960s, the idea of the universal Nordic welfare state flourished in opposition to the patriarchal systems of the European Continent and the Anglo-American systems of minimal government. As historical studies have shown, there was a great deal of mythology involved in the cultivation of these differences. Welfare researchers speak bluntly of a model made up of five exceptions.¹⁶ One gets the same impression from a comparative analysis of the distinctive characteristics of Nordic capitalism.¹⁷ The universal aspect of the welfare state, that citizenship alone conferred rights to uniform benefits, regardless of any connection to the labor market, has long been an important difference between the Nordic countries and the rest of Europe, hence the widespread notion of the socially minded and democratic Nordic region in contrast to Catholic and Conservative Europe. Today, this hallmark has been modified by the introduction of employment-related pensions, and it is thus likely that the distinctively Nordic, democratic nationalism will also decline in importance.

Each in its own way, Sweden and Norway also kept their distance from the European community, while Denmark acceded in 1973. And therewith began a political divide that deepened when Sweden and Finland joined the EU in 1995 and Norway once again chose to remain on the outside – albeit in such a way that the country, like Iceland, adopts EU legislation on the inner market through the EEC. These divergent choices go some way towards explaining the lack of interest in Nordic cooperation among the governments of Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, but not the more deep-seated cultural and political differences that have become increasingly clear in recent years, even though Iceland has flirted with the idea of joining the EU since the financial crisis of 2008. Though it will probably come to nothing, this, combined with the economic collapse, has given the Faeroe Islands reason to think again about whether they should continue down the road towards full independence or settle for home rule like that granted to Greenland in 2009.

DENMARK AND SWEDEN in particular have grown apart from each other politically. Sweden has officially declared itself a multicultural land of immigrants with the abolition of the close connection between the Lutheran church and the state. In Denmark, the debate on the relationship between church and state has finally begun, at least in circles with a particular interest, but most politicians who express an opinion on the subject adhere firmly to the utterly vague balance of power we call the “people’s church”. Among younger politicians, there seems to be enthusiasm for total separation, but the people’s church, more than 150 years old, seems as popular as ever with the Danish people. Indeed, along with the so-called “grammatical comma” (which is actually German and diverges from both Norwegian and Swedish), the majority of the population seem to perceive the national church as the most important guarantee of “Danishness”. Along with the religious holidays like the Public Day of Prayer and Ascension

Day, it has proven more difficult to abolish than the Danish government envisaged. Norway has recently disestablished the state church

in favor of an arrangement designated the “people’s church”, whereby the Evangelical Lutheran Church is accorded the status of one among many religious communities. It is too soon to tell whether this will eventually entail a separation of church and state as in Sweden or a vague situation like that in Denmark.

On the other hand, Denmark is leading the way in Europe along with Austria, Italy, and perhaps the Netherlands, towards curbing immigration. The discourse in Norway – thus far – is different from the discourse in Denmark. On the surface, the words are politically correct as in Sweden, but the actual deeds are closer to Denmark’s. Iceland and Finland have not yet been challenged to the point where it has been necessary to take an open stance on immigration. It is too early to say whether all of this combined with foreign policy differences will drive the Nordic countries even further apart. These issues were discussed at a series of meetings at the Norwegian embassy in Stockholm, the proceedings of which have been published in an anthology, *Skandinaviska vägval*, edited by Bjørn Magnus Berge and Anders Björnsson.

Under the surface in Sweden there lies a latent threat of violent revolt against the multicultural policy and political correctness, which Danish media love to talk about. But there is a strong tradition in Sweden of putting a lid on that kind of behavior, while in Denmark there has been, since the breakthrough of “popular” movements in the 19th century, a strong tradition of anti-elite populism that has been simply called “*folkelighed*”, which is perceived as benign and good. The present course has also been followed for some time, as evident in the Danish Power and Democracy Study, for instance, which was more reassuring about democracy than the almost contemporaneous Norwegian power study under the direction of Øyvind Østerud.¹⁸ By 1973, Denmark had already taken a different route from that of the other Nordic countries with the breakthrough of Glistrup’s Progress Party. The differences did not become actual system differences, however, until the alliance established between the Danish People’s Party, the Liberal Party, and the Conservative People’s Party of 2001–2011. The center-right government in power in Sweden since 2006 has not brought about any significant rapprochement. On the contrary, a united political Sweden has successfully isolated the Sweden Democrats,

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even though the party gained seats in the Riksdag on the strength of a platform and strategy lifted from the Danish People’s Party. The situation is however still relatively open, as is also the case in Norway, where the present government is likely to be exchanged for a coalition of the conservatives and the Progress Party.

IN THAT SITUATION, the future seems dim for the Swedish historian and former government official Gunnar Wetterberg’s proposal for a Nordic federation, put forward in the winter of 2009 in *Dagens Nyheter* and later expanded upon in a pamphlet, *The United Nordic Federation*. He argues well, objectively, and persuasively for the advantages to the Nordic countries of a formalized partnership, contending that the countries could gain international influence commensurate with their aggregate size. In a united federation, the countries could be represented in the G20 and other international forums, although he does not clarify what policies would be pursued in these contexts. The Nordic countries already have a greater international presence than their modest size would dictate. The combined population of the Nordic countries, 26 million, is not much larger than that of a single German federal state as North Rhine-Westphalia, but they play a much greater role internationally. Wetterberg also wisely saves his thoughts about the historical barriers to a formalized federation for the end of the book, not to mention the issue of where the capital city would be. It does not take a great deal of imagination to foresee the fight between Stockholm, which has successfully marketed itself as the “Capital of Scandinavia”, and Copenhagen, which cannot achieve consensus among the suburban municipalities of Zealand – let alone its own administration – on any subject whatsoever. The obvious choice of a third city is not much more likely. And the geographical center of the geographical Nordic region from Greenland in the west to Karelia (and Estonia) in the east, Tórshavn on the Faeroe Islands, has slim chance, unless such a choice was able to remove the emotional significance of the idea of a capital city. And that would be no easy thing in countries so intensely nationalist as the Nordic nations.¹⁹

In the 1960s, the Nordic states demonstrated their incapacity and lack of interest in supporting Nordic culture and language. Today, the need is greater than it’s ever been since the two Nordic multinational states of Denmark and Sweden were separated into national states in 1809 and 1814. This separation process, at least in relation to Denmark, will not come to an end until the Faeroe Islands

and Greenland have determined their political futures. The Nordic region is fascinating, multifaceted, and a worthy task for wise Europeans in the area we should perhaps call “Northern Europe” rather than the ideologically charged “Norden”. But there is little reason to conceive of the Nordic countries, or *Norden*, as constituting an exceptional region or a permanent alliance in the EU. We are European countries, for good or ill. And as the other EU member states become relatively smaller and more closely aligned while maintaining or accentuating their distinctive national characteristics, the special relationship between the Nordic countries will probably become less significant, provided that the European project does not disintegrate due to the financial crisis and the problems associated with the euro. Regardless of what lies ahead, the Nordic countries started down their separate paths in 1814, when the Oldenburgian state became the biggest European loser in the Napoleonic wars only a few years after 1809, when Sweden had for a short period been reduced to a small state in danger of being carved up by its neighbors. ✕

uffe østergård

references

- 1 My thanks to Rasmus Glenthøj, University of Southern Denmark, for his assistance with this information – at the 25th Congress of Nordic Historians held in Stockholm in August 2004, a session was arranged on the “New Nordic Region (*Norden*)”. The session, which included chapters on each of the five Nordic countries and a chapter on Scandinavism and Nordic cooperation and one with pictures of the Nordic countries, has been published as *Det nya Norden efter Napoleon* [The new Nordic region after Napoleon], Max Engman and Åke Sandström (eds.), Stockholm 2004.
- 2 The original Danish text has the word *Norden* – literally, “the North” – here. *Norden* is occasionally used untranslated in English-language texts, but Baltic Worlds prefers to translate it, usually as “the Nordic countries” or “the Nordic region”, depending on context. (Editor’s note.)
- 3 *Dansk Udenrigspolitik historie* [The history of Danish foreign policy] vols. 2 and 3, Copenhagen 2002 and 2003, edited by Ole Feldbæk, Carsten Due Nielsen, and Nikolaj Petersen.
- 4 Ole Feldbæk, *Danmark og Norge 1720–1814: Nærhed og adskillelse* [Denmark and Norway 1720–1814: Nearness and separation] Oslo, 1998.
- 5 John Erichsen, *Drømmen om Norge: Om norske huse i Danmark gennem 250 år* [The dream of Norway: 250 years of Norwegian houses in Denmark], Copenhagen 1999 and Mette Skougaard (ed.), *Norgesbilleder: Dansk-norske forbindelser 1700–1905* [Pictures of Norway: Danish-Swedish connections 1700–1905], Copenhagen 2004.
- 6 For a thorough treatment of the relationship between the European Union and the Nordic countries see T. B. Olesen, *Den europæiske udfordring: EU, EØS og nordisk samarbejde* – *i historisk belysning* [The European Challenge], Oslo: Europautredningen (no. 12 May 2011).
- 7 Uffe Østergård, “Lutheranism, Nationalism and the Universal Welfare State – National Churches and National Identity after the Reformation and the Development of the Welfare State in the Nordic Nation States”, in Katharina Kunter and Jens Holger Schiørring (eds.), *Europäisches und Globales Christentum / European and Global Christianity: Herausforderungen und Transformationen im 20. Jahrhundert / Challenges and Transformations in the 20th Century*, Arbeiten zur Kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte, series B vol. 54, Göttingen 2011, pp. 78–101.
- 8 Uffe Østergård, *Europa: Identitet og identitetspolitik* [Europe: Identity and the politics of identity], Copenhagen 1998.
- 9 The problems of security in the Commonwealth of the Realm (the “Kingdom”) in the Arctic have been analyzed in a report from the Danish Center for Military Studies at the University of Copenhagen by Jon Rahbek-Clemmesen, Esben Salling Larsen, and Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, *Forsvaret i Arktis: Suverænitæt, samarbejde og sikkerhed* [Defense in the Arctic: Sovereignty, cooperation, and security], January 2012.
- 10 Uffe Østergård, “Cooperation among Equals – Political Culture in the Nordic Countries”, in Ekavi Athanassopoulou (ed.), *United in Diversity? European Integration and Political Cultures*, London 2008, pp. 105–130.
- 11 Øystein Sørensen & Bo Stråth (eds.), *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, Oslo 1997.
- 12 Uffe Østergård, “Dänemark und Deutschland als europäische Nachbarn – Geschichte und Erinnerung”, in Susanne Fabrin & Matthias Müller-Wieferig (eds.), *50 Jahre Goethe-Institut Dänemark*, Copenhagen 2011, pp. 219–224.
- 13 The subject is treated in an interesting way by Kari Haarder Ekman in her dissertation *Mitt hems gränser vidgades: En studie i den kulturella skandinavismen under 1800-talet* [The boundaries of my home expanded: A study of cultural Scandinavism in the 19th century], Gothenburg 2010.
- 14 The Organization for Nordic Economic Cooperation, with its Swedish acronym NORDEK, was a project attempting to establish a Nordic common market consisting of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland negotiated between 1968 and 1970 in a situation where two economic blocs stood in opposition to each other in Europe, the EEC and the EFTA. The Nordic plan was based on establishing a customs union supplemented by cooperation in economics, industry, energy, agriculture, and fishing, as well as financing and capital flows. The Nordic Council approved a draft treaty in 1970, but it was never ratified by the participating countries, in part due to Finnish misgivings arising from Soviet opposition. A Danish attempt to create a Nordic customs union excluding Finland, SKANDEK, came to nothing due to Swedish and Finnish opposition.



- 15 Niels Finn Christiansen, Klaus Petersen, Niels Edling, and Per Have (eds.), *The Nordic Model of Welfare: A Historical Reappraisal*, Copenhagen 2006.
- 16 Susana Fellman, Martin Jess Iversen, Hans Sjögren, and Lars Thue (eds.), *Creating Nordic Capitalism: The Business History of a Competitive Periphery*, Houndmills, Basingstoke 2008.
- 17 Lise Togeby et al., *Power and Democracy in Denmark: Main Conclusions from the Democracy and Power Study*, Århus 2003; Øyvind Østerud, Fredrik Engelstad, and Per Selle, *Makten og demokratiet*, [Power and democracy], Oslo 2003; Øyvind Østerud, "Maktutredning og demokrati", [The power study and democracy], in *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift* 2004:1.
- 18 Wetterberg himself is prudently realistic about the perspectives for his utopia to come true. In an interview in the Danish weekly *Weekendavisen* on February 8, 2013, his proposal is given 8 percent odds of being realized, up from 5 percent because of the financial crisis.



Illustration: Karin Sunvisson

BLESSED SCANDINAVIA IN 1930S EUROPE

Scandinavia seems to have existed as two essentially separate literary places. Some visitors, like Karel Čapek, saw the democratic Utopia. Others, like Nazi writer Hanns Johst, saw a group of Aryan peoples who could potentially be worthy friends to the Third Reich.

THE CZECHOSLOVAKIAN writer Karel Čapek (1890–1938) and his wife Olga Scheinpflugová took a trip to Scandinavia in the summer of 1936, traveling through Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. Their travelogue, *Cesta na sever* [Journey to the North] was published later that year. For Čapek, one of the most important European anti-fascist intellectuals of the day, the journey to the north was obviously a mental timeout from the misery of the Continent. To him, these countries represented a region where the peoples were “happier and more spiritually adult”. In the Scandinavian democracies he could relax and, according to Olga, he was transported by what he saw: “The landscape and the people’s living standard corresponded to his idea of the promised land.” Čapek was among the intellectuals who could not accept the

Soviet Union and communism as a bulwark against fascism. In something of a contradiction, he was posthumously rehabilitated by the regime in Cold War Czechoslovakia. Today, he is mainly known for coining the neologism “robot” and for his anti-fascist, civilization-critical, and satirical science fiction novel *War with the Newts* (*Válka s mlčky* in the original).

In a Europe where one country after another instituted totalitarian regimes in the 1930s, Scandinavia became a region upon which people could project a variety of political hopes and aspirations. Scandinavia offered an example that anti-fascists who were also critical of the Stalinist Soviet Union and radical socialism were quick to exploit in order to spread their message more effectively. But the image of Scandinavia in 1930s Europe was Janus-faced. Scandinavia was generally considered the womb of the Aryan race – or the Nordic race as it was also called – where, according to prominent Western anthropologists, the most ethnically pure Aryans of the modern age were to be found. Scandinavia seems to have existed as two essentially separate literary places in the

1930s. Some visitors, like Čapek, saw the democratic Utopia, while others, like the Nazi writer Hanns Johst, saw a region and a tribe of peoples who could potentially be close and worthy neighbors and friends to the Third Reich.

The promised land

The drawing of a mental boundary between a free, happy, and paradisiacal Scandinavia on one side and on the other an increasingly hopeless Continental Europe where state after state had fallen under the yoke of totalitarianism is clear in Karel Čapek’s case. As he was leaving Scandinavia, he was reawakened to reality. He claimed not to have read any newspapers during those summer weeks in the north, but found out as he was preparing to depart that civil war had broken out in Spain. He left the Nordic dream to return to the European nightmare: “I went to see the northern part of Europe, and thank the good Lord; she is not in such bad shape yet.” For Čapek, who saw himself as a European patriot, there was something pure, unspoiled, and admirable in Scandinavia. Here, he saw a noble people, or as he wrote: “a formidable and courageous race who love peace and freedom, demonstrate their integrity, and have not the slightest need to allow themselves to be led by anyone else”. One is struck by how the concept of race is used on all sides of the ideological front, and the notion of Scandinavians as particularly noble and upright is reproduced in near unison. The metaphors were rife: Denmark, for instance, might be likened to a rosy-cheeked, happy, and well-fed (but also intelligent) farm boy, synonymous with the good fortune of an entire nation.

THE SPANISH CATALAN author Josep Pla also wrote from Denmark when he traveled north in 1928. In *Cartes de lluny*, a collection of travel impressions, city views, and “imaginings”, he describes a meeting with a local parish pastor in rural Jutland. For Pla, this was an encounter with a literary and philosophical Scandinavia he had known for decades and the horizon of his expectations was already drawn. The Danish pastor embodied the myth of Nordic freedom, the simple life in harmony with nature, and higher moral ideals. All of this gave “these Protestant pastors of the wilderness a reformist and anarchist