Nordic Review of International Studies

Peer-reviewed articles

Discussion articles

2/2023

FISA Finnish International Studies Association

Publisher

The Nordic Review of International Studies (NRIS) publishes peer-reviewed scholarly contributions within the field of International Relations (IR), focusing specifically on Nordic perspectives. The NRIS is committed to publishing articles that examine the international sphere empirically, theoretically, or institutionally from a Nordic angle. The aim of the NRIS is to foster scholarly debates on international politics within and concerning the wider Nordic region. The NRIS embraces interdisciplinary approaches and appreciates a wide range of theoretical and methodological choices.

The journal is published by the Finnish International Studies Association (FISA) and committed to the principles of Open Access publishing.

Visit our journal site for further information and to submit your manuscript: nris.journal.fi.

ISSN 2954-2553

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

Editors

Editorial board

Contents

Peer-Reviewed Articles

Discussion articles

Editorial

The security environment in the Nordic region is rapidly changing as a result of Russia's war of aggression, which has various political, social, and economic ramifications. The most obvious implications are to do with hard security arrangements including increasing military spending and updating security strategies across the Nordics and the Baltics. There are also identity-related implications as the Nordics needs to re-think their collective identities and relations to the neighbouring regions. Th second issue of *The Nordic Review of International Studies* (NRIS) investigates the Nordics from the perspective of identity.

The question of identity is at the core of international politics and represents a key theme in the study of International Relations. When it comes to the Nordic region, there are various identities that influence political developments and cultural meanings: local, regional, institutional, global. Despite the waves of globalisation, the European integration process, and the fluctuating political environment, Nordic identity has remained a meaningful identification within the region.

In this issue, identity is examined from various theoretical and empirical perspectives. In their study of Finnish UN policy in the 2000s, Hanna Tuominen and Anna Kronlund investigate the policy from the perspective of Nordic identity, focusing specifically on how the Finnish approach reflects the common identity within the three pillars of the UN system. They find that Nordic identity is essential for Finnish UN policy, even if there is variation in time and in policy areas.

In her article on the scales and phases of Nordic resilience, Johanna Ketola identifies common denominators and factors that are believed to produce resilience across the Nordic countries, regions, and communities. Henri Vogt reviews the Finnish approaches towards European integratory processes since the early 1990s and argues that rather than as an effort to develop a new kind of westernised identity, one should perceive this orientation as an affirmation of the traditional Finnish and Nordic, pragmatic and protestant values.

In their discussion article, Minna Ålander and Sanna Salo examine Sweden's foreign policy identity after 200 years of neutrality and non-alignment. They argue that the failure of Sweden's moral superpower in both domestic and foreign policy has led to a profound identity crisis. Iro Särkkä studies the interplay between three overlapping geographically driven state identities – the Nordic, European, and Atlanticist – in Finland's official foreign policy discourse during the post-Cold War period. She shows that geographically driven state identities are used as means to achieve both physical and ontological security as part of state identity politics.

Finally, Brendan Humphreys explores Scandinavian penal exceptionalism as an identity marker, asking whether the prison estate of the Nordic countries is reflective of their broader societies, and if so, how does this relate to the idea of a pan-Nordic identity. All the articles in this issue foreground the role of identity in the study of the Nordics, increasing knowledge on the intricate nature of collective identity.

We are very pleased that NRIS has been enthusiastically received by the scholarly community. The first issue has been actively read and distributed, which is also reflected in the number of submissions we have received this year. We are happy to see that NRIS is evolving into a vibrant forum for debates on and in the Nordics as we initially envisioned.

Johanna Vuorelma, Ville Sinkkonen, Sanna Salo

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

Peer-Reviewed Article

The United Nations and Nordic identity: reflections on Finnish UN policy in the 2000s

Hanna Tuominen, University Lecturer, Centre for European Studies, University of Helsinki
Anna Kronlund, University Lecturer, University of Turku

Abstract

Support for the United Nations (UN) has been a strong priority for the Nordic states. The group has been cooperating to promote their shared values and interests since the 1960s. The Nordics have gained a reputation as do-gooders, norm advocates and strong supporters of the UN. This article studies Finland's UN policy in the 2000s from the perspective of Nordic identity, specifically how the Finnish approach reflects the common identity within the three pillars of the UN system. On the theoretical level the article is based on the literature covering group politics and collective identity. We focus on the value-based, expressive and instrumental dimensions of Nordic identity, drawing on Finnish foreign policy documentation and interviews with key Finnish UN diplomats and policymakers. According to the findings, Nordic identity is essential for Finnish UN policy, even if there is variation in time and in policy areas.

Keywords

Finland, Nordic identity, United Nations, norms, diplomacy

Introduction

The Helsinki Treaty of 1962 formalised cooperation among the Nordic states and the role of the inter-parliamentary Nordic Council, as established in 1952. The Nordic Council of Ministers was then founded in 1971 to improve cooperation among Nordic governments. The purpose of both formal and informal Nordic cooperation is to consult and share information, coordinate policies, and to promote common values and interests through speeches, statements and comments. The UN has been an influential forum for Nordic cooperation on different diplomatic levels at least since the 1960s. All five Nordic states belong to the regional Western European and Others Group (WEOG), and they have a system of rotation for membership in the UN bodies. Through cooperation and assuming common positions the Nordics have been able to punch above their weight, and to achieve visibility in questions such as gender equality, peacekeeping, mediation and sustainable development. Moreover, Nordic contributions to UN leadership and to the budget have been considerable (see Laatikainen, 2003, 410), demonstrating their commitment to the UN system.

The Nordic brand, which was deliberately constructed during the Cold War, was highly positive. Within the UN the Nordics advocated for a more peaceful advanced society, international morality and social justice, based on their own societal model (Browning 2007, 35). This image was maintained after the Cold War in characterisations of the Nordic states as exceptional actors (Brommesson, 2007; Wivel, 2017), 'do-gooders' (Puyvallée and Björkdahl, 2022) and advocates of ambitious norms (Ingebritsen, 2002; Björkdahl, 2007; Tuominen, 2022). This general picture may hide the more critical perceptions of the Nordics as an arrogant and self-righteous group (see Seppä and Tervo, 2020, 301) that sees itself as morally superior (Tuomioja, 2013). According to Jakobsen (2017), the Nordic-UN relationship became more instrumental after the end of the Cold War. The Nordics also became a more intrinsic part of the EU bloc and the wider West, which diminished their distinct profile (Laatikainen, 2003; Browning, 2007). Nordic cooperation has intensified more recently, especially in foreign, security and defence issues due to changes in the European and regional security environment. Overall, Nordic views have converged (Brommesson et al., 2023), enabling the adoption of a more cohesive perspective. The number of common Nordic statements has increased at the UN, and cooperation with the Baltic states in the NB8 format has been lively. This activation of the Nordic group is not surprising in the currently contested multilateral system. The regional, long-standing collaboration provides a firm basis for action in times of crisis (Brommesson et al., 2023), and a unique reference group for Finland.

However, the collective Nordic brand may well conceal relevant differences among the Nordics at the UN - in resources, political commitments and domestic factors driving UN policy, for example (see Götz, 2011). When the Cold War ended the Nordic countries, at different speeds, departed from their humane internationalist tradition by developing more militarised activism (Wivel, 2017; Pedersen, 2018). On the international level these states also compete for influence and status. They each have their own UN priorities and a willingness to promote national visibility (Haugevik and Sending 2020, 111). Hence, there is a need to differentiate and build individual profiles to complement the common Nordic image. In any case, according to Rören (2019), competition among the Nordics is friendly, and strong societal linkages enable collective and constrain individual status-seeking.

The positive Nordic reference group has been valuable for Finland, and leaning to Nordicness has been a long-term preferred choice. However, there is also variety in the degree to which Nordicness matters (Ojanen and Raunio, 2018, 415). Our focus in this article is on the UN, which is an interesting traditional forum for close Nordic cooperation. More particularly, we study Finland's UN policy

in the 2000s from the perspective of Nordic identity, and consider how the Finnish UN approach reflects the common identity within the three pillars of the UN system. Overall, there has not been as much academic research on Finnish UN policy compared to the other Nordics. Previous policy-oriented papers have concentrated on Finland's general approach at the UN (Vesa, 2012; Gowan, 2015). Academic contributions include studies on Finnish UN campaigns (Seppä and Tervo, 2020; Tuominen, 2022) and activities concerning specific policies or issues (Karhu and Lanki, 2022; Tuominen, 2023b). The aim in this article is to shed light on why and how this group matters among its individual members, and thereby to enhance current knowledge about the Nordic group at the UN (Ingebritsen, 2002; Laatikainen, 2003; Götz, 2011; Jakobsen, 2017; Rören, 2019; Creutz, 2021).

According to the tenets of constructivism, identities play an essential role in enhancing understanding of the foreign-policy behaviour and interests of states. We interpret Nordic identity as a form of collective affinity, reflecting a sense of belonging to a group. Collective identities are more fluid, tentative and evolving than national or personal identities. They are constructed, modified and sustained in interactive processes whereby the group acknowledges the commonalities. Thus, Nordic identity is based on shared values, normative beliefs and common interests. We are interested in manifestations of this identity through cooperative practices and common statements. According to Andersson (2010, 49), cooperation based on a collective identity is considered self-evident and an end in itself. However, such identities may also serve more interest-based ends, used as means to achieve other purposes. Our aim in this article is to trace all these dimensions of the collective Nordic identity, from the value-based to the expressive and instrumental.

As our documentary data we use Finnish government programmes, foreign-policy documents and various strategies focusing on UN-relevant policies, as well as detailed data concerning Finnish UN priorities, statements and reports from the 2000s. The documents are complemented with insights from key Finnish UN policy makers and civil servants collected via semi-structured interviews (N=15). We interviewed the then President of Finland, Tarja Halonen (2000-2012), permanent representatives of Finland to the UN, directors of UN-policy-related departments of the Foreign Ministry, as well as other experts who have worked closely with UN issues. The appendices give a complete list of the documents and interviews. Many reports on Finnish UN policy remain confidential and secret for 25 years. Hence, our unique interview data enhances understanding of the country's policy in the 2000s by revealing subjective experiences and perceptions of the Nordic dimension as well as often undocumented diplomatic practices within the group.

Following this introduction our article is divided into four parts. First we outline the relevance of group politics at the UN and discuss the Nordics as a group. The focus in the second part is on Nordic collective identity and its three dimensions. In the third part we present our methodological choices and the research data, and in the fourth part we analyse Nordic identity in Finnish UN policy, reflecting on this more generally at first, and then through the three pillars of the UN system, namely peace and security, human rights, and development. Finally, we draw some conclusions about its relevance in Finland's UN policy.

The Nordic group in the UN

The analysis of UN politics requires an understanding of group politics because different regional, political and thematic group memberships do matter. The UN has five official regional and electoral groups: the African Group, the Asia-Pacific Group, the Eastern European Group, the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) and the Western European and Other Group (WEOG). Such grouping ensures an equal geographical balance in UN bodies and leadership positions. Political groups are

highly important for member states as they are major repositories of identity and ideas (Smith and Laatikainen, 2020, 3). They may be long-standing groupings such as the Group of 77 (representing developing countries) or the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), representing Muslim countries and founded in the 1960s, or they may be temporary, even ad hoc coalitions focused on single issues.

Bloc behaviour such as voting consistently as a unit has increasingly created tensions at the UN. In particular, tensions between China, Russia and the United States and their need to find allies who align with their positions have influenced UN decision-making. Given the resulting confrontations, blocs have rather negative connotations. The EU as a regional organisation forms an effective and visible group in the UN, even if it does not have an official status in many of its bodies. EU member states are obliged to act in unison when there is a common position, and otherwise to support each other's positions (Laatikainen, 2017; Tuominen, 2023b).

Acting in groups matters especially to smaller states, potentially giving them more influence and visibility, and better access to information. The Nordic group is categorised as a regional political group, which shares collective interests in UN deliberations (Laatikainen, 2017, 116), with a reputation for unusual unity and dedicated support for the rule-based international order (Laatikainen, 2003, 414). It is de facto recognisable externally as the Nordic states rotate for membership of UN bodies and join their forces through common statements and consistent voting. They often meet key UN and third-state leaders together, and cooperate in the GA high-level week and in organising events. The collective action of the Nordic states is based on consensus, and in cases of disagreement they are free to act individually. This provides highly valued flexibility and pragmatism (Iso-Markku et al., 2018, 9). Overall, Nordic cooperation happens on all political levels, based to a significant extent on typical features including informal networking, experience sharing and joint action (Strang, 2016). On UN issues the Nordic states have long traditions of cooperation on all diplomatic levels among national ministries and in UN delegations.

A curious feature of the Nordic group is that Finland, Denmark and Sweden are bound by common EU positions, whereas Iceland and Norway are not. Intensive EU cooperation diminished the autonomy and recognition of the group at the UN in the 1990s (Laatikainen, 2003; Browning, 2007; Wivel, 2017). However, it has also been claimed that Nordic priorities such as gender equality were extended to the European level (Elgström, 2017). According to Jakobsen (2017, 290), the Nordic-UN relationship has become more instrumental since the end of the Cold War, and the UN is perceived as one instrument among others. In fact, Nordic member states have been eager to promote more effective EU action in the UN. Challenges in EU cooperation and a wider multilateral system have recently provided an impetus for more intensive Nordic cooperation (Brommesson et al., 2023). In particular, the Nordics are willing to take more ambitious positions on issues such as gender equality and LGBTI rights, whereas the EU may not always manage to act in unity, or it takes only lowest-common-denominator positions (Tuominen, 2023a).

Hence, the relevance of the Nordic group seems to depend on various external and internal factors. Domestic political forces and changes in governments explain policy formation and orientation to the UN (Karhu and Lanki, 2022). The restrictions in the migration policies of the Nordic states is one example of a change that has eroded their brand at the UN. However, changes in the structural environment and external events often have even more influence on the policies of smaller states (Brommesson et al., 2023). Russia's aggression has changed the entire security environment and led to the prioritisation of NATO relations. Thus, other institutional commitments affect policies and decision-making in the Nordics. Finally, relations with third states, and especially bilateral relations

with the US, have had an effect on adopted UN policies, as is evident in UN crisis-management operations (see Wivel, 2017; Pedersen, 2018).

Nordic identity in the UN

There are many underlying reasons behind Nordic UN cooperation, but in this article we underline the relevance of identity-based explanations. In line with the constructivist view (see Browning, 2007; 2008), we believe that questions of identity are essential in understanding Finnish UN policy. Nordic identity represents a regional collective identity, whereby the self is conceptualised in a collective way. It leans on mutual trust and a long, joint political history and societal development. The shared values, common perceptions of norms and principles and regionally shared security concerns explain the congruence of Nordic UN orientations. The shared general approach and values make the Nordic collective identity a natural and even self-sustaining phenomenon, strengthened by the fact that many Nordic institutions and cooperation channels and practices support it.

Identities are constructed and reconstructed in interaction with different audiences, especially by differentiating from others. Many collective identities are based on the idea that one's own group is somehow better than others. Nordic exceptionalism was seen as a key ingredient of Nordic identity during the Cold War, and the 'peace-loving and rational Nordics' differentiated themselves from conflict-prone Europe (Browning, 2007, 27). The Nordic model was portrayed as superior, better than the alternatives and based on a low level of tension and social welfare (Waever, 1992; Wivel, 2017, 491). Nordic identity faced a crisis as the Cold War ended and its exceptionalism eroded. A strengthening EU identity also diminished its importance: it was not distinct enough from that of the rest of Europe. This demonstrates how the vitality of identities relates to a specific timeframe, and Nordic identity did not seem to be the most relevant. Thus, situational relevance explains the activation of collective identities (Andersson, 2010, 48). Hence, collective identities vary over time, but also among policy areas.

Finland has at least three co-existing identity narratives in the UN. *Nordic identity* was an essential link to Western identification after 1945, and differentiated Finland from Eastern Europe and the Baltic republics (Browning, 2008, 195). The end of the Cold War rendered Finland's policy of neutrality unnecessary: the country joined the EU in 1995 and *European identity* gained ground. However, the intention was to bring good Nordic values such as a strong environmental policy, development and equality into the EU (Elgström, 2017). Interestingly, Nordic cooperation was often presented as an alternative to European integration in the 1990s, and Waever (1992) predicted that there would be a wider *Nordic-Baltic identity*. Apart from situational relevance, commitment is an essential factor activating collective identities: it reveals the fact that not all identities are of equal importance to an actor (Andersson, 2010, 49).

Our initial focus in this article is on Finnish UN politics, and we consider both the commitment and the timely variation of the Nordic dimension. We trace Nordic identity by considering the value-based shared *thematic priorities* of the countries concerned. Second, we are interested in the manifestations of a common Nordic identity, namely practices of diplomatic cooperation, consistent voting and common statements indicating the *expressive side of identity*. Third, we turn to the more *instrumental dimension,* acknowledging the ways in which a common identity may be used for reaching other goals, mainly through developing differentiating niche areas using the Nordic brand. As Andersson (2010) notes, such means-oriented action could also strengthen collective identities, and hence should not be bypassed in the analysis.

Data and methods

Our documentary data consists of Finland's Government programmes, UN strategies, other relevant UN policy documents (on foreign and security policy, human rights and development policy), thematic UN-related documents, Finnish priorities at the UN General Assembly and reports by UN ambassadors. During the period under examination, Finland published UN strategies in 2001, 2008 and 2013, and a white paper on multilateralism in 2021 providing the main framework for action. Because many of the relevant UN documents are confidential, we traced Finland's UN and Nordic dimension policy through semi-structured expert interviews (n=15) conducted in the spring/summer of 2023. The informants included a former President of Finland, Finnish UN ambassadors, directors of UN-relevant units at the Foreign Ministry, thematic ambassadors and thematic experts. Because of our assurance of anonymity we refer to the interviews only by date. A complete list of the documents used and the interviewees is to be found in the appendices. The interview data complements current understanding of Finnish UN policy in the 2000s in revealing subjective experiences and perceptions of the Nordic dimension, as well as the frequently un-recorded diplomatic activities within the group. The interviewees had the opportunity to comment on the final version of this article.

The interview data covers themes such as shared values, cooperation practices and differences among the Nordics. It was used to operationalise value-based, expressive and instrumental dimensions of Nordic identity in Finnish UN policy. Cooperation is a necessary indication of a collective identity and the perceptions and motives behind it. Much of the diplomatic cooperation among the Nordics is informal and based on unwritten practices, which makes the interview material highly relevant for studying the Nordic dimension. The interviews were adjusted to the expertise of the interviewees and the relevant time period, and the informants were free to add their own remarks on relevant issues. We analysed the documentary and interview data using thematic coding drawn from our theoretical framework on Nordic identity. We report our findings by focusing, first, on the general Nordic orientation and then on how Nordic identity is reflected in different UN pillars such as peace and security, human rights and development. The results shed light on Finland's commitment to its Nordic identity, how it varies and how interviewees express it. Special attention is paid to the varying views reflected in the official documents and in our interview data, as well as between informants and policy areas.

Finnish UN policy and the Nordic dimension

The Finnish UN policy line is decided in Helsinki, and UN delegations follow individual issues and the positions of other states. According to our interviewees, cooperation among the Nordics takes various forms and happens among capitals, delegations and individuals. Government programmes, UN priorities and UN strategies are decided by the political leadership assisted by civil servants in different ministries. Many interviewees emphasised the role of experts in formulating and leading Finnish UN policy, and the lack of a more public UN debate. This seemed to differentiate Finland from the other Nordics, in which Parliaments and civil societies are more actively involved, for example.[1] The UN unit in the Foreign Ministry is responsible for coordination, but other departments and delegations play roles in formulating policy.[2] Furthermore, other ministries are actively involved

1. Interviews 9.5.b; 19.6.
2. In the Political Department, for example, the Unit for Human Rights Policy and Peace Mediation, in the Department of Development Policy the Unit for UN Development Issues and in the Legal Services the Unit for Public International Law.

in thematic UN issues.[3] The increased need for cooperation between the ministries on multilateral issues is recognised (MFA 2021a, 14). The role of the Foreign Ministry has been emphasised lately due to the politicisation of many UN issues and forums. Finland is reorganising its UN policy leadership to improve coordination and effectiveness – and the best model is being sought from the other Nordics.[4]

Analysis of the key Finnish documents showed that UN policy and priorities did not change dramatically in the 2000s. The interviewees confirmed the long-term stability and coherence of Finland's UN policy and its presence within the key pillars.[5] As one of them remarked, the Finnish UN profile was very natural, self-evident and well-known among others.[6] These were considered strengths; Finland has emphasised the close connection between UN pillars and bodies. Together with the other Nordics, the country has aimed to strengthen multilateral cooperation and the UN system, and has defended the integrity and independence of the Secretary General and other UN position holders (MFA 2021a). Finland was active in the early 2000s when Harri Holkeri served as the first Finnish President of the UNGA. President Tarja Halonen together with President of Namibia Sam Nujoma acted as joint Presidents of the UN Millennium Summit, and Ambassador Marjatta Rasi chaired the ECOSOC (Final Report by Rasi, 2005). Finland, together with the other Nordics, has actively supported the UN reforms agreed at the World Summit of 2005, and facilitated the participation of civil society and private actors in UN policymaking (Finnish Government, 2021, 37-38). Enhancing the participation of civil society is a shared objective among the Nordics. More recently, Finnish UN priorities have stressed the defence of the multilateral rule-based system and its norms, the fight against disinformation and fake news, as well as resisting authoritarianism – an agenda that is also shared among the Nordics.[7]

Paradigmatically, Finnish UN policy has changed from a more institutional to a thematic approach. In the view of some interviewees this was the key reason why the UN strategy had not been updated: UN policy is considered part of the wider foreign and security policy.[8] However, it was also recognised that there had been some lack of interest in UN affairs at the end of the 2010s, which was also related to resources and priorities in the Foreign Ministry.[9] Many long-term Finnish UN priorities reflect shared Nordic values: these include commitments to prevent conflicts and strengthen peace meditation, and to support and advance human rights, focusing particularly on gender equality and supporting the rights of women and girls as well as of the most vulnerable groups. Other shared priorities include supporting the implementation of UN climate change action and Agenda 2030. Finland's UN policy has a cross-cutting focus on gender equality and inclusivity (MFA, 2013), both predominant Nordic values. Finland also seeks niche policy areas to differentiate itself from others, including its Nordic neighbours.[10] Themes mentioned included new technologies, water diplomacy, sanitation issues, and resolutions on youth, peace and security. However, allocating resources to specific themes when they were lacking in core areas was criticised.[11] Several interviewees mentioned how Sweden and Norway were promoting a wider UN agenda, whereas Denmark was highly prioritising its efforts.

3. Interviews 3.5; 16.5.a.
4. Interviews 3.5.; 9.5.a; 16.5.a.
5. Interviews 3.5.; 9.5.a; 16.5.a; 19.6.; 28.6.; 22.8.
6. Interview 16.5.a.
7. Interview 28.4.; 3.5.; 2.6.; 23.8.
8. Interviews 3.5.; 9.5.a; 9.5.b; 19.6.
9. Interviews 9.5.a.; 28.6.
10. Interview 9.5.a; 28.6.
11. Interview 13.6.

Finland sought membership in the principal UN organs by following the Nordic rotation system. Many interviewees referred to the Nordic dimension as being most evident in the negotiations on coordinating memberships. Finland was a member of the Human Rights Council in 2006, and returned for the ongoing term 2022-24. It served as a member of the Security Council in 1969-70 and 1989-90 but lost its latest campaign in 2012. The reasons behind the defeat have been related to the Nordic image in literature, and many interviewees confirmed that the need arose after the campaign to reconsider the pros and cons of the Nordic reference group. Finland will seek SC membership for the term 2029-30 with Nordic support after a potential Danish term. According to the interviewees, UN campaigns and memberships have key relevance in the development of Finnish policy.[12] As these efforts attract extra resources, they provide opportunities to reconsider UN policy, strategy and wider, non-European bilateral partnerships. This is also expressed in the new Government programme, which promises to update UN strategy to create space for the upcoming SC campaign (Finnish Government, 2023b, 163).

The EU is the key political group for Finland at the UN, and it aims to act coherently and to coordinate positions in UN forums (Tuominen, 2023a). Wider EU guidelines for common action are coordinated by the United Nations Working Party (CONUN) in the Council.[13] Finland has consistently argued in its policy documents in favour of a stronger global role for the EU (see MFA 2021a). Coherence and effectiveness within the UN have been seen as crucial, as has as the promotion of EU-UN cooperation. According to reports, Finnish Council presidencies (1999, 2006, 2019) were major opportunities for increasing Finland's visibility and showing leadership. Running the presidency in multilateral forums was an enormous undertaking for a small state, especially before the Lisbon treaty. Simultaneously, these events shaped and improved the Finnish UN approach and the country's status.[14] Many interviewees mentioned how other international responsibilities and chairmanships had also strengthened Finland's UN profile (see also Tuominen, 2022).

According to the Government (2021, 38), Nordic UN cooperation promotes common values and objectives. Informality and mutual trust were mentioned as key strengths of the group.[15] The willingness and need for more intensive cooperation is apparent, with more references to the Nordic dimension in documents. One interviewee said that Finland had consciously stressed the EU dimension as it gave it more leverage. However, Nordicness is underlined because of the shared values.[16] Interestingly, it was mentioned that Nordic cooperation was even prioritised over the EU in some diplomatic practices.[17] Remarks such as these underline the deep commitment to Nordic identity. Many interviewees emphasised the beneficial, positive image of the Nordics[18], although some contested this purely positive image in acknowledging Nordic self-righteousness on a broader scale.[19] Overall, the relevance of the Nordic group was underlined in relation to collective representation and elections, and also to shared themes and values. However, it was also suggested that the Nordics wished to avoid being seen as too united as a bloc, and instead aimed to build bridges beyond like-minded states. This tendency was considered strongest in the Finnish and

12. Interviews 9.5.a; 12.6a.; 13.6.; 28.6.; 23.8.
13. Interview 9.5.a.
14. Interviews 16.5.b; 12.6.a; 19.6.
15. Interviews 3.5.; 9.5.b; 16.5.b; 13.6.
16. Interview 19.6.
17. Interviews 23.8.
18. Interviews 16.5.a; 16.5.b; 12.6.b; 13.6.; 22.8.; 23.8.
19. Interviews 9.5.a; 28.6.

Norwegian approaches.[20]

There has been a long-term tendency to improve the effectiveness of cooperation among Nordic and Baltic states (MFA, 2008, 17). Such efforts are evident in the increasing number of common Nordic-Baltic (NB8) statements delivered in UN forums, especially in Geneva. However, according to the interviewees, cooperation such as this is pragmatic and based on interests - it is activated when beneficial and there is variation between forums and pillars.[21] Hence, the Nordic-Baltic identity exists, but it tends to be more superficial and interest-based. Furthermore, documents and interviewees referred to the role of the UN as more of a forum through which to build up bilateral relationships with countries Finland did not otherwise reach.[22] Several interviewees mentioned the thematic UN Group of Friends through which Finland had successfully cooperated with non-European countries. As many of them pointed out, without these groups it would be impossible to achieve any results.[23]

Nordic identity in peace and security

The Nordic Council has recently been promoting the Nordic peace brand, which according to Hagemann and Bramsen (2019) consists of two elements: core values and ways of working. Historically, the Nordics have had an active role in UN peace-keeping operations (MFA, 2013). During the Cold War, for example, almost a quarter of the peace-keeping troops came from the Nordic states. However, although participation has decreased over the years due to a lack of capabilities and changes in peace-keeping operations, there is still a false image of Finland as a great power in this respect.[24] The Finnish focus has gradually evolved towards overall conflict prevention and peace mediation. The NGO's and individuals played a central role in building up Finland's reputation for mediation in the UN. Martti Ahtisaari founded the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) in the early 2000s after his term as the country's President, and he served in several important UN positions of trust. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008, the first Finn to be thus honoured. According to our interviewees, this motivated the prioritisation of mediation.[25] Changes in the other Nordic countries, such as the diminishing Swedish global orientation and role after the 2006 elections, also helped to promote and develop a stronger Finnish profile in issues of peace and security.[26]

The 2011 Government Programme and Action Plan on Mediation mentioned peace-building and mediation as the key foreign-policy priorities. Finland had been supporting political UN missions, together with Mexico, since 2012, initiating the UN Group of Friends of Mediation with Turkey in 2010 and the following UNGA resolutions (2011, 2012, 2014, 2016) on peace mediation. Other strong priorities in the early 2010s included support for the International Criminal Court and rule-of-law development, as well as backing the Responsibility to Protect (MFA, 2013). However, in the end the Finnish contribution to R2P has been rather moderate compared to that of its Nordic neighbours, especially Denmark (Tuominen, 2023b). Finland continues to promote the rule of law as vital for sustainable peace-building (MFA, 2011b), a notable part of which is to fight against the culture of impunity for serious crimes. The Nordics and the Baltics have been vocal in addressing Russian violations of international law at the UN, demanding justice for Ukrainian victims.

20. Interview 28.4.; 16.5.a; 28.6.
21. Interviews 9.5.a; 9.5.b.; 16.5.a; 2.6.; 28.6.; 22.8.
22. Interviews 16.5.a; 19.6.; 28.6.
23. Interviews 16.5.a; 2.6.; 12.6.b; 28.6.
24. Interviews 9.5.b; 16.5.a; 12.6.b.
25. Interviews 12.6.a; 22.8.
26. Interviews 12.6.a; 28.6.

Arms control and disarmament were also mentioned as areas in which Finland has contributed much and gained expertise[27], placing particular emphasis on preventing the proliferation and illicit trade of small arms and light weapons (MFA, 2011b). The country was one of the founding members of the Arms Trade Treaty Resolution core group in 2006, and Ambassador Klaus Korhonen acted as President of the working group in 2016-2017. The Nordics have expressed their common views through statements in various UN forums. However, according to one interviewee, the Finnish profile is distinct, Finns not always voted consistently with the Nordics and some EU countries.[28] Nevertheless, all the Nordics have actively contributed to and promoted the disarmament agenda at the UN, making it a common cause. They have also strived to increase the participation of women in disarmament fora.

Overall, peace and security were defined as highly competitive fields among the Nordics, despite their common values and expressions within this pillar. The profiles are remarkably similar in their support for UNSC agenda 1325 on women, peace and security (WPS). Women's empowerment is visible in different initiatives, such as the Nordic Women Mediator network established in 2015. Finland has focused on the operational side of the WPS, emphasising the agency of women and climate issues, whereas Iceland has concentrated on the role of men and boys.[29] Finland has aimed to enhance the role of young people in the different stages of peace processes (MFA, 2021a, MFA, 2021c, UNGA priorities, 2018), and it was the first country to prepare a national action plan on youth, peace and security resolution in 2021. Supporting the participation of religious and traditional leaders in peace processes is also underlined when state institutions are weak (MFA, 2021, MFA, 2013, 19). Finland contributed to the Peace Building Fund in the 2000s (MFA, 2021c), but its support is moderate in comparison to that of Norway and Sweden. Finland, although not currently participating in the Peace Building Commission is aiming for a more active role (UNGA priorities, 2020).

The EU is the main framework for action, and the development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has shaped Finland's UN policy. Key priorities are set in EU coordination meetings, and following the 2009 Lisbon Treaty EU members of the SC have been compelled to foster EU interests and to act in cooperation. Finland has been active in strengthening EU crisis-management capabilities and political operations together with Sweden, and has contributed especially to the training and education of personnel (MFA 2011b). More recently, Finland has also educated other Nordic diplomats in the peaceful resolution of cyber disputes (MFA 2021a, 21). Otherwise, the Nordic aspect in the EU has been less evident given that Denmark had an opt-out from the CFSP until 2022. Finland has been able to promote the EU agenda in the UN during its Council presidencies, participating in SC meetings and delivering EU statements in 2006[30], and updating the EU's peace mediation concept in 2019 (MFA, 2021c, 11). However, according to our interviewees, the Nordic brand as a positive force for international peace and security is still strong and serves as a major platform of influence.[31] Within the SC the Nordic states express their views mainly through common statements, and each Nordic candidacy is supported by the group.[32]

The wider Nordic-Baltic (NB8) identity has not been so prominent on matters of peace and security. There have been no joint NB8 statements in the SC, apart from some related to Ukraine. This was

27. Interviews 9.5.a; 12.6.a.
28. Interview 9.5.b.
29. Interviews 9.5.a; 28.6.
30. Interview 16.5.b.
31. Interviews 9.5.; 12.6.b.
32. Interview 23.8.

attributed to the less prominent positions and contributions of the Baltics at the UN, the divergent approaches to security issues, and the traditional deep commitment to the Nordic group.[33] However, there is informal cooperation, including Arria-Formula meetings such as 'Media Freedom in Belarus' (22 January 2021), in which Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined with other WEOG countries. Finland has also organised yearly preparation seminars for upcoming SC members (MFA, 2008), which demonstrates overall support for the UN system.

Human rights and the Nordic orientation

The human-rights unit in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs was founded in 1996, following the model set by other EU states. Finland did not express its opinions of country-specific violations during the Cold War, which differed from the Swedish position. Many interviewees mentioned that the legal, almost technical dimension was still very much alive in the Finnish approach. However, the EU membership increased the pressure also to take political positions.[34] The Government published communiqués or reports on human-rights policy in 1998, 2000, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2021. It was considered important to emphasise coherence between domestic and external human rights, especially in the early 2000s. The Foreign Ministry published a strategy outlining the means of promoting external human rights in 2013, in line with the EU model[35]. Later on the practice of combining the national, the EU and the global level in reporting continued, forming a unique model in international comparisons.[36] Overall, Finland's foreign, security and development policies are human-rights based, which means that the impact on human rights of all actions are assessed (Government of Finland, 2020, 10).

Finland and the other Nordics support and promote the opportunities taken by the UN to address human rights through its procedures and monitoring bodies.[37] Finland has proposed several resolutions on safeguarding the independence and operational preconditions of treaty-monitoring bodies and HRC special procedures (Government of Finland, 2014, 17), and the Nordic countries have pledged their political support of the activities of the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions through a resolution in the UNGA (Government of Finland, 2022, 27). Finland and Sweden presented the resolution on executions at the HRC in June 2023.[38] Currently, the most important task is to defend existing human-rights language in the face of contestation.[39]

Finland works as part of the EU and coordinates human-rights positions within the group. However, the EU has not always been able to formulate ambitious positions on some key priorities, such as the promotion of women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and the rights of indigenous peoples and sexual and gender minorities. Therefore, the cooperation has been lively among the Nordics, also including the Baltics.[40] The human-rights documents emphasise shared Nordic values and priorities, and these were also confirmed by the informants. Many interviewees named gender equality as the main Nordic success story, and an area in which all the states are highly active. Within this competitive field Finland specifically emphasises women's political and economic participation, the elimination of discrimination against women, and SRHR (MFA, 2013, 21-

33. Interview 9.5.a.
34. Interviews 28.4; 16.5.b; 19.6.
35. The EU published its first Human Rights Strategy and action plan in 2012.
36. Interview 19.6.
37. Interviews 28.4.; 19.6.
38. Interview 19.6.
39. Interviews 28.4.; 12.6.b; 28.6.
40. Interviews 28.4.; 3.5.; 12.6.b.

24), and has contributed to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), serving as a member in 2013-16. Finnish delegations to the CSW are large, and the country was also active in 2023 as part of the EU negotiation team with Sweden, the Netherlands and Hungary.

Nordic cooperation has foregrounded equality, openness and non-discrimination, and the rights of the most vulnerable groups. In particular, the disability provision was highly visible in the Finnish UN profile in several areas, namely technology, education, water and sanitation, SRHR and conflicts.[41] Finland funds projects that promote the rights of persons with disabilities, being one the main funders of the UN Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD). Another major human-rights priority, shared with Sweden, concerns the rights and inclusion of indigenous peoples in UN decision-making. In 2017 Ambassador Kai Sauer acted as negotiator in consultations on how to facilitate the participation of indigenous people in the UN. Even if the negotiations did not proceed at that point, this was considered one of Finland's successes.[42] Openness to participation of civil society is specific to the Nordics, who have made remarkable contributions to this goal at the UN. A major and increasingly common theme in the Nordics concerns human rights defenders (HRDs): Finland recently updated its guidelines to meet the increased challenges they face (MFA, 2023).

The Nordics and the Baltics have been issuing an increasing number of joint statements since 2017, which reflects their shared values and interests. One of the challenges is the extending UN mandate and workload.[43] Hence, the motivation lies in the potential to pool resources, rationalise UN work and take part in most of the ongoing discussions. However, the Nordics do not wish to appear as an exclusive group, hence they do not jointly sponsor resolutions but rather seek partners from other regions.[44] Widening the focus to include economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) is a major target, and Finland has promoted the right to education, adequate housing, food and water; the right to enjoy the highest standard of physical and mental health; and the right to work and enjoy equitable and favourable working conditions. Education and new technologies were among the key Finnish priories in the HRC campaign aiming to update its status (Tuominen, 2022). Finland defended the right of all women and girls to a safe online environment during its chairing of the Freedom Online Coalition and in the Generation Equality campaign (Government of Finland, 2022, 90). Technology and innovation as the means of enhancing equality have been promoted through different UN events.[45]

Nordic identity in development

Development policy is guided by national legislation and the Finnish constitution, in addition to international law and Finland's international commitments. UN Sustainable Development goals also play a part (MFA, 2021d, 9). Finland has implemented six development-policy programmes in the 2000s (2001, 2004, 2007, 2012, 2016 and 2021). The priorities in the latest one include women's and girls' rights, education, sustainable economies and decent work, peaceful and democratic societies as well as climate change and biodiversity. The goals have remained largely the same, although the original emphasis on poverty reduction has weakened.[46] Policies have been human-rights based

41. Interviews 28.4.; 16.5.a; 19.6.; 23.8.
42. Interview 28.4.
43. Interviews 28.4.; 12.6.b.
44. Interviews 28.4.; 12.6.b; 19.6.
45. Interview 28.6.
46. Interview 8.6.

since 2012, with particular attention paid to the most vulnerable groups. Finland's development policy is also focused on peace and security and the prevention of conflicts, reflecting the linkages among the UN pillars.

The documents we analysed showed how development has increasingly related to wider foreign- and security-policy issues since the 2000s. The interviewees explained this with reference to political as well as conceptual changes, including SDG enactment.[47] Finland served as a member of the ECOSOC in 2002-2004, with Ambassador Marjatta Rasi as its chair. Later, participation depended on the year and the themes.[48] Nordic+ cooperation used to be an influential framework (MFA, 2013, 94), but its relevance has decreased. According to the latest policy report (MFA, 2021d, 4), the Nordics are considered the closest reference group, even prioritised over the EU. Many interviewees referred to NB8 cooperation as still a work in progress, mainly due to their different and less visible roles as contributors. The war in Ukraine has also sharpened Baltic perspectives. However, cooperation with the Nordics is not self-evident given their wish also to maintain close relations with partners in the Global South instead of focusing only on Ukraine.[49]

Finland and the Nordic states share common interests and priorities in development policy. According to one interviewee, the Nordic group has been remarkably united concerning values, goals and working methods.[50] Promoting gender equality and non-discrimination are essential common goals. Under Finland's policy of 2021, 76 per cent of all new development cooperation interventions, including core support for multilateral organisations, should advance gender equality (Vastapuu and Lyytikäinen, 2022, 13). The interviewees generally emphasised the Nordic initiative and contributions to UN Women[51], in which Finland and its Nordic neighbours have invested heavily: overall, Finland has been its largest donor. The country's position was evident, for example, when the new Executive Director made her first overseas visit to Finland in 2021.[52] Finland has also been active in the Generation Equality campaign, launched by UN Women.

The Nordics have historically cooperated on UN development issues, one example being the Nordic Development Fund. They also frequently express their common opinions in UN development debates, making them a highly unified group in the eyes of others.[53] The cooperation reflects the enhanced weight of development in the UN agenda since the 2000s, and the specific Nordic aid profile. Their contribution to the UN development budget is considerable (around 15%), making the group a strong reference for Finland.[54] According to Karhu and Lanki (2022), Finland has aimed to maintain a 'Nordic aid identity' because it is instrumentally beneficial. There are notable differences in aid volumes and targets, attributed in the literature mainly to domestic factors (Kjær et al., 2022, 323). Finland is clearly a smaller contributor than Sweden or Norway to development issues, however, and even if there is Nordic rotation, many of the board positions are dependent on granted funding.[55] As some interviewees pointed out, Finland benefits from the Nordic rotation of board memberships, but it should cooperate even more to get other candidates elected.[56] Overall, the Nordics as aid

47. Interviews 16.5.b; 2.6.; 13.6.
48. Interview 2.6.
49. Interviews 16.5, 2.6.; 23.8.
50. Interview 2.6.
51. Interviews 2.6.; 8.6.; 13.6.; 28.6.
52. Interviews 2.6.; 28.6.
53. Interview 23.8.
54. Interviews 16.5a; 2.6.
55. Interview 22.8.; 23.8.
56. Interviews 2.6.; 23.8.

donors were more united in the 1990s than in 2022, and instrumental considerations have become more visible in their approaches.

All Finnish governments in the 2000s have agreed to the UN target of spending 0.7 per cent of GNI on aid, but this has not materialised. As one interviewee recalled, development aid is highly dependent on electoral changes.[57] This was particularly apparent in the Government programme of Juha Sipilä (2015), which radically cut the aid budget and led to the prioritisation in their funding of UN organisations related to equality and women's rights.[58] As previous research has shown, these cuts were legitimised with reference to new trends in the Nordic countries (Ojanen and Raunio, 2018, 414). Hence, Nordic identity may also be instrumental in this respect. The report on development policy (MFA, 2021d) extended the planning beyond election terms and defined development as the core of foreign and security policy, expressing links between the UN pillars. However, in 2023 the newly formed government again decided to make substantial cuts to aid, and some interviewees raised concerns about the potential changes.[59] Similarly, reductions in Swedish development aid have called into question the future level of Nordic contributions.[60]

In comparison to its Nordic neighbours, Finland gives the largest amount of its aid as core aid through UN organisations, namely UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women. Together with the other Nordics, it is one of the largest core funders of UNFPA, enabling long-term planning, flexible responses to emerging priorities, and sustainable support for human-rights-based programmes that help to improve the lives of women and young people in developing countries. In addition, Finland supports the UNFPA Innovation Fund and humanitarian efforts as well as specific projects and initiatives. Key interest areas include improving basic health and social services, including SRHR, and the prevention of maternal mortality and female genital mutilation. Finland is more open than the other Nordics to including the private sector in development, which may be related to its smaller resource base.[61]

Concluding remarks

The focus of the study reported in this article was on Finnish UN policy in the 2000s from the perspective of Nordic identity, which we considered to be value-based, expressive and instrumental. Overall, emphasising the collective Nordic identity helped in framing the policy. As demonstrated, Nordic cooperation is value-based, intense and often informal diplomatic interaction, supporting the assumption of a collective identity. Even if Finnish UN policy documents emphasise the relevance of the EU framework, our interview data indicates that the Nordics often constitute an even more strongly preferred reference group. However, the intensity of Nordic identity has varied, and was challenged by European identity especially in the early 2000s. Its relevance increased in the 2010s as the multilateral environment became more challenging (see also Brommesson et al., 2023). Furthermore, EU cooperation does not always produce optimal outcomes from the Nordic perspective. Cooperation among the NB8 has increased recently, but there are still limitations, such as on questions of peace and security and development. Hence, Nordic identity is competing with other potential collective identities, but has maintained its priority status. Even if Finland shows strong commitment to the Nordics, pragmatism and situational relevance might influence its concrete policymaking at the UN (see Ojanen and Raunio, 2018).

57. Interview 8.6.
58. Interviews 2.6.;8.6; 28.6.
59. Interviews 2.6.; 8.6.; 28.6.; 23.8.
60. Interview 28.6.; 23.8.
61. Interview 2.6.

As we have demonstrated, Finnish UN policy has been rather stable in the 2000s. Finnish priorities and working methods have expressed a traditional, pragmatic Nordic UN orientation (see Wivel, 2017). Dedicated support for UN institutions, treaties and normative frames in alliance with the other Nordics is prioritised. Given the limited resources, the EU and the Nordic group are compelled to pool them, especially as the UN agenda is expanding. Interestingly, Finnish UN policy has moved from an institutional approach towards thematic prioritisation. Although Nordic identity commonly refers to shared values and thematic priorities, the Nordics are also competing for status and visibility. Finland needs to update its profile in national thematic niche areas such as water diplomacy and technology, and to differentiate itself from its Nordic peers. On the one hand, individuality matters when serving in visible UN positions, for example as a member of the HRC (see Tuominen, 2022) or the SC, but on the other hand the Nordics express their identity in these bodies through common statements. Our findings support the idea of friendly status-seeking among the Nordics (Røren, 2019); they respect each other's initiatives and working space, even without formal negotiations. In the following we summarise some of our key finding regarding Nordic identity and the three UN pillars.

In terms of peace and security, the Nordics have focused on similar themes and priorities reflecting the value-based dimension of identity. Nordic identity is especially visible in peace mediation and the WPS agenda in that the states also compete and develop their own niche areas. Within the SC the Nordic group strongly expresses its common identity through electoral cooperation, joint statements and events. However, the well-known Nordic peace brand also serves national endeavours instrumentally. EU integration and its implications for security policies diminished the Nordic identity temporarily. Following its lost SC campaign, Finland also sought partnership beyond the Nordics, the Friendship Group with Turkey on peace mediation being one example. Security concerns, interests and institutional commitments are currently more closely aligned than ever among the Nordics, supporting the situational relevance of a common identity in peace and security. NB8 cooperation could increase the weight of the group, but it is clearly a secondary option for Finland.

According to our findings, strengthening support for the UN human-rights system and advocating norms is prioritised among all the Nordics (see also Björkdahl, 2007; Tuominen, 2023b). They also share several thematic priorities and aim to act more ambitiously within the EU. Hence, the common identity in this field is undeniable, and the cooperation is informal and intense. However, differentiating within this progressive peer group and developing distinct profiles may be tough. Given the need to avoid an exclusive group mentality, expressions of a shared identity occur in statements, not resolutions. Nordic-Baltic cooperation is most intense on human-rights issues. However, success also often depends on finding partners from other regions, and the mainly positive Nordic brand frequently serves Finnish interests in this endeavour.

Nordic identity has traditionally been strong in development issues, related specifically to aid volumes, gender equality, poverty reduction and sustainable development. Differences among the Nordics in aid volumes and targets have grown in the 2000s due to domestic factors (Kjaer et al., 2022). Despite the cooperation and common themes, there are also individual country profiles; and despite the competition and various niche areas, joint Nordic statements are provided in many UN forums, expressing a common identity. Sustaining its Nordic aid identity has been instrumentally important for Finland, which has lagged behind its peers. Hence, the instrumental dimension is most visible in this pillar. As we have demonstrated, the importance of the development policy and of resources has varied among governments in the 2000s, making the policy pragmatically oriented and less foreseeable, and sometimes going against Nordic identity (see Ojanen and Raunio, 2018, 414). Pragmatism also concerns cooperation with the Baltics, which are not seen as equal contributors to

the UN.

In conclusion, Nordic identity and its different forms seem relevant in terms of understanding Finnish UN policy, even if there is slight variation among the UN pillars. Nordic identity is reflected in all the dimensions, through values and expressions but also instrumentally. Given the scarcity of academic research on Finnish UN policy, this article makes an interesting contribution to the wider discussion on the currency of the Nordic group. Our conclusions emphasise only one dimension, namely a common identity, hence there is still a need to study other aspects of Finnish UN policy. The research topic is timely as Finland's next SC candidacy campaign is approaching and the new Government has promised eventually to update Finland's UN strategy. In a world of heightened geopolitical challenges and contestation, the cooperating Nordics constitute an influential reference group for Finland.

References

Andersson, Hans E. (2010) 'What Activates an Identity? The Case of Norden', *International Relations* 24 (1), 46–64.

Björkdahl, Annika (2007) 'Swedish norm entrepreneurship in the UN', *International Peacekeeping* 14 (4), 538–552.

Brommesson, Douglas, Ekengren, Ann-Marie and Michalski, Anna (2023) 'From variation to convergence in turbulent times – foreign and security policy choices among the Nordics 2014–2023', *European Security*, early view, https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2023.2221185

Browning, Christopher (2007) 'Branding Nordicity. Models, Identity and the Decline of Exceptionalism', *Cooperation and Conflict* 42 (1), 2007, 27–51.

Browning, Christopher (2008) *Constructivism, Narrative and Foreign Policy Analysis. A Case study of Finland,* Bern: Peter Lang.

Creutz, Katja (2021) 'Nordic Experiences in the UN Human Rights Council: A Tour d'Horizon of 2019 with Iceland and Denmark' *Nordic Journal of Human Rights* 39 (1), 18–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/18918131.2021.1942607.

Elgström, Ole (2017) 'Norm advocacy networks: Nordic and Like-Minded Countries in EU gender and development policy', *Cooperation and Conflict* 52 (2), 224–240. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836716652429.

Gowan, Richard (2015) 'Finland and the United Nations: In Defense of the National Interest', Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland publication, https://um.fi/documents/35732/48132/finland_and_the_united_nations__in_defense_of_the_national/266fff23-6246-bd6c-8d84-6e9530058aff?t=1525861382304.

Götz, Norbert (2011) *Deliberative Diplomacy. The Nordic Approach to Global Governance and Societal Representation at the United Nations* (Dordrecht: Republic of Letters).

Hagemann, Anine and Bramsen, Isabelle (2019) *New Nordic Peace: Nordic Peace and Conflict Resolution Efforts*, Nordic Council of Ministers publication, http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1302296/FULLTEXT01.pdf.

Haugevik, Kristin and Sending, Ole J. (2020) 'The Nordic Balance Revisited: Differentiation and the Foreign Policy Repertoires of the Nordic States', *Politics and Governance* 8 (4), 110–119. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i4.3380.

Haugevik, Kristin, Svendsen, Øyvind, Creutz, Katja, Olesen, Mikkel, Runge Lundborg Regnér, Anna and Schmidt, Linnet Jakob (2022) *Security debates and partnership choices in the Nordic states: From differentiation to alignment*, NUPI report 1/2022, https://www.nupi.no/en/publications/cristin-pub/security-debates-and-partnership-choices-in-the-nordic-states-from-differentiation-to-alignment.

Ingebritsen, Christine (2002) 'Norm entrepreneurs. Scandinavia's role in world politics', *Cooperation and Conflict* 37 (1), 11–23.

Iso-Markku, Tuomas, Innola, Eeva and Tiilikainen, Teija (2018) 'A Stronger North? Nordic cooperation in foreign and security policy in a new security environment, Prime Minister's Office', https://sldinfo.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/nordic-vnteas-report_final.pdf.

Jakobsen, Peter V. (2017) 'The United Nations and the Nordic Four. Cautious sceptics, committed

believers, cost–benefit calculators' in Peter Nedergaard and Anders Wivel (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Scandinavian Politics*, (London: Routledge), 281–293.

Karhu, Marikki and Lanki, Jari (2022) 'In the Quest for True Commitment: The Finnish Aid Paradigm and the 0.7 Target in Domestic Politics', *Forum for Development Studies* 49 (3), 435-465, https://doi.org/10.1080/08039410.2022.2116353.

Kjær, Anne Mette, Pettersson, Jan, Tjønneland, Elling, Karhu Marikki and Lanki, Jari (2022) 'Diverging Like-Mindedness? Development Policy Among the Nordics', *Forum for Development Studies* 49 (3), 319-344, DOI:10.1080/08039410.2022.2120414.

Laatikainen, Katie V. (2003) 'Norden's Eclipse: The Impact of the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy on the Nordic Group in the United Nations', *Cooperation and Conflict* 38 (4), 409–441.

Laatikainen, Katie V. (2017) 'Conceptualizing Groups in UN Multilateralism: The Diplomatic Practice of Group Politics', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 12, 113–137.

Laatikainen, Katie and Smith, Karen E. (2020) 'Introduction: Group Politics in UN Multilateralism' in Karen Smith and Katie Laatikainen (eds.) *Group Politics in UN Multilateralism*, Nijhoff: Brill.

Leira, Halvard (2021) 'Afterword. Gendering the Brand?', In Eirinn Larsen, Sigrun Marie Moss and Inger Skjelsbæk (eds.) *Gender Equality and Nation Branding in the Nordic Region* (London & New York: Routledge), 207–211.

Ojanen, Hanna and Raunio, Tapio (2018) 'The Varying Degrees and Meanings of Nordicness in Finnish Foreign Policy', *Global Affairs* 4 (4–5), 405–418.

Pedersen, Rasmus (2018) 'Bandwagon for Status: Changing Patterns in the Nordic States Status-seeking Strategies?, *International Peacekeeping*, 25 (2), 217–241.

Puyvalée, Antoine de Bengy and Björkdahl, Kristian (2021) 'Introduction: On the Resilience of the Scandinavian Humanitarian Brand' in Antoine de Bengy Puyvalée and Kristian Björkdahl *Do-gooders at the End of Aid. Scandinavian Humanitarianism in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1–13.

Røren, Pål. (2019) 'Status seeking in the friendly Nordic neighborhood'. *Cooperation and Conflict* 54 (4), 562–579. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0010836719828410.

Seppä, Tarja & Anni Tervo (2020), 'Kokoaan suurempi: Suomen ja Luxemburgin turvallisuusneuvostokampanjat' *Politiikka* 62 (3), 295–307. https://doi.org/10.37452/politiikka.97481.

Strang, Johan (2016) 'Introduction: The Nordic model of transnational cooperation? In Johan Strang (ed.) *Nordic cooperation: A European region in transition* (Abingdon: Routledge), 126.

Strang, Johan, Marjanen Jani and Hilson, Mary (2021) 'A Rhetorical Perspective on Nordicness: From Creating Unity to Exporting Models', in Johan Strang, Jani Marjanen & Mary Hilson (eds.), *Contesting Nordicness. From Scandinavianism to the Nordic Brand,* (DeGruyter: Berlin/Boston), 1–34.

Tuominen, Hanna (2022) 'Finland's Status Updating through the UN Human Rights Council Campaign', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 17 (2), 306–330.

Tuominen, Hanna. (2023a) 'Effective Human Rights Promotion and Protection? The EU and its Member States at the UN Human Rights Council', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 61 (4), 935–950.

Tuominen, Hanna (2023) Finland's role in the promotion of Responsibility to Protect at the United

Nations, *Nordic Journal of Human Rights*, DOI: 10.1080/18918131.2023.2284492.

Tuomioja, Erkki. (2013) 'Foreign Minister's speech "Are Nordic values at stake in the UN?" in Hanasaari seminar 13.9.2013', https://um.fi/speeches/-/asset_publisher/up7ecZeXFRAS/content/ulkoministeri-tuomiojan-puhe-pohjoismaisesta-yk-yhteistyosta/35732.

Vastapuu, Leena and Lyytikäinen, Minna (2022) 'Gender Equality in Finnish Foreign Affairs from 2019 to 2022, Ministry for Foreign Affairs', https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/Gender+equality+in+foreign+affairs_Vastapuu_Lyytikainen.pdf/4aef250d-4d89-41cd-d390-6059951d4aa9?t=1668426670061.

Vesa, Unto (2012) 'Finland in the United Nations: Consistent and Credible Constructivism', Finnish Foreign Policy paper 2, FIIA, https://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/finland-in-the-united-nations.

Waever, Ole (1992) 'Nordic Nostalgia? Northern Europe after the Cold War', *International Affairs* 68 (1), 77–102.

Wivel, Anders. (2017) 'What Happened to the Nordic Model for International Peace and Security?', *Peace Review* 29 (4), 489–496. https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2017.1381521.

Appendix I. List of Interviewees

Tarja Halonen, President of Finland 2000-2012, Foreign Minister 1995-2000

Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives, Deputy Permanent Representatives:

2005-2009 Kirsti Lintonen, Ambassador, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations, New York

2009-2014 Jarmo Viinanen, Ambassador, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations, New York

2010-2015 Janne Taalas, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations, New York

2019-2022 Jukka Salovaara, Ambassador, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations, New York

2022- Elina Kalkku, Ambassador, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations, New York

Heads of UN Units, Ministry for Foreign Affairs:

Satu Lassila, Director, Unit for UN Development and Innovation Issues, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Erik Lundberg, Deputy Director General, Political Department, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Anna Salovaara, Director, Unit for UN and General Global Affairs, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Ann-Mari Fröberg, Team Leader, Unit for Human Rights Policy, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Thematic ambassadors:

Rauno Merisaari, Ambassador for democracy and human rights, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Katri Viinikka, Ambassador for equality issues, Unit for Human Rights Policy, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Other UN policy experts:

Karoliina Heikinheimo-Pérez, First Secretary (Human Rights), Permanent Mission of Finland to the UN in Geneva

Marikki Karhu, Secretary General of the Finnish Development Policy Committee, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Eeva-Liisa Myllymäki, Counsellor, Ministry for Foreign Affairs (retired)

Appendix II. List of Policy Documents

Finnish UN Priorities at the General Assembly 2010-2020 (lacking years 2016 and 2020-21), collected from the webpages of the Finnish Parliament (2010-14) and the Archives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Final report from the Finnish UN Embassy in New York (1998-2005) (by Ambassador Marjatta Rasi)

Final report from the Finnish UN Embassy in New York (2005-2009) (by Ambassador Kirsti Lintonen)

Government of Finland, Government programmes 1999-2023, https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/government/history/government-programmes

Government of Finland – Human rights reports 1998, 2000, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2021.

Government of Finland – Foreign and security policy reports 2016, 2020.

Government of Finland (2014) Human Rights Report, https://um.fi/documents/35732/48132/government_of_finland_human_rights_report_2014/9d777ec6-8977-d2f2-fec3-1d48a60a40e9.

Government of Finland (2020) Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy, https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/162515.

Government of Finland (2022) Report on Human Rights Policy (published in English 17.2.2022), https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163838/VN_2022_10.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y.

Government of Finland: Preliminary results of government negotiations, 16 June 2023,

MFA (2008) The UN Strategy of the Finnish Foreign Service, https://um.fi/documents/35732/48132/yhteisty%C3%B6n_maailma___suomen_ulkoasiainhallinnon_yk_strategia_28_5_2008

MFA (2013) The UN Strategy of the Finnish Foreign Service.

MFA (2011a) Action Plan for Mediation.

MFA (2011b) Finland and Africa. Working together for Peace and Security.

MFA (2021a) Era of new cooperation - The Contribution of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland to Strengthening Multilateral Cooperation, https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/163362.

MFA (2021b) A Diverse world, universal human rights'. Finland's Human Rights Council Campaign, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/HRC+campaign+brochure+ENG.pdf/f15a644e-5b86-3f8b-b283-8826fd2d8e13?t=1615215634102.

MFA (2021c). Katsaus Suomen Ulkoministeriön rauhanprosesseja tukevaan yhteistyöhön. Kehitysevaluoinnin yksikkö 2021/3.

MFA (2021d) Report on Development Policy Extending Across Parliamentary Terms, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/163218.

MFA (2023) Supporting Human Rights Defenders Together: Guidelines of the Finnish Foreign Service, https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/164904.

Speeches by the Head of the Finnish UN delegation at the General Assembly 2000-2022 (by President, Foreign Minister or Ambassador).

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

Peer-Reviewed Article

Continuity over change, institutions over innovations, organised over organic: the scales and phases of Nordic resilience

Johanna Ketola, Project Researcher, University of Turku

Abstract

This study approaches Nordic resilience as a continuum and a multi-level process exploring the resilience perceptions across the region. Through a mixed-methods approach combining earlier literature and a unique set of interviews collected in the Nordic countries and regions in 2021–2022, the study develops a heuristic model of Nordic resilience, which is composed of three overlapping phases: resistance, endurance, and transformation. While the study does not attempt to evaluate whether resilience to certain dangers exists either spatially or temporally, it builds a catalogue of perceived resilience elements specific to the Nordics. The research confirms that despite terminological differences, resilience perceptions across the Nordics are aligned. The identified resilience factors appear mostly at the national and international levels emphasising the state responsibility and centrality in resilience production. Simultaneously, the interviewees give little attention to the micro-level responsibility for resilience, namely the role of individuals and communities. This leads to a Nordic resilience paradox where problems with responsibility and governability of resilience are practically absent but the strengths of a resilience approach are not fully recognised as attention to bottom-up agility, innovation, and organic transformation is lacking.

Keywords

Resilience, societal security, comprehensive security, Nordic, crisis

Introduction

Studies on resilience have blossomed as a result of the increasing frequency and intensity of real-life events and hazards, one such example being the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Over the past two decades, resilience has become a central concept for scholars to assess how communities, organisations, and nation-states respond to crises and recover from them (Mikkola et al., 2018, p. 85). Resilience thinking has also clearly broken through in the Nordic region, both in terms of research and policies. As Spruds and Vignuzova (2018, pp. 7-8) maintain, resilience is currently at the core of the evolving societal security community, not only in the Nordics, but also across the wider Baltic region.

Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic from early 2020 to March 2023, combined with Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine, launched in February 2022, have triggered Nordic responses in terms of resilience politics, policies, and practices. Under various auspices, initiatives aimed at making Nordic institutions more *resilient* have now begun. For example, the joint statement from the Nordic Prime Ministers on deepening cooperation in the field of security of supply and preparedness in November 2021 declared:

> *Our Nordic welfare societies provide a stable foundation to meet crises situations and unexpected circumstances. Well-functioning institutions, open and transparent structures and high levels of education and equality all feed in to societal resilience, flexibility, and the capability to repel, respond to and bounce back from crisis. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2021)*

Indeed, the Nordics share a solid common base for building their cooperation as the societies in the region strongly resemble each other economically, culturally, and politically. They all also emphasise transparency and good governance as the cornerstones of their political systems. Although it is fairly easy to generalise all things Nordic, simultaneously downplaying any differences, previous research has demonstrated that the Nordic approach to security is internationally distinctive, characterised by general public acceptance and inclusiveness (Larsson and Rhinard, 2020b, p. 227). The Nordics further share a similar *societal security* approach, focusing on protecting the 'core values of a society from a wide range of intentional and unintentional threats', and they also promote horizontal and cross-sectoral governance models as well as wide range of public and private responses that have been developed to respond to threats (Larsson and Rhinard, 2020a, p. 5).

The Nordic societal security model offers a holistic approach to security whereby the state and society pool 'their efforts to build resilient Nordic societies' (Spruds and Vignuzova, 2018, pp. 7-8; see also Aaltola and Juntunen, 2018, p. 26). Societal security and the closely related term *societal resilience* are both associated with Nordic values such as democracy, good governance, and transparency (Larsson and Rhinard, 2020a, p. 5; Spruds and Vignuzova, 2018, pp. 7-8). Along with many other shared features, these convergences and similarities create opportunities for improving Nordic cooperation and joint action.

Resilience in the Nordic context has been particularly studied in the realms of the economy (e.g., Giacometti et al., 2018; Gylfason et al., 2010) as well as disaster risk reduction (e.g., Henriksen et al., 2018; van Well, 2018; Rapeli et al., 2018). One of the first attempts to explore whether a Nordic model exists in the security policy domain was conducted by Christer Pursiainen (2018). Pursiainen (ibid., 632) assessed Nordic critical infrastructure resilience, arguing that there is indeed a Nordic model being developed, the essential feature of which is emphasis on policies 'securing vital societal functions rather than the individual infrastructures that support these functions'.

Resilience has also been explored in Nordic defense studies where it has been argued that societal

resilience can almost never be detached from territorial defense (Spruds and Vignuzova, 2018; Wither, 2020). Regarding individual countries and their security arrangements, Finland has been expressly explored (e.g., Aaltola and Juntunen, 2018, Hyvönen and Juntunen, 2020) for its perceived uniqueness, characterised as a blend of top-down territorial defense and bottom-up societal resilience (Aaltola and Juntunen, 2018, pp. 27-28). Usually, comparative studies include three of the Nordic countries, typically Norway and Sweden as well as either Denmark or Finland, omitting Iceland and self-rule regions.

The research at hand analyses the differences and similarities between Nordic resilience perceptions by utilising varied *resilience frames*. Not only does this study add to the existing body of knowledge regarding Nordic resilience, but it also assesses what the methodological and conceptual implications of the resulting understanding of Nordic resilience(s) are. The unique empirical data of this study consists of interviews with experts (n=88), mainly civil servants, from all the Nordic countries as well as self-rule regions. The research offers a holistic, processual model of Nordic resilience, introducing the perceived resilience elements specific to the Nordics. What it does *not* attempt to do is to evaluate whether resilience to certain dangers exists either spatially or temporally.

The main finding is that while conceptual use varies, resilience perceptions in the Nordics are closely aligned due to close interactions across the regions at various societal levels. The Nordics offer a blend of organised and robust understandings on the concept, emphasising the institutional ability to bounce back after a crisis. While the approach requires bottom-up legitimacy, it nonetheless relies on top-down capacities and thus pays scant attention to individual and community levels. The study argues that the strength of this approach is the small risk of security becoming detached from leaders. The weakness, however, is that resilience practices are not yet geared towards transformational forward-looking capacities, especially at the micro level.

This article proceeds as follows. The following section discusses the concept of resilience and places it within current security studies. Then the article introduces the methods used in the empirical section, which builds a consolidated model of Nordic resilience by employing a temporal resilience model. The final section restates the main findings and concludes the study.

Conceptual discussion on resilience

Resilience can be anything, at least (but not limited to) a feature, a concept, an ideal, a practice or a policy. As a subject of academic studies, its origins are in different fields such as *ecology*, *engineering, psychology,* and *disaster management* studies. Resilience unites different walks of life, academic disciplines, policies and politics. Unsurprisingly, there is thus no single definition of resilience and, in fact, research is extremely widespread. On one hand, the resulting diversity alludes to its conceptual vagueness and ambiguity while on the other, diversity can also be seen as a strength as it allows for different understandings and approaches.

Chandler and Coaffee (2017) have previously explained how the understanding of resilience has developed in at least three phases. The first 'generation', named the *homeostatic* approach, endorsed recovery abilities and the readiness of (eco)systems to return to an ideal state of balance or equilibrium after a disturbance. Here, resilience is understood as a combination of internal properties. It turned the paradigm of modern problem-solving upside down by focusing first on oneself before engaging with the external world.

At this juncture, the themes of resiliency were also picked up by international relations (IR) scholars, which included topics such as persistence, endurance, and robustness. For instance, Bourbeau

(2018, pp. 42-43; 2013, pp. 3-4) explains how resilience was used to characterise the ways in which international institutions stay in power in the face of exogenous challenge ('regime robustness/ resilience') and how authoritarian regimes resist pressures to democratise.

Chandler and Coaffee (2017) characterise the second generation as the *autopoietic* understanding of resilience. It emphasises the dynamic and emergent features of resilience that arise from the rather unique interactions and relationships between different scales (panarchy). As an inter-relational and contextual phenomenon, resilience becomes more than the sum of its parts. Second-generation resilience focuses on internal organisation and self-transformation, thus bouncing forward rather than focusing on maintaining the status quo or returning to it.

In the third phase, which could be called *carpe diem*, the understanding departs from the prior, subject-oriented interpretation of resilience. As an experimental and community-oriented approach, it seeks ad hoc opportunities within current contexts. Chandler and Coaffee (2017, p. 6) argue that this approach has resulted in the reinterpretation of problems as opportunities for international policy interventions. For example, Evans and Reid (2017) describe how resilience became the 'defining motif' for Americans to reflect on their *recovery* from the 9/11 attacks.

In contemporary IR research, resilience is often discussed within the context of security studies but not without controversy. In addition to claims that the term is used vaguely and loosely, the normative basis of resilience has been also questioned: is resilience necessarily a good and/or desirable thing? Evans and Reid's (2017) answer to this question seems to be outright negative. In their assessment, the underlying ontology of resilience is vulnerability (p. 331) and accordingly, resilience as a political choice is nihilistic as it portends both the necessity and positivity of exposure to danger (pp. 331; 340). In a more moderate critique, Bourbeau (2013, pp. 7-8) argues that approaches to resilience should allow theorising situations in which a resilient strategy could be also understood as negative. Bourbeau calls for particular awareness of resilience being an obstacle to positive change in some cases.

Moreover, there is no agreement on what the referent object of resilience studies actually is. For example, Mikkola et al. (2018, p. 91) argue that it is not individuals and communities but rather the vital functions of society that are the true referent object. Alternatively, Evans and Reid (2017) refute the centrality of human life in the equation.

Berling and Petersen (2020, pp. 121–132) identified the two main scholarly disagreements regarding resilience. The first debate is about decision-making levels and responsibilities ('micro versus macro level'), with the argument revolving around the dangers of securitisation and (excessive) trust in an individual's capacity to act and self-reflect in the face of danger. Here, the worst-case scenario is that 'Security becomes detached from decisions of leaders.' The second disagreement concerns 'the meaning of change (adaptation versus progression)' where it is argued that resilience does not offer a strategy for change. In fact, the resilience approach might even prevent institutional change. Similar to Evans and Reid (2017), the study's authors (2020, p. 132) consider resilience as a potential 'antithesis to political planning and strategy' as the practices accept uncertainty as a key feature of the future. Reid (2022) suggests that adopting resilience as a strategy may increase the efficacy of the state, but it will also make 'society itself into a more direct agent of war, and therefore, also a target in war'.

Types of resilience

Perceptions of resilience can be analysed against different pre-existing typologies. Two sets of frames are particularly worthwhile to explore when studying and comparing resiliencies in the Nordics. Firstly, in his study about the securitisation of migration in France and Canada, Bourbeau (2013) suggested distinguishing between three types of resilience: *maintenance, marginalisation,* and *renewal* (MMR). In the MMR-frame, *maintenance* is geared towards preserving the status quo through adaptation, although disturbances and shocks might not necessarily be negative, they are socially constructed as threats (2013, p.10). 'Rhetoric and discursive powers will be deployed to portray the event as a significant threat and security practices will also be either implemented or strengthened as a response' (p. 11). Resilience as *marginality*, in turn, implies reactions 'within the boundaries of the current policy' (p. 12). The responses do not 'challenge the basis of a policy (or a society)' (p. 12). *Renewal* represents the most radical type of challenge to existing policies, "characterized by responses that transform basic policy assumptions and, thus, potentially remodel social structures" (p. 14). The MMR typology offered a 'conceptualization of resilience as the process of patterned adjustments adopted by a society or an individual in the face of endogenous or exogenous shocks' (p. 9). As a result, resiliencism could be considered 'a conceptual framework for understanding how continuity and transformation take place under these circumstances' (p. 9).

Secondly, Trine Villumsen Berling and Karen Lund Petersen have identified three forms of Nordic resilience, *robust*, *reflexive* and *organised* (RRO), in their comparative study on public debates on resilience in Nordic security politics. In the RRO-frame, *robust resilience* refers to the ability of the individual to adapt to new situations and demands. Drawing from Chandler and Coaffee's (2017) characterisation of the first generation of resilience and bearing similarities to Bourbeau's category of maintenance, robust resilience stresses the ability to survive in the face of a threat (Berling and Petersen 2020, p. 136). As the authors maintain, *reflexive resilience* is 'an ability to not only adapt but also to be reflexive about our production of new threats' (p. 139). Reflexive resilience is a post-modern (cf. Chandler, 2014), and even Beckian, type of resilience whereby resilience is not directed towards any particular threat. Yet almost paradoxically, the whole of society is expected to contribute to the definition and management of threats (p. 139). In turn, *organised resilience* offers a pragmatic type of resilience characterised as 'a tool of management between means and ends, the end however being defined negatively as a matter of "coping with uncertainty" and the possible catastrophe and the means being that of setting up the right institutional structures' (p. 141).

Following a discourse analysis, the authors conclude that "the semantic field defining the meaning of resilience all stress societies' (and individuals') ability to adapt and defend themselves against new and uncertain dangers" (p. 135). In the authors' assessment, this openness to unknown threats and dangers comes with a governmentality problem as 'resilience becomes the standard answer in the Nordic countries, but we are unsure to what' (p. 147).

Scales of resilience

As resilience is a fluid, context-dependent and *panarchical,* rather than *hierarchical,* phenomenon, Hyvönen et al. (2019) argued that research should, ideally, target the interaction and dynamics between the different levels (or scales) (see also Bourbeau, 2013). To this end, Walklate et al. (2014) have identified seven levels of resilience: *individual, familial, communal, institutional, national, regional* and *global*, while Hyvönen et al. (2019, p. 1) settle on four societal levels: *individual, communal*, *national,* and *institutional*, supplemented by *international* connectivity.

Distinguishing between the scales adds analytical value because 'resilience is not an objective condition nor an immutable state that individuals or communities can arrive at through working together. Rather, there are multiple resiliencies that manifest themselves along a spectrum of different contexts and conditions' (Walklate 2014, p. 422). This includes inter-state settings but the larger the tier, the more complex it is to approach and measure it.

In fact, although resilience has the potential to transform (security) governance, it either escapes almost any measurement at the macro-level and above or it is built on assumptions. As will be argued in the next section, this type of multi-level approach to resilience does matter as international resilience discourses are often 'domesticated' in a process of negotiation which occurs between the scales (Hyvönen and Juntunen, 2020, p. 157).

Drawing from previous literature, as well as from the empirical material[1], this research adopts a four-level model including the international, national, communal and individual scales in which the dominant levels are national and international, and the interaction between the two.

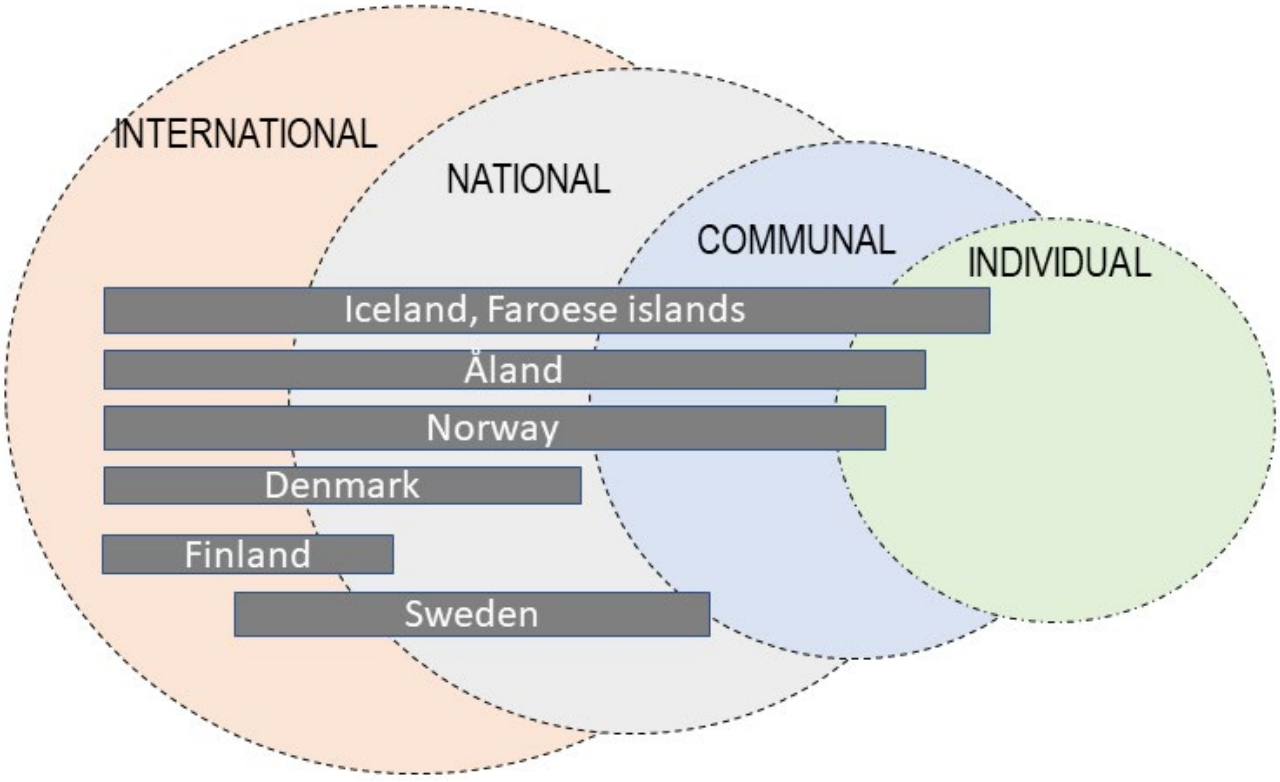

Figure 1. In this indicative illustration, country cases are placed according to the scales that were most discussed. Iceland appeared to have most multi-level view on resilience, spanning from individual responsibilities to global level actors. On the opposite end of the spectrum is Sweden where discussion remained mostly on national level actors and the division of labour between them. Given the low number of interviewees from Greenland, definitive conclusions could not be reached.

1. National and international levels were most referred to in the interviews. The international level encompasses all levels beyond national, including Nordic, European and global. To some, but nonetheless a clearly lesser extent, discussion revolved around the lower levels, individual and communal, while the familiar level was practically absent.

Method

This research consists of a literature review of Nordic resilience as well as interviews that were collected as a part of the research project *Managing Competitive Interdependence in Northern Europe: Nordic Security of Supply in the Age of Disruption* (NOSAD) from autumn 2021 to spring 2022[2]. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts, policymakers and personnel involved in practical crisis preparedness work across the Nordics. The expert interviews consisted of a series of predetermined but open-ended questions divided into two main thematic sections related to (1) national policies and the operational environment and (2) Nordic cooperation. The interview questions, 11 in total, were sent to the participants beforehand, along with other information on the research project. The full list of questions can be found as an appendix to this article. The interviews took between 30 and 90 minutes and some were conducted in pairs and groups. With some exceptions, at least two researchers were involved in each interview to take notes as the interviews were not recorded.

The relevant experts were identified through their organisational roles and affiliations. To ensure that gaps in expertise in terms of regions or themes would be covered, the so-called snowballing method (see Taylor, 2015, p. 815) was utilised, meaning that the interviewees were asked to suggest other people who could participate in the research. This approach proved to be valuable in order to access specific communities.

Altogether, 53 interviews were conducted with 88 interviewees. They consisted of 12 background interviews with 17 persons and 41 expert interviews with 72 persons, with almost half of the interviewees (40) being women[3]. The purpose of the background interviews was to test the interview questionnaire and to scope both the relevant experts and topics that should be addressed. Most interviews were conducted in English, but some were also carried out in Finnish and Swedish. The interviews were conducted anonymously and based on informed consent, which was asked from, and provided by, all interviewees. The semi-structured, qualitative interview method proved to be a suitable approach for accessing the attitudes, interpretations of events, understanding, and values of interviewees, all of whom came from different professional and national backgrounds.

The interview data was collected, managed, and stored according to the established procedures of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. To ensure the security of the information handled during the project, the research data protection guidelines in EU Directive 95/46/EC and the Finnish Personal Data Act (523/1999) were used. The research agency follows the information security and archiving practices stipulated by the relevant Finnish government guidelines and standards.

The interview data was first analysed as individual country and region cases (e.g., case Åland, case Iceland) and were then compared. Utilising a theory-driven qualitative content analysis, the key topics emerging from the interviews were thematically coded according to the resilience frames provided by Bourbeau (2013) and Berling and Petersen (2020). Finally, a processual Nordic resilience framework was developed, combining interview material with existing literature on Nordic resilience.

2. The research project was funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers. This article has greatly benefitted from this collaboration during the project. Therefore, I would like to warmly thank the NOSAD team of Christian Fjäder, Emma Hakala, Mariette Hägglund, Harri Mikkola and the team leader Mikael Wigell for the cooperation.

3. Given the particular and substantial added value to the research, three of the background interviews were considered part of the analysis. As agreed beforehand with the interviewees, no direct quotes appear in the analysis but there are several illustrations and remarks provided by interviewees that are formulated in a way to stay true to the original remarks.

The applicability of the resilience frames elaborated on in section regarding types of resilience was tested as part of the study (Annex 1). Both frames offered some useful categories to code and compare resilience perceptions. However, when the data was analysed against both MMR and RRO frames, similarities, rather than differences, across the region became visible. In this vein, all the Nordic cases essentially represented the *marginality, robust* and *organised* types of resilience. The category of *organised* resilience proved to be a largely useful description of security management across the Nordics. The discussions with experts in all countries revolved around the dilemma of how to best prepare for threats, how to bridge the gap between means and ends, and how to improve the strategic elements of planning for and managing different security concerns. A pattern emerged of interviewees being rather conservative in terms of challenging the existing security management policies or structures of society amid the recent crises. Thus, the interviews were more often than not coded to represent *marginality* and its close relative, *robust* resilience. Furthermore, there was emphasis on continuity rather than transformation. This approach can be explained, to a large extent, by the fact that most interviewees were civil servants. It is also important to bear in mind the particular crisis setting in which the interviews were conducted: both COVID-19 and Russia's war on Ukraine had instigated crises that united, rather than divided, the respective societies.

Nordic resilience, a processual understanding

The country comparison, combined with the existing literature on Nordic resilience, allows for the development of an approach that accommodates emerging resilience perceptions and understandings. The country cases were best unpacked according to the approach adapted from Mikkola et al. (2018, p. 11), which handles resilience as a *three-tier process* comprised of:

1. *ability to repel threats* emerging from outside the political community,
2. *a tendency of the political community to endure crises* and
3. *ability of the political community to utilise threats to learn and reform* its functions

The first phase concerns *resistance* as the ability to resist and deter threats, thus preventing crises from occurring or escalating. The second resilience phase concerns the ability to endure and remain operational during a crisis. Thirdly, the next phase concerns rebuilding better after a crisis, the focus being on the ability to learn from the crisis and transform.

Distinguishing between the phases is particularly relevant to policymaking and building *strategies* that aim to identify the responsible actors. This type of *processual understanding of resilience* offers an approach to empirically explore the *degree* of resilience. The perks of using the processual approach have been explained by Bourbeau (2018, p. 51) in the following manner:

> *The processual approach to resilience differs crucially from the critical theoretic approach in emphasising the importance of context in understanding the resilient actions of a community or governing body. Factors such as communal history, collective memory and social convention significantly affect the behaviour of socio-political agents during times of crisis and cannot be disregarded by a well-grounded theory.*

Understood as a process, resilience strategies may challenge some of the realist, traditional and state-centric approaches to security that focus on defense, or in other words, the safeguarding of territorial integrity in the face of a threat posed by other states or 'organised collective entities' (Hyvönen and Juntunen, 2020, p. 159). This resilience logic endorses the all-hazards approach, keeping the nature of threats open instead of applying the logics defense, e.g., protection and prevention (Wigell et

al., 2022; Hyvönen and Juntunen, 2020, p. 159). However, as discussed previously, this openness regarding threats represents the core weaknesses of the resilience approach as it might imply a lack of targeted policies or even that preparedness is lacking due to the 'naturalisation' of catastrophes and their treatment as 'inevitable' (Wagner and Anholt, 2016, p. 419).

Approaching resilience as a *continuum and process* allows us to explore how resilience may be actualised over time and in three overlapping phases (see figure 2 below) that are referred to here as: *resistance, endurance,* and *transformation* (Hyvönen and Juntunen 2020, p. 159; Juntunen and Hyvönen, 2014; Mikkola et al. 2018, p. 94). While acknowledging that there may be no clear theoretical consensus regarding resilience as resistance and that resilience can be seen as an alternative to resistance, even in 'conflicting terms' (Pankakoski, 2023), the evidence presented in the next section suggests that the Nordic understanding of resilience does includes resistance.

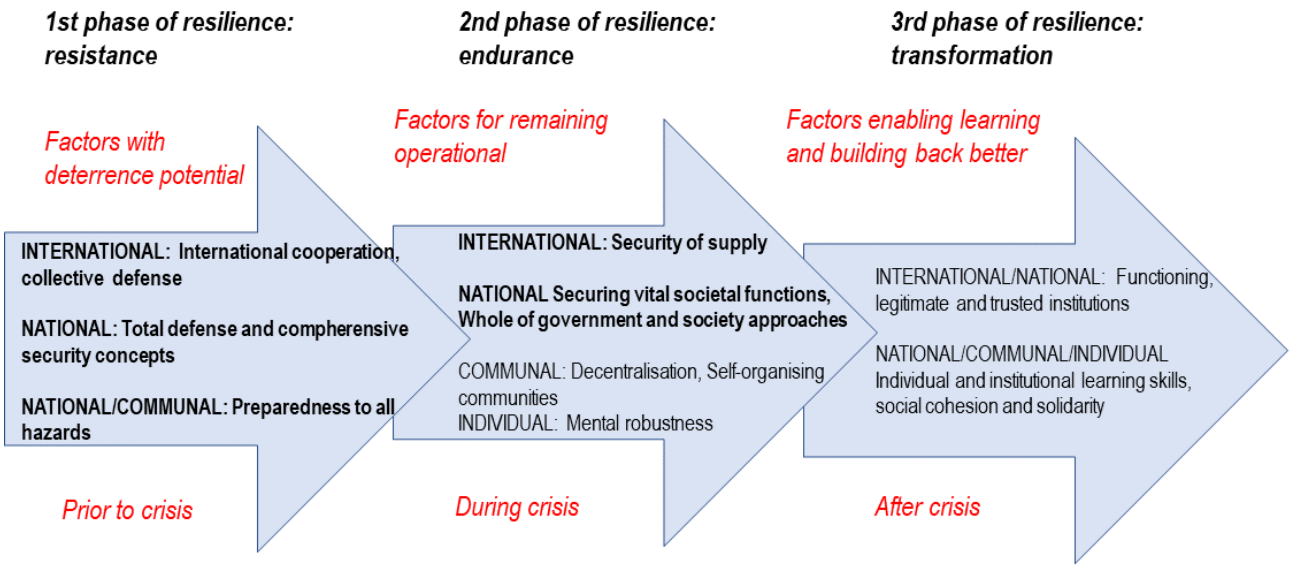

Figure 2. Nordic resilience as process (adapted from Mikkola et al, 2018, p. 94; Hyvönen et al, 2019, p. 20; utilising also Berling and Petersen, 2020, and the interview material). The themes that are particularly well-highlighted in the empirical data compared to previous studies are bolded.

Resilience as resistance

The interviews highlighted the notion that resistance in the Nordics is built at the international level. A common characteristic of the Nordics is the tendency to build national resistance, even deterrence, through international alliances and partnerships – shown recently by Finland's acceptance into the NATO alliance and Sweden's application for membership. The Nordics are all small, enjoy open economies and democratic societies that seek to strengthen their security capabilities through active international cooperation.

In terms of policy, the most recent example can be found from Denmark, which states in its foreign and security policy strategy of 2023 that: 'Denmark must achieve increased resilience through closer European cooperation' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2023, p. 25). Further, the document (p. 25) explains how resilience can be achieved through, inter alia, reduction of dependencies and vulnerabilities, diversifying supplies, export controls, foreign investment screening as well as through increased awareness of research and innovation collaborations. Hence, while international

cooperation is a necessity for building up the resistance of the small, open and import-dependent Nordic countries, in trade and economics, this cooperation might also be considered a downside as it entails risks and vulnerabilities.

Following the two crises noted in this article (pandemic and Russian invasion of Ukraine), a new understanding of the strategically shared Nordic space has emerged that stresses the importance of international cooperation. The interviews, however, revealed differences in the extent to which the responses should be developed. While islanders (Åland, Faroe, Iceland) preferred the Nordic arrangements, the Danish prioritised the EU, for example. For their part, Swedes were mostly focused on developing their own national responses.

Indeed, one of the perceived mutual challenges seems to be that there is no single institution or central manager for joint regional preparedness. But as one interviewee mentions, although each Nordic country is small, they need to be part of a bigger club[4]. The strongest candidates who could become the central manager for joint preparedness in the region were said to be the EU, Nato and the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM). Although the NCM is the only body to enjoy universal Nordic membership, it was nevertheless decried as a largely political body lacking sufficient operational capabilities.

The interviewees nevertheless acknowledged that the NCM seems to be moving towards crisis preparedness and societal resilience, despite the assumption that it lacks capacities and resources for meaningful engagement. Some interviewees from Åland and the Faroe Islands noted that the NCM does not offer them sufficient avenues for practical cooperation as it operates mainly on a high political level[5]. Importantly, the exclusion of the island communities implies that the NCM is not promoting or exchanging ideas on bottom-up resilience approaches enough.

Secondly, at the core of resilience as resistance in the Nordics is the concept of *total defense.* Total defense combines both military and civilian aspects of defense planning and preparation for inter-state conflict as well as the *whole of society approach*. Wither (2020, p. 61) concluded that national resilience and territorial defense are the essential elements of the frameworks of the total defense policies adopted by Finland, Sweden, and Norway as they 'combine the armed forces and civil society in a comprehensive whole of society approach to security intended to deter an attack by making a target state a very challenging prospect for an aggressor'. Denmark, in turn, stopped applying the system of total defense after the Cold War period in a move away from territorial defense (Jakobsen and Rynning, 2019, p. 893), while Iceland does not have a total defense concept in the strict sense as it has no armed forces.

The Nordics differ from each other when it comes to terminology. Instead of total defense, the Finns refer to comprehensive security whereas in Norway, the term 'total defense' is often used as a synonym of *comprehensive security*. The Danes, in turn, equate comprehensive security with *societal cohesion* (see also Berling and Petersen, 2020, endnote 7). Despite this mix of terms (total defense, comprehensive security, social cohesion, lack of armed forces), the holistic idea is largely the same: the resistance to threats and hazards is not only horizontal but also exists as bottom-up and top-down societal processes.

Thirdly, the Nordic resistance frame is distinctively an *all-hazards approach* targeting 'the full spectrum of threats in preparedness planning regardless of their source, causality or likelihood'

4. Interviewee 48.
5. Interviews 40, 50, 61, 62.

(Wigell et al., 2022, p. 13). The all-hazards approach in each country and region has been shaped by different socio-ecological conditions and experiences, including how security management is focused and organised.

For instance, Icelandic crisis preparedness has its roots in sea rescue which is also the key orientation of Faroese preparedness thinking. In contrast, Finland's orientation has been shaped by the Second World War experience of inter-state war(s) with the Soviet Union. According to the interviews, the all-hazards model does not imply that no one is responsible. In contrast, the overall responsibility for security preparedness is very much in the hands of authorities.

Regarding the types of threats, the interviews suggest that overall, the two recent crises (COVID-19 and Russia's war on Ukraine) are narrowing down the historical, cultural, and geographic differences between threat perceptions across the Nordics. For instance, COVID-19 revealed that the small Nordic states are vulnerable to disruptions in the global supply chain, such as medical supplies. Russia's war has brought back geopolitics and revived some of the Cold-War mindsets in the Nordics, resulting in reinvigorated interest towards learning from the Finnish psychological and territorial defense.

Indeed, the Finnish comprehensive security model was treated as the most advanced because 'it covers it all'[6]. The ongoing war close to the Nordics also begs the question: have we witnessed a return to traditional security thinking? The interviews alluded to the sense that this is not the case, as references were equally made to the so-called new threats such as climate change, pandemics, and cyberattacks as sources of potential crises to which the war added a new layer of complexity. In other words, the all-hazards approach did not become irrelevant at the outset of a traditional war.

Resilience as endurance

Perhaps the most remarkable factor perceived to strengthen endurance during a crisis is the *whole of government approach*, operating on a national level. The approach, shared by all Nordic states, refers to a governance system in which ministers, governmental agencies, and the like work together horizontally (Wigell et al., 2022, pp. 64-72). The Nordic governing structures are a combination of central government and sectoral responsibility depending on the scale and nature of a given crisis.

Generally speaking, Nordic governance systems aim to maintain the same responsibilities in times of normalcy as well as in times of crisis. While this idea of a *competent authority* is clear on paper, the Swedish and Norwegian respondents in particular considered that, in practice, the problem might actualise in the context of so-called grey zone threats that could fall between administrative lines. Thus, such a situation might lead to confusion over who within the government structures takes the lead.

Despite the similarities across Nordics, the Swedish model is somewhat distinct: the agencies have relatively large room for maneuver within their respective domains, and ministerial governance is forbidden (Hägglund, 2020). The difference between Sweden and its Nordic neighbors in this respect became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, as has been discussed (see e.g. Rainio-Niemi, 2020). The cost of this approach is its lack of agility.

If Sweden is then at one end of the Nordic agility spectrum, Denmark is at the other. In the Danish context, several examples of institutional agility were brought up. For instance, interviewees described how the roles and functions of the national crisis management body (National Operative Staf) were

6. Interviewee 1a.

shifted during the COVID-19 pandemic and how private companies changed their operations[7].

Secondly, on endurance, the Nordics share a *whole of society approach* aimed at responding to threats in a comprehensive manner on national and communal levels (Wigell et al., 2022, p. 60). This approach can be characterised as the key cornerstone of Nordic resilience. Not only does it refer to shared responsibilities with civil society organisations, such as Red Cross societies, but also to the inclusion of private sector entities in security management. Across the Nordics, private corporations are responsible for securing the vital functions of societies, often in conjunction with public entities[8].

In particular, the small island communities that are prone to natural hazards perhaps endorse the whole-of-society approach most vigorously because assistance from outside the community might not be immediately available. This is particularly the case in the geographically vast and sparsely populated Greenland. Given the limited amount of personnel in remote regions, preparedness seems to be everyone's business while only a handful of individuals are formally responsible.

The third common endurance factor is the degree of *decentralisation* that is applicable to the sub-national level. At the heart of decentralised governance is the often constitutionally bound idea of proximity, i.e., decision-making should be as close to people as possible. Decentralising security management is often a necessity, particularly in areas prone to natural disasters such as Norway and Iceland where self-organising local communities are in charge of early responses. However, in the Nordic mindset, this *modus operandi* is not meant to circumvent security responsibilities but is rather a necessity driven by logistical factors.

There are communities that might need to withstand on their own for some time, though they are not expected to survive without eventual central-government assistance. The cooperation between central authorities and local communities is, according to the interviews, mainly straightforward and unproblematic. Tensions were, however, observed between islands (Åland, Faroe) and the capitals (Helsinki, Copenhagen) when the discussion turned to having the islanders' voices heard on the topic of resilience policies at the national level[9]. Indeed, the decentralisation of security management has been a topic of concern with respect to the Nordics' sparsely populated and self-governing regions, which often have their own particular security management arrangements, such as Greenland which is neither part of the EU nor NATO[10].

The island communities represent an interesting case of Nordic resilience and provide a potentially easily approachable set of communities whose resilience could be explored more in detail. The interviewees from Åland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland highlighted that while their institutional capacity to respond to crises may be limited due to the population size and geographical distance to capitals, the small communities have nonetheless developed their own individual and less formal survival strategies. In contrast to some of the national crisis preparedness documents, which list possible threats and offer detailed descriptions of competent authorities, the small communities' strategies involve networks of skilled people who have assumed the responsibility to act in emergencies.

7. Interviews 3a, 27, 66
8. E.g. interview 37.
9. Interviews 40, 52, 60, 61, 71.
10. See discussion, e.g., Gray, A. (2023) *NATO's Northern Flank Has Too Many Weak Spots.* Foreign Policy. August 7th 2023.

The fourth observation relating to endurance is that across the Nordics, the importance of the *security of supply* (SoS) in resilience work is well recognised[11]. This is largely due to the pioneering work of Finland whereby strong readiness prevails over societies needing SoS to endure a crisis. SoS plays a crucial role in ensuring the business continuity in a society during a crisis, yet it is fundamentally global due to economic globalisation and interdependencies in supplies. This does not mean that SoS issues are equally shared, and in fact, SoS is more of an issue for some of Nordic regions than others.

Without necessarily conceptualising the phenomenon, SoS appears to be, in practice, a particular dilemma for the small Nordic island regions who are vulnerable to disruptions in sea traffic, a situation that is further complicated by limited storage facilities (Wigell et al., 2022, pp. 37-38, 80). While Finland also shares this particular island mentality, its SoS work is based on the possibility of the Baltic Sea being closed off due to war or a similar disturbance – Finland relies heavily on functioning connections in the Baltic Sea. In contrast, for the internationally well-connected Denmark, SoS has historically appeared less relevant[12].

Resilience as transformation

The interviews confirmed an earlier assessment made by Aaltola and Juntunen (2018, p. 36), namely that the responsibility for *resilience production in the Nordic societies is clearly with the state entities.* Albeit to a markedly different degree, the interviewees also attached heightened importance to inter-state institutions such as the EU, NATO, and Nordic formats. The centrality of state authority was generally not questioned in the interviews[13], which thus distinguishes Nordic resilience from some the Anglo-American approaches. It seems there is little risk of the responsibility for security shifting to individuals and communities[14]. In fact, the elite interviews might suggest the opposite: it could even be argued that *Nordic understanding of resilience pays too little attention to the micro level's agency for resilience*.

The marginalisation of the micro level opens the door for critically theorising Nordic resilience as the model does not seem to genuinely challenge the traditional security paradigm and nor does it embrace bottom-up approaches. For instance, remote communities were referred to[15] as 'fragile', lacking in capacity to respond to crises, and in need of outside help. Moreover, state-centrality becomes an issue in analysing resilience as transformation as it leads our attention to institutional change rather than organically blossoming self-growth and the ability to bounce forward[16].

The Nordics are often referred to as *trust societies* due to their relatively high trust in government, civil service, and security agencies. On top of this vertical and institutional trust, what matters for Nordic resilience is the horizontal, social trust that plays a key role in building resilience both at the individual and community levels, according to Hyvönen et al. (2019, p. 60). Trust is definitely at the

11. SoS, in short, refers to the availability of a product, service or function such as digital networks, energy, financial infrastructure, food, pharmaceuticals, and transport (Aula et al., 2020).
12. It was described in interview 33 that the security of supply is not a concern in the public sphere and that, in turn, the population in Denmark are used to having a high level of supply.
13. Only one clear deviation from the pattern in Norwegian context: the enormous faith in governments' ability to take care of the population was considered as a problem (interview 46).
14. The distinction might be also a bit artificial and more theoretically than empirically driven.
15. Interview 37
16. Results may be different if the focus is shifted from resilience in security to the resilience of democracies, as was done by Poyet et al., 2023.

heart of Nordic identities and self-understandings that manifest themselves politically. For instance, the Nordic Council's Strategy on Societal Security argues that trust in the authorities is a 'Nordic Gold' that needs to be protected (Nordic Council, 2019, p. 4).

The Nordics' relatively well-funded social services and social security networks aim to protect the most vulnerable groups of the population, and due to the resulting relative absence of economic disparities, social cohesion and solidarity is expected to further contribute to (national) resilience. In terms of recovering from crises, 'it is essential to encourage equality and equal opportunity' (Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 2021).

The distinctively Nordic *welfare state* is closely intertwined with the Nordic *warfare state* and their mutual (good) performance further builds societal trust (Larsson and Rhinard, 2020a, p. 7). The trust factor comes across well in the interviews and is not limited to national crisis management bodies but rather expanded to regional and more informal settings.[17] In addition to trust, Hyvönen and Juntunen (2020) have highlighted the case of Finland in which the top-down model requires bottom-up legitimacy.

Previous resilience literature suggests that the Nordics benefit from their well-functioning institutions, even after disruptions. The notion is that self-reflexive institutions, as well as well-educated individuals, are able to learn from disruptions and use their respective experiences in self-transformation. However, in the interviews, there was only one clear reference that drew a connection between the welfare state model and resilience in the security domain[18].

Resilience as recovery from crises mixes and overlaps with resilience as resistance. In the Nordics, both resistance and this 'bouncing back better' are practiced at the international level. The logic for this approach, which requires active foreign policy, is clear according to the interviews and previous literature: the Nordics are small, open economies and democracies that rely on free trade and strong international institutions to provide the needed stability and predictability in the global arena.

While there were also some nationalistic tones (particularly for Sweden), the interviewees highlighted the importance of strengthening resilience though international connections. One interviewee mentioned that Nordic cooperation should not be maintained only at the PR-level[19]. The respective NATO accessions by Finland and Sweden was seen by many to broaden not only institutional cooperation but also practical work on resilience. One downside might be that civil servants' focus on international cooperation (macro) could distract them from identifying resilient practices at the micro level.

Conclusion

This study identified common denominators and factors that are believed to produce resilience across the Nordic countries, regions, and communities. Mapping and placing these resilience

17. Trust, or the lack of thereof, of neighbors and Nordic institutions was discussed throughout the interviews but not systematically. Indeed, the relationship between trust and resilience is intriguing. A previous study on Nordic travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic by Creutz et al. (2021, p. 82) illustrates that in the border areas of Öresund, Svinesund and Tornedalen, trust became one of the major negative issues and the lack of trust was not limited to national decision-making machinery. Particularly traumatic for individuals and communities in cross-border regions were the visible borders that were raised for the first time in the more than 70 years of Nordic free movement. The 'imposition of hard borders' was perceived as a 'betrayal of the Nordic and European project' as coined by the authors (p. 83).
18. Interview 24.
19. Interview 49.

factors on a continuum provide a structured model for future studies of the Nordics as well as those seeking to challenge the Nordic model. These elements help to pose future research questions more concretely: resilience to what, when, and by whom? While this study did not attempt to evaluate whether resilience to certain dangers exists, it compared the Nordic countries and regions and built a catalogue of perceived resilience elements specific to the Nordics. Similarities in resilience perceptions are a potential strength, offering a basis to start imagining a joint resilience vision, strategy, or policy. Yet some critical theorists would warn against adopting a strategy of resilience as it is the 'polar opposite' of security and a 'social insecurity by state design' (Reid, 2022).

The resulting, empirically-driven understanding is hardly a universal tool. Despite the shortfalls and limitations of the scope of the study, it identified key resilience factors. Importantly, those factors mostly appear on national and international levels, emphasising state responsibility and centrality in resilience production. The resulting Nordic resilience understanding underestimates micro-level responsibility for resilience while overstressing state institutions as central managers of resilience.

This leads to what could be called a Nordic resilience paradox: resilience does not come with problems of responsibility and governability due to the absence of conflict between micro and macro level resilience-building. In fact, the two levels (micro and macro) are perceived to complement each other. With some exceptions, particularly in Danish and Icelandic contexts, the focus on institutions and the macro level alludes to certain lack of attention to agility, innovation, and organic transformation, implying that the strengths of a resilience approach are not well recognised.

In this regard, it seems that the theory of resilience has preceded the practice in the Nordics: the complexities of the security environment and importance of local empowerment are recognised but there is not necessarily a full paradigm shift. Moreover, the imagination of public officials seems to be limited to the ability of societies to bounce back (first generation resilience) at best, not geared towards transformational bouncing forward skills (second and third generation resilience), with the possible exception of Denmark.

Regarding the pre-existing resilience frames against which the empirical data was analysed, the typologies were useful for understanding the general features of Nordic resilience but not optimal for discovering the differences between the countries and regions. While testing the frames, it became apparent that civil servants across the region shared similar perceptions when it comes to the management of crisis preparedness and response.

As the differences appeared mostly on resilience scales, a processual and scale-sensitive approach was selected and applied. Based on this study, it could be hypothesised that the MMR-frame is more useful for discourse analysis of crises that divide societies rather than unite them, while the RRO-approach offers a frame for assessing (documented) policies. Hence, to some extent, the resilience perceptions are dependent on context and crisis.

Nordic interviewees found resilience in security management reasonably governable and they saw little risk of security becoming detached from the decisions of leaders. Indeed, state-centrism links resilience to territoriality and defense fairly easily, blurring the lines between resilience and governance research. Future resilience research designs in the Nordic context should more vigorously move away from treating resilience as a nation-state affair and look at the security management practices of sub-national communities. These types of studies could reveal the full potential of resilience approach in the Nordics.

This work was supported by the Strategic Research Council at the Academy of Finland (grant number 345950), the Foundation for Foreign Policy Research and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

References

Aaltola, M., and Juntunen, T. (2018) *Nordic model meets resilience–Finnish strategy for societal security*. Societal Security in the Baltic Sea Region. Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 26-42.

Aula, I., Amundsen, R., Buvarp, P., Harrami, O., Lindgren, J., Sahlén, V., and Wedebrand, C. (2020) *Critical Nordic Flows: collaboration between Finland, Norway and Sweden on security of supply and critical infrastructure protection.* National Emergency Supply Agency.

Berling Villumsen, T. and Petersen Lund, K. (2020) 'Designing resilience for security in the Nordic region: Implications for strategy' in Larsson, S. and Rhinard, M. (ed.) *Nordic societal security: Convergence and divergence*. London: Routledge, pp. 131-153.

Bourbeau, P. (2013) *Resiliencism: premises and promises in securitisation research*. Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses, 1(2), pp. 3–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2013.765738

Bourbeau, P. (2018) *On Resilience: Genealogy, Logics, and World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chandler, D. (2014) *Resilience and the autotelic subject: toward a critique of the societalization of security*. International Political Sociology, 7(2), pp. 210–226. https://doi.org/10.1111/ips.12018

Chandler, D. and Coaffee, J. (2017) 'Introduction: Contested paradigms of international resilience' in Chandler, D. and Coaffee, J. (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of International Resilience*. London: Routledge.

Creutz, K., Berglund S., Karacan, T. B., Giacometti, A., Haugevik, K., Nyberg Sørensen, N., Wøien Meijer, M. and Lares, A. (2021) *Nordic cooperation amid pandemic travel restrictions*. FIIA Report 68.

Evans, B. and Reid, J. (2017) 'Dangerously Exposed: The life and death of the resilient subject' in Chandler, D. and Coaffee, J. (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of International Resilience*. London: Routledge, pp. 331-341.

Finnish Academy of Science and Letters (2021) *Bending, but not breaking – From the coronavirus pandemic to strengthening Finland's crisis resilience*. Available at www.acadsci.fi/statement2021.pdf

Giacometti, A. and Teräs, J. (2019) *Regional economic and social resilience: An exploratory in-depth study in the Nordic countries*. Nordregio.

Gylfason, T., Holmström, B., Korkman, S., Söderström, H. T., and Vihriälä, V. (2010) *Nordics in global crisis*. *Vulnerability and resilience.* ETLA B.

Henriksen, H.J., Roberts, M.J., van der Keur, P., Harjanne, A., Egilson, D. and Alfonso, L. (2018) Participatory early warning and monitoring systems: A Nordic framework for web-based flood risk management. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 31, pp. 1295-1306. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijdrr.2018.01.038.

Hyvönen, A-E. and Juntunen, T. (2020) 'From 'Spiritual Defence' to Robust Resilience in the Finnish Comprehensive Security Model' in *Nordic Societal Security: Convergence and Divergence.* Routledge New Security Studies, London, pp. 154-178. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003045533-11

Hyvönen, A.-E., Juntunen, T., Mikkola, H., Käpylä, J., Gustafsberg, H., Nyman, M., Rättilä, T., Virta, S. and Liljeroos, J. (2019) *Kokonaisresilienssi ja turvallisuus: tasot, prosessit ja arviointi.* Valtioneuvoston

selvitys- ja tutkimustoiminnan julkaisusarja 17/2019.

Hyvönen, A-E. and Juntunen, T. (2018) *Resilienssi avaimena laaja-alaiseen kokonaisturvallisuuteen: haasteita ja mahdollisuuksia*. Valtioneuvoston selvitys- ja tutkimustoiminta, Policy Brief 25/2018. Helsinki: Valtioneuvoston Kanslia.

Hägglund, M. (2020) *Rebuilding Sweden's crisis preparedness: Lack of clarity impedes implementation.* FIIA Briefing Paper 283.

Jakobsen, P. V. and Rynning, S. (2019) 'Denmark: happy to fight, will travel', *International affairs*, 95(4), pp. 877-895. https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2021.1932476

Juntunen, T. and Hyvönen, A-E. (2014) 'Resilience, Security and the Politics of Processes', *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses*, 2(3), pp. 195–209. https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2014.948323

Larsson, S. and Rhinard, M. (2020a) 'Comparing and conceptualising Nordic societal security' in Larsson, S. and Rhinard, M. (ed.) *Nordic societal security: Convergence and divergence*. London: Routledge, pp. 3-21.

Larsson, S. and Rhinard, M. (2020b) 'Conclusion: Convergence and divergence in Nordic societal securities' in Larsson, S. and Rhinard, M. (ed.) *Nordic societal security: Convergence and divergence*. London: Routledge, pp.225-234. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003045533.

Mikkola, H., Aaltola, M., Wigell, M., Juntunen, T., Vihma, A. (2018) *Hybridivaikuttaminen ja demokratian resilienssi: Ulkoisen häirinnän mahdollisuudet ja torjuntakyky liberaaleissa demokratioissa*. FIIA Report 55.

Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2021) *Nordic Prime Ministers' joint statement on deepening cooperation in the field of security of supply and preparedness* https://um.fi/current-affairs/-/asset_publisher/gc654PySnjTX/content/nordic-prime-ministers-joint-statement-on-deepening-cooperation-in-the-field-of-security-of-supply-and-preparedness (accessed 17.6.2023)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (2023) *Foreign and Security Policy Strategy*. Available at https://um.dk/en/foreign-policy/foreign-and-security-policy-2023 (accessed 23.10.2023)

Nordic Council (2019) *Nordic Council strategy on societal security*. Available at http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1362729&dswid=4992 (accessed 23.10.2023)

Poyet, C., Niemikari, R. and Raunio, T. (2023) 'What makes democratic institutions resilient to crises? Applying a novel analytical framework to the case of Finland', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2023.2230456

Pankakoski, T. (2023) *Concepts We Recover by: Metaphorical Concepts in Post-Covid-19 Transition to Normalcy*. Paper presented at Politicisations of Pandemic Recovery: Knowledge, Justifications and Democratic Agency, University of Helsinki, June 15-16, 2023.

Pursiainen, C. (2018) 'Critical infrastructure resilience: A Nordic model in the making?', *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 27, pp. 632–641. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2017.08.006

Rainio-Niemi, J. (2020) 'Koronakriisi ja valtio: Suomen ja Ruotsin mallien vertailua', *Kosmopolis*, 50(2), pp. 162-173.

Rapeli, M., Cuadra, C., Dahlberg, R., Eydal, G.B., Hvinden, B., Omarsdottir, I.L., and Salonen, T. (2018) 'Local social services in disaster management: Is there a Nordic model?', *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction,* 27, pp. 618-624. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijdrr.2017.07.018

Reid, J. (2022) *'Resilient Ukraine' and the Future of War in Europe.* E-international relations https://www.e-ir.info/2022/03/17/opinion-resilient-ukraine-and-the-future-of-war-in-europe/ (accessed 30.6.2023)

Spruds, A. and Vignuzova, E. (2018) 'Introduction', in Aaltola, M., Kuznetsov, B., Sprūds, A. and Vizgunova, E. (ed.) *Societal Security in the Baltic Sea Region*. Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs

Taylor, S., Bogdan, S. and DeVault, M. (2015*) Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource* (4th edition). Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley.

Wagner, W. and Anholt, R. (2016) 'Resilience as the EU Global Strategy's new leitmotif: pragmatic, problematic or promising?' *Contemporary Security Policy*, 37(3), pp. 414-430, https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2016.1228034

Walklate, S., McGarry, R. and Mythen, G. (2014) 'Searching for Resilience: A Conceptual Excavation', *Armed Forces & Society*, 40(3), pp. 408-427. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X12465419

Van Well, L., van der Keur, P., Harjanne, A., Pagneux, E., Perrels, A. and Henriksen, H.J. (2018) 'Resilience to natural hazards: An analysis of territorial governance in the Nordic countries', International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, 31, pp. 1283-1294. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijdrr.2018.01.005

Wigell, M., Hägglund, M, Fjäder, C. Hakala, E. Ketola, J. and Mikkola, H. (2022) *Nordic Resilience: Strengthening Cooperation on Security of Supply and Crisis Preparedness*. FIIA Report 70.

Wither, J. K. (2020) 'Back to the future? Nordic total defence concepts', *Defence studies*, 20(1), pp. 61-81. DOI: 10.1080/14702436.2020.1718498

Discussion Article

Finnish orientation(s) towards Europe and the West

Henri Vogt, Professor of International Politics, University of Turku

Abstract

Finland's accession to NATO in April 2023 has been celebrated as the final confirmation of the country's western orientation, also in identity-political terms. By reviewing the Finnish approaches towards European integratory processes since the early 1990s, including the field of security, the article argues that rather than as an effort to develop a new kind of westernised identity, one should perceive this orientation as an affirmation of the traditional Finnish and Nordic, pragmatic and protestant values.

Keywords

Finnish identity, EU membership, NATO membership, Nordic pragmatism

Introduction

On April 4, 2023, Finland relinquished its long-standing neutrality and became full member of the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO). For many, this decision represents the ultimate confirmation of the country's orientation towards, or alignment with, the 'West'. 'It is now fulfilled', has been a recurring contention over the past few months in Finnish public debates.[1]

This line of argumentation, however, poses an inherent risk for misinterpretation. It may begin to express a national need of sorts to develop into something 'more western', a unilinear identity-political transition towards an ideal type, however that may be defined. This article[2] – a sweeping overview rather than a detailed empirical analysis – seeks to argue that this is *not* how we should understand Finland's orientation towards the western integratory processes since the end of the Cold War. Rather than as a 'move towards something', we should perceive this orientation as an accomplishment determined by the ideals of active, hard-working protestant Nordicness – the fulfilment of an already extant traditional national identity, as it were.

To convince the reader of this argument, I will review Finland's approaches and attitudes towards European institutional cooperation over the past three decades. I begin with the possible explanations for Finland's decision to join the European Union, and then discuss some features of the country's EU policies and attitudes since 1995 – with the concomitant identity-political changes. In the final section, I will consider a few points related to the first steps of the country's NATO path. Continuity thus prevails: new identity layers develop and are mixed with old ones, while long-term institutional arrangements make this possible.

Joining the European Union

For years, as I have been giving introductory lectures on International Relations to the Department's new students, I have tried to make sense of the basic theoretical toolkit of IR by referencing Finland's decision to join the European Union in the mid-1990s – before the current student generation was in fact even born. Each of the main components of this toolkit, the worldviews of 'realism', 'liberalism', and 'constructivism', seems to point to a different explanation for the willingness of the Finns to vote in favour of EU membership in the October 1994 referendum and thus relinquish a significant proportion of their national sovereignty, ultimately secured through the war sacrifices of 1939–45. The result of the referendum was unambiguous: 56.9 percent of voters cast their ballots 'yes', with a turnout of 74 percent. Finland joined the European Union the following year, together with Sweden and Austria.

The **realist** explainer would presumably contend that the primary reason for Finland's decision to join the EU was *security*. People sharing this perspective believed that membership would act as a security shield against the great power Russia with which the country shared a complicated history – and a border of well over 1000km.

In the country's public discussions, this storyline has arguably been and still is the dominant one, probably because security concerns indeed provided a central impetus for Finland's *foreign policy leadership* to embark upon the Union path (e.g. Paavonen, 2015, p. 15). Russia's weakness after the

1. E.g. former European Commissioner and presidential candidate Olli Rehn in Europe Forum, Turku, 30/8/2023.
2. The bulk of this essay was originally a lecture entitled 'Finnish Narratives on Europe and the European Union' that I gave at the University of Cologne in May 2019, as part of the all-European lecture series on 'Narratives of Europe, Narratives for Europe'.

collapse of the Soviet Union offered a window of opportunity for making this decision while, at the same time, an imperialist form of discourse seemed to re-emerge in Finland's neighbour, particularly apparent in the nationalist extremist rhetoric of Vladimir Zhirinovsky and his supporters. Zhirinovsky openly suggested that Finland ought to be re-annexed to Mother Russia, and his Liberal Democratic Party of Russia even won the 1993 parliamentary elections with 23 percent of the votes (e.g. Bäck, 2017, p. 33).

It is noteworthy, however, that NATO membership never attained any significant support among the wider Finnish public during those early post-Cold War years (and its popularity remained relatively low, with only around 20 percent openly in favour, that is, until Russia launched the war in Ukraine in February 2022; Vogt, 2022); the policy of international neutrality had, after all, served the country well since its adoption in the aftermath of the Second World War. In other words, had military security been *the* overriding concern, one would have expected NATO to have already represented a more appealing alternative in the minds of the Finns.

The second reason for Finland's positive EU decision points to a **liberal** framework for understanding the world. From this perspective, the Finns were excited about the possibility that the European markets would open for them and for their businesses in a novel way. Given that the country had recently survived a major economic recession, possibly deeper than any Western country had experienced since the 1940s, there is, indeed, a substantial amount of credibility to this thesis. The country's economy was (and is) heavily export-oriented, and the recession had shown how vulnerable a small country's economy can be vis-à-vis the globalised economy. Belief in international cooperative institutions was also high, not least because of Finland's greatest Cold-War diplomatic achievement, the Helsinki process and the resulting OSCE, which had paved the way for the end of communism in the continent. This surely also reflected a sense of pragmatism: prior to the referendum, EU supporters repeated time and again that it is important to sit at the tables at which decisions were being made.

The **constructivist** frame of explanation focusses on the ways in which words, deeds and interaction with others constantly produce various types of identities. A constructivist would thus argue that the Finns wanted to become members of the (West) European family of countries in order to demonstrate their true Europeanness, to convince themselves and others that their identity was European and Western, not Eastern. This appeared particularly pertinent given that in the Western media, Finland had often found itself in the eastern part of the continent and as a subordinate of the Soviet Union; hence the pejorative term *Finnlandisierung* (Finlandization in English). Sami Moisio (2008, p. 82) has even drawn a historical parallel between the 1939–40 Winter War, that is, the country's heroic battle against the Soviet Union during the first months of the Second World War and its later decision to apply for EU membership. Both episodes demonstrated to the world that Finland wanted to belong to the western hemisphere – and to be *recognised* in these terms.

It is by no means easy to deduce which of these three principal theoretical explanations is in the end the most convincing or crucial one, even though, as indicated earlier, the security factor has definitely dominated public debates. The obvious conclusion is that Finnish EU support was a combination of all these three factors – in addition to a general enthusiasm towards the winds of change after the decades of the Cold War, which in many respects was a highly successful time in Finnish history,

making the construction of a modern social-democratic welfare state possible.[3] However, what is important from the present article's perspective is that identity-political concerns did play a central role and, as we will see below, their impact may have been even more central when the country's policies in the EU's institutional framework began to take shape.

The centrality of these three explanations also entails the contention that the original raison d'être of the European Union, integration as *a peace process,* hardly proliferated in the Finnish debates of the mid 1990s – in contrast to the war-shadowed political conditions since February 2022 with regular references to the EU's peace-related origins. The EU has *not* represented an *existential* or foundational institution for the Finns, as it possibly has in many western European countries in which the abolition of intra-European war has traditionally been *the* primary justification of the Union. For Finland, the choice to 'join' Europe was pragmatic and instrumental, even in identity-political terms (cf. Raunio and Saari, 2017).

Finland in the EU: the first 13 years

With Finland's accession, the European Union appeared to have welcomed a model pupil to its ranks, a hard-working protestant one – or this was at least how the domestic Finnish debate depicted it. *The country's elites* wholeheartedly and virtually unanimously embraced their new status within the European family and EU critical voices by and large disappeared from public debate. Johanna Vuorelma (2017), in her illuminative text on Finnish EU attitudes, even names this original approach to the Union as the '*romantic narrative*'.

In this context, the initial guiding idea behind Finland's Union politics was to carry the country into all *cores* of the Brussels polity, to be able to sit at the tables where the decisions were truly being made. This also indicated proactivity in terms of policy formulations during those early years of Union membership; the *Northern Dimension* initiative of 1998, a comprehensive policy framework for advancing cooperation with Russia and the Baltic States, is the most famous example of this attitude (e.g. Ojanen, 2001). Liberal internationalist and institutionalist ideals thus seemed to prevail, coupled with some sort of aspirational constructivist identity politics with which the Finns sought to demonstrate their European credentials (Clunan, 2009). Realistic security concerns only appeared on the policy agenda to a very limited degree.[4]

There was also, from the beginning, the idea that with the accession of Finland (along with Sweden), the EU would in fact become an inherently *better* polity. It would assume at least some of the Nordic virtues: protestant work ethics, a developed sense of equality, openness, transparency, accountability – more democracy, if you wish. President Martti Ahtisaari (1994–2000), a future Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, expressed this view elegantly in a speech he gave in Denmark in September 1994, only a

3. All these three factors are also geography-related. (Moisio, 2008). 'Security' ultimately reflects the *geopolitical* predicament of the country; new markets and open borders are particularly important for this seemingly *peripheral* corner of Europe; and identity is also geographically defined, Russia representing the significant, traditional 'Other' for the Finns. Indeed, the decision to join the EU possibly reflects the old geographical foreign policy wisdom that has prevailed in the country – 'we first and foremost need to acknowledge the reality of our geopolitical position'. This seemingly simple point has been strongly present in the post-war tradition of Finnish foreign-policy making.

4. It is, however, noteworthy that these pro-integration attitudes were not necessarily shared by the wider public. During the first decade of Finnish membership, the EU's popularity was not particularly high; the country rather belonged to the EU-sceptical camp (Vallaste, 2013). The 'traditionalists', and to a lesser extent those who critically regarded the Union as *the* stronghold of neoliberalism, still enjoyed significant support among the population. According to Eurobarometers, during the first decade of EU membership, Finnish attitudes remained more sceptical than the EU average. However, after 2010 Finnish EU views eventually came very close to those of a typical EU citizen. (Bäck, 2017, p. 38).

few weeks before the EU referendum:

> *'We Finns are […] in rather basic agreement that the Nordic social model, based on equality, social accountability and open democracy, will on the whole remain a good model for the future, too, despite all the problems. It is a model that also allows us to play a part in broader integration of our continent. […] If the Finnish nation votes "yes" on accession to the European Union, we [Finland and Denmark] shall work together as Union members on the basis of Nordic values. The Union will then take on an increasingly northern weighting which will benefit the Union as a whole and Europe in general.' President Martti Ahtisaari, speech in the Danish Foreign Policy Society, September 7, 1994.*

While this thinking may still be present among Finnish EU elites, and perhaps among the wider public, its strength has surely waned with the passage of time as a more realistic view about the internal intricacies of the Union has begun to reign. Something of this attitude may still remain, however. Risto Heiskala et al. (2022, Ch. 5) interviewed a significant number of EU-engaged politicians and EU civil servants, members of the Finnish euro-elite, in the late 2010s. The shared belief that these interviewees conveyed was that the Finnish EU policy-makers are, on the whole, exceptionally hardworking and deeply engaged in what they do in various EU contexts in order to build a better Europe for us all, perhaps not too far removed from the Nordic model.

There is, of course, an evident risk of hubris here, an unfounded conceit that the Finns might possibly maintain vis-à-vis other parts of Europe, particularly the southern member states. In Finnish *belles lettres*, there is a superb depiction of said arrogance, namely Hannu Raittila's ironical novel *Canal Grande* from 2004. In the book, a group of Finnish engineers, a band of true *homo fabers*, try to rescue the monumental buildings of Venice from drowning – thinking that the local actors would be unable to do it. Indeed, the ideals of the Nordic model represent an identity of *doing* rather than that of being. However, as I discuss later, this deep belief in the virtues of the Finnish or Nordic model has also provided the basis for the most significant counter narrative to the EU in Finland.

A Nordic tech-miracle

Despite this continued importance of the culture of Nordicness, this first phase of Finnish EU-membership was in many respects re-constitutive in terms of Finnish identity politics. The country's mental horizons towards the outside world widened significantly and the closeness of state identity seemed to weaken (cf. Saukkonen, 1999). The economy boomed unexpectedly and its foundation became more diverse and more international. Nokia's domination in the global mobile phone markets epitomised these positive developments. One can even self-satisfactorily argue that as a frontrunner of mobile technologies, the peripheral state of Finland made it possible for others to enlarge their mental horizons as well – 'to connect people', paraphrasing Nokia's slogan. These technologies even seemed to initialise a change in the stereotypical introvert and reticent mentality among the country's citizens – ordinary Finns thus began to talk![5]

Simultaneously, in many global comparative indexes Finland was suddenly ranked among the best in the world, often outright the best, in many instances alongside other Nordic countries. The PISA studies in the field of education were possibly the flagship of this ranking success, to the extent that

5. For example, Olli Alho (2002), a prominent intellectual, wrote about this on the main national web portal *Virtual Finland* as follows: 'Mobile phones have no doubt changed visitors' perceptions of Finland. Whereas a few decades ago a visitor might report back home on an uncommunicative, reserved and introvert Arctic tribe, the more common view today is that of a hyper-communicative people who are already experiencing the future that some fear and others hope for: a society where anyone can reach anyone else, no matter where or when.'

during the 2000s, a constant stream of foreign education officials visited the country to learn 'how the Finns do it' (e.g. Østerud, 2016). These types of successes have continued in a range of fields until the 2020s, from competitiveness to (non)corruption – and they may already have become an element of national identity construction. In the past four years, Finland has been ranked as 'the happiest country in the world', which some Finns for their part find bewildering.

Finland had thus seemed to evolve, or so it was believed, into a first-row modern high-tech state, displaying an exceptionally harmonious overall societal development, essentially based on the ideals of social-democratic equality (cf. Vogt, 2019). This new belief in international high-flier status contrasted strongly with the country's traditional national self-image or even identity. The conventional narrative had long dictated that 'we are a small, peripheral and poor country in the North', with thin national layers of culture compared with the long-term civilised nations of Central and Western Europe.

Finnish identity, founded upon such rigid maxims, thus also naturally involved an element of uncertainty and perhaps insecurity – which, perhaps paradoxically, led to a relatively strong and closed nation-state identity, as Pasi Saukkonen (1999) once argued by way of his systematic comparison with the Netherlands. As the example of *Canal Grande* already indicated, this uncertainty is likely to have diminished with the successes of the new millennium – although to what extent, remains a moot question. However, what is important is that the successes did confirm that the chosen path of societal development was good and desirable, endorsing the virtues of traditional Nordic protestant identity. Perhaps even the NATO membership functions towards that same direction in many people's minds.[6]

Finland, the EU's crises and the populist counter-narrative

All things considered, the romance between Finland and the EU nonetheless diminished as the Union encountered a series of economic shocks from 2008 onwards, in particular the Euro-crisis, culminating in the establishment of the European Stability Mechanism in September 2012. The Finnish EU debate now assumed much more critical undertones than before, with only a limited degree of understanding displayed towards such countries as Greece, which were apparently so poorly managed that they would not have deserved Euro-membership in the first place. Finland thus became a close ally of Germany in support of that country's (and the European Commission's) austerity policies towards the Euro-members in need of rescue from economic collapse. Vuorelma (2017), in the above-mentioned article, describes this new mood in terms of *tragedy* (or occasionally satire).

I am, however, not entirely convinced that this term points to the most essential new feature of the Finnish understanding of the country's position vis-à-vis Europe at the time. A more informative term might be confusion or perplexity, springing from the Finns' inability to see things in a genuinely European context and from the perspective of the troubled new allies, the co-member states – that perspective was not yet internalised (has it been internalised somewhere?). The confusion surely also reflected Finland's own economic problems in the early 2010s. The decline in the world economy was aggravated in the Finnish context by the fact that Nokia practically lost the battle for the souls of mobile phone users against Apple – and the company's influence in the country's economy and its

6. Pertti Joenniemi (2002) has talked about an ambivalence between the Hegelian and Herderian traditions of Finnish nationhood and concluded that Finland has never really been able to decide to which of these traditions it belongs. On Finnish national identity, see also, e.g., Raento, 2008; Anttila, 2007.

newly-defined identity had indeed been immense until that capitulation.

Be that as it may, through the increased popularity of the Finns Party – then still known as the True Finns – the view of 'the EU as a tragedy' gained a mouthpiece in the country. The party earned a historic victory in the elections of 2011, gaining four times more votes than in 2007 – 19 percent. The then leader and founder of the party, Timo Soini, a former MEP, became famous for his provocative rhetorical skills, including critical EU slogans. 'Where the EU, there a problem', still rings a bell among the wider public. After the next elections of 2015, the party also managed to join the new right-wing government (with 17 percent of the votes).

However, under Soini's leadership the party's (right-wing) populist credentials remained comparatively moderate (a fact that foreign media did not understand), owing perhaps to its roots as a modest, agrarian smallholders' party. Since 2017, however, after the dramatic ousting of the Soiniates from the party leadership, the Party has been clearly more radical and nationalistically inclined, embracing highly critical views towards the EU and European immigration policies. The tenor thus hardly differs from what one can find among the echelons of, say, *Fidesz* in Hungary or *Rassemblement National* in France. The logic of recognition seems to apply in a reverse manner: the Party's supporters undoubtedly believe that traditional genuine Finnishness, a sub-branch of 'true' Europeanness, is no longer given the appreciation it deserves. The party's EU election programme of 2019 made these points as follows:

> *The Finns is the only Finnish party that nurtures, in its European politics, the Finnish values and the classical Western ones shaped by the antique era, a sense of Christian community and the Enlightenment. By contrast, the parties in power in Finland, with the assistance of Brussels, preach the gospel of open immigration, globalisation and neoliberal economic policies. Finnish mainstream parties are thus willing to bypass the western legacy of Finland and the rest of Europe, which has prevailed for several thousand years. (The Finns Party, EU election programme 2019; translation HV)*

Niko Pyrhönen's doctoral dissertation (2015) offers a particularly interesting interpretation of this EU counter narrative. His main argument was that the Finns Party has been able to exploit a *welfare nationalist narrative.* Immigration has become an economic issue that potentially threatens the very foundations of the Finnish welfare model, thus undermining the well-deserved well-being of 'ordinary hard-working, true and genuine Finns'. It is evident that my perspective in the present essay comes very close to this: the argument about the (imagined) fulfilment of traditional Nordic Finnishness by way of integration into European institutional arrangements originates, in fact, from the same source as this populist counter narrative.

It is worth bearing in mind, however, that public EU support has overall gradually increased in the country in recent years – the age of tragedy now appears to be a matter of yesteryears. After the Covid-19 pandemic, and particularly since the Ukraine war started in 2022, the support for EU membership has in fact been higher than ever, with almost two thirds in favour of the country's membership and less than 20 percent against. The latter figure is approximately the same percentage that has turned out to vote for the Finns Party over the past 12 years but, remarkably, as much as one fifth of that party's supporters now also see EU membership in positive terms. (EVA, 2023.) There may indeed now be a stronger sense of shared destiny with the rest of the European continent across the entire population.

Two NATO-related points

The Finnish decision to join NATO in the spring of 2022 was surely not determined by identity-political matters, at least less so than in the case of EU membership. Hard, realistic security concerns prevailed – and a strong need to safeguard as much defence policy continuity as possible under the profoundly changed conditions. Identity politics, also in terms of continuity, did play a role, however, although possibly not to the same degree as in neighbouring Sweden, where the idea of being a dedicated part of the western community was and had been very strong – so strong that it could in the end undermine 200 years of beneficial neutrality (e.g. Hagström, 2022). Even though it may still be premature to form a holistic picture of the Finnish NATO process, I would like to emphasise two significant points here (cf. Vogt, 2022).

First, a strong emphasis on the country's own resources and traditional mechanisms of preparedness has featured systematically in the Finnish NATO debates of the past two years, also after the formal membership of the defence alliance was secured. The dominant form of parlance has been that, even under NATO's shield, the country still needs to be well prepared for all kinds of crises; there is no reason for unjustified optimism and the traditions of the conscription army ought to be cultivated further. Likewise, the long border with Russia will remain where it is. The message that the external affairs elites thus wish to convey is that 'we have always managed our security well and we will do that also in the future, ultimately on our own terms'. In one recent speech, President Sauli Niinistö, a hugely popular leader of the country's foreign policy, related this sentiment as follows:

> *Being part of an alliance does not change everything. Even in the future, we are responsible for defending our own country. As part of the alliance, Finland is a provider of security. The foundations of fulfilling this duty are the Finnish defence system, based on conscription and large reserves and the exceptionally high willingness to defend our country. Our allies know our readiness, and we should cherish the good reputation we have. (Speech by President of the Republic of Finland Sauli Niinistö at the promotion and appointment of cadets on 25 August 2023)*

The second point is that, similarly to the EU almost 30 years earlier, an essentially European institutional arrangement becomes *better* when Finland (and, as it is hoped, Sweden) joins it. References to the ways in which NATO can benefit from the exceptional qualities of the Finnish defence forces have been common; 'we' can offer knowledge and expertise and an example of how a country ought to be prepared for crisis. It has also been frequently repeated how wise it was that the country did not disarm to any significant degree over the past 20 years, unlike many other European NATO states. The emphasis on Nordicness is, again, part of this: the hope that all the Nordic countries would belong to the same defence alliance has been very strong. Indeed, the goal is to preserve what we have, not to become more Western somehow – the West can learn from us. The newly appointed minister for foreign affairs Elina Valtonen expressed this unequivocally in August 2023:

> *NATO membership will strengthen not only our security, but also the stability of Northern Europe and the European security architecture. Finland's strong defence capability and resilience will strengthen the whole Alliance. […] But our membership in NATO will not be complete without Sweden. We will therefore do everything in our power to ensure that Sweden joins NATO as soon as possible. (Speech by the Minister for Foreign Affairs Elina Valtonen at the 2023 Annual Meeting of Heads of Mission)*

In comparison with the early EU years, in contrast, one can possibly detect one significant identity-political difference in the current situation. Because Russian aggression has been so utterly incomprehensible for virtually everyone, there may now be a more or less conscious need to do

away with the Eastern features of the Finnish national identity among the wider population through public debates (cf. Heiskanen et al., 1994). Historians have already been compelled to remind the public that during the Russian era of Finnish history, 1809–1917, a flourishing *national* culture in fact emerged, comparable with any other small nation in Europe (Meinander, 2023). It remains to be seen how the conceivable exclusion of the country's eastern cultural traits will develop in the future and what its practical implications will be, particularly in cross-border interactions between Finland and Russia.

Concluding remarks

It seems thus that Finland's institutional position in the world has become consolidated, 'we are where we are supposed to be', people reason. *There is also a very broad consensus on this in the country*, possibly indicating that the Finns (still) *share* a strong nation-state identity. Analytically sound resistance to EU and NATO memberships hardly exists. In the parliamentary election campaign of the spring of 2023, for example, foreign policy or the country's external relations were hardly an issue. In a similar vein, in the presidential campaign currently underway (autumn 2023), the differences between the main candidates appear to be minimal in this respect. So how can we explain this *consensual* state of affairs?

One possibility would be to consult the triangle of IR metatheories once again. It is obvious that realistic security concerns are very widely shared under current national conditions – sometimes perhaps to *too* great a degree, undermining any efforts to think in terms of global and local peaceful connections, which remain important, even under wartime conditions. Simultaneously, however, people see the frameworks of international governmental organisations as ultimately beneficial for them; the basic principles of liberal (institutional) internationalism are thus still appreciated. Further, as regards the constructivist paradigm, as I have argued in these pages, the layers of Europeanism, perhaps even westernism or globalism, have gradually accumulated on top of the traditional protestant work-intensive Nordic values and mentality – but the latter still provide the core of Finnish national identity.

However, the explanatory value of these basic IR approaches could easily be challenged, the viewpoints remain almost too obvious. Instead, it might be possible to see the (identity-related) prevalent Finnish attitudes towards Europe and the world in terms of some sort of *historical institutionalism*. Well-functioning institutions, from schools and healthcare centres to political and legal bodies, have been an elementary aspect of Finnish national self-understanding. While an autonomous duchy in the 19th century, the country already established a range of social, political and cultural institutions of its own, and it was primarily through these institutions that independence was eventually achieved in 1917 and preserved afterwards. Civic attachment to these institutions has proved resilient: survey evidence frequently demonstrates that trust in central political and societal institutions in Finland is, on average, higher than elsewhere in Europe (e.g. Bäck, 2017, 45).

This historically induced appreciation of sound institutional frameworks possibly now also affects the Finns' predominant perceptions of the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, their primary international frames of reference. These also need to be well managed and cultivated further – in a pragmatic Nordic manner.

References

Alho, O. (2002) 'A Guide to Finnish customs and manners.' [Online]. Available at https://finland.fi/life-society/a-guide-to-finnish-customs-and-manners/ (Accessed 10 September 2023)

Anttila, J. (2007) *Kansallinen identiteetti ja suomalaiseksi samastuminen.* Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto.

Bäck, M. (2017) 'Kriittiset mutta uskolliset suomalaiset: kansalaisten EU-asenteet jäsenyyden aikana.' In Raunio T. and Saari, J. (eds.) *Reunalla vai ytimessä? Suomen EU-politiikan muutos ja jatkuvuus.* Helsinki: Gaudeamus / Eurooppa-tiedotus, pp. 26-51.

Clunan, A. (2009) *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

EVA 2023 (Elinkeinoelämän valtuuskunta 2023) 'EU-myönteisyys edelleen huippulukemissa' [Online]. Available at https://www.eva.fi/blog/2023/05/09/eu-myonteisyys-edelleen-huippulukemissa-kriittisyys-yhteydessa-epaluottamukseen-politiikkaa-kohtaan/ (Accessed 10 September 2023)

Haggström, L. (2022) 'Sveriges väg mot Nato, kantad av identitetspolitik och bristfällig analys.' *Kosmopolis*, 52(4), pp. 87-95.

Heiskala, R., Aro, J., Herranen, O. and Viitamäki, R. (2022) *Suomen kolmas tasavalta. Hallitsemistapa EU-aikakaudella.* Helsinki: Gaudeamus.

Heiskanen, I., Mitchell, R. and Saukkonen, P. (1994) 'European dimensions of Finnish culture: A survey of international and European orientation of Finnish intellectuals', *World Futures*, 39(1-3), pp. 25-46, DOI: 10.1080/02604027.1994.9972389

Joenniemi, P. (2002) 'Finland in the new Europe. A Hegelian or Herderian project?', in Lene Hansen, L. and Wæver, O. (eds.) *European Integration and National Identity. The Challenge of the Nordic States.* London and New York: Routledge.

Meinander, H. (2023) 'Itseään kunnioittava kansakunta ei siivoa historiaansa katukuvasta', *Helsingin Sanomat,* 9 September 2023

Moisio, S. (2008) 'Finlandisation versus westernisation: Political recognition and Finland's European Union membership debate', *National Identities*, 10(1), pp. 77-93, DOI: 10.1080/14608940701819785

Ojanen, H. (ed.) (2001) *The Northern Dimension: Fuel for the EU?* Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs

Østerud, S. (2016) 'Hva kan norsk skole lære av PISA-vinneren Finland?'' Nordisk tidsskrift for pedagogikk og kritikk, 2, pp. 14-35. http://dx.doi.org/10.17585/ntpk.v2.119

Paavonen, T. (2015) 'From national protection to global market economy Finnish foreign-trade policies and integration policies since World War II'. *Studia Humanitatis Borealis.* № 1. C. Pp. 23–42.

Raento, P. (2008) 'Introduction: Nation, state and identity in Finland', *National Identities*, 10(1), pp. 1-4, DOI: 10.1080/14608940701819736

Raunio, T. and Saari, J. (2017) 'Johtopäätökset: Pragmaattinen, kansainvälistyä Suomi. ' In Raunio, T. and Saari, J. (eds.) *Reunalla vai ytimessä? Suomen EU-politiikan muutos ja jatkuvuus.* Helsinki: Gaudeamus/ Eurooppa-tiedotus, pp. 26-51.

Saukkonen, P. (1999) *Suomi, Alankomaat ja kansallisvaltion identiteettipolitiikka.* Helsinki: SKS.

Vallaste, K. (2013) *Euroscepticism: Problem or Solution? Framing Euroscepticism in Mainstream*

Media and Writings by Eurosceptics in Sweden, Finland and Estonia 2000-2006. Helsinki: University of Helsinki.

Vogt, H. (2019) 'Powerlessness and Unfairness. A Letter to Jan Zielonka.', *Democratic Theory*, 6(1), pp. 111-121.

Vogt, H. (2019) 'Abschied vom Kleinstaatenrealismus. Finnland und Schweden vor dem Nato-Beitritt', *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik.* Heft 9/2022 pp. 105-112.

Vuorelma, J. (2017) 'A Narrative Battle: Debating Finland's EU policy during the Economic Crisis', *National Identities*, 19(1), pp. 11–31.

Discussion Article

NATO's Nordic enlargement: Reconfiguring Sweden's foreign policy identity after 200 years of neutrality and non-alignment

Minna Ålander, Research Fellow, Finnish Institute of International Affairs
Sanna Salo, Postdoctoral Fellow, Finnish Institute of International Affairs

Abstract

Prompted by Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, Sweden and Finland have undergone a paradigm shift in their foreign policies as they decided to abandon the doctrine of military non-alignment and join NATO. In this discussion article, we argue that the policy changes have been accompanied by fundamental shifts in the countries' identities. This is particularly the case for Sweden, which long perceived itself as a 'moral superpower' in both foreign and domestic policy terms. A key transformation brought about by the changes in the security environment has been a reconfiguration of the relationship between Sweden and Finland. We argue that the changes in the two countries' identities may be long-lasting, affecting the way in which Sweden and Finland perceive their positions among the Nordic countries – and the broader Western alliance.

Keywords

Sweden, Finland, NATO, security, identity, foreign policy

Introduction

Russia's war against Ukraine has been a major disruptive event for all of Europe. For Sweden and Finland, it has meant a deep shift in security policy, prompting them to Break with the tradition of military non-alignment and to seek membership in NATO. Such policy shifts also fundamentally affect a state's *identity*. Here the changes have been profound, particularly for Sweden. Both in foreign and domestic politics, real-world events have forced Sweden to reconsider its self-narrative as a peaceful 'people's home', a safe haven outside the world's conflict zones. In foreign policy terms, Sweden has traditionally positioned itself as a 'moral superpower' (Dahl, 2006), an arbiter of peace that observes conflicts from afar instead of participating in them. Domestically Sweden has been, or so the narrative goes, a tolerant, liberal country that has smoothly taken in more than its share of refugees and migrant workers.

Both parts of Sweden's identity have, in recent times, been seriously shattered. The war in Ukraine led Sweden to seek membership in NATO, which has not, however, been as easy as imagined with Hungary and especially Turkey holding the Swedish membership hostage to their own, broader foreign policy goals. The outburst in gang violence particularly in city suburbs with large populations with foreign background but also, increasingly, in wealthier areas, has led Swedish policymakers to acknowledge problems related to integration of newcomers. The rising salience of immigration and crime further boosts the Sweden Democrats, a nationalist far-right party whose ascendancy to power is, in itself, a major disruption in Swedish politics.

In this discussion article, we put these recent changes in Sweden's foreign and domestic policy and identity in a wider historical and geopolitical context. In particular, we discuss Sweden's relationship with Finland, its immediate neighbour and closest partner. Finland has always – since it was historically part of the Swedish Kingdom – been the little brother in this relationship. Yet the events following the Russian war in Ukraine seem to have fundamentally changed this. Finland took the lead in the two countries' parallel NATO processes, and was accepted into the Alliance in April 2023, whereas Sweden finds itself still in the waiting room. We argue that the NATO process, alongside the larger geopolitical changes the Ukraine war has unleashed, have changed, potentially for good, the way Sweden and Finland consider their positions among the Nordics and the larger Western alliance.

A decade of change

Arguably, Sweden had its wake-up call already in 2013, when during the so-called 'Russian Easter' (Gyllander, 2022) Russian jets simulated an attack on Swedish territory. As Sweden had no pilots and jets in readiness, NATO came to help: Danish jets on Baltic Air Policing duty scrambled to intercept the Russian planes. Sweden had to acknowledge back then that military power had not become obsolete and that history did not end after the Cold War, after all. One year later, Russia's annexation of Crimea followed, further amplifying the signal that Sweden had to start taking defence seriously again. As a result, Sweden reintroduced partial conscription in 2017 and reestablished the Gotland regiment that had been discontinued in 2005. Ten years after the Russian Easter, Sweden is waiting to join NATO, thus completing the country's security policy transformation.

The changes, despite having taken place over the course of ten years, are fundamental in nature and require a wider adjustment of Sweden's foreign policy identity. Sweden's so-called 'strategic timeout' (Kunz, 2015, p. 12) in the beginning of the 2000s did not impact only the armed forces, which were scaled down significantly, but also the public debate, where security policy was not a priority topic for decades. Compared to Finland, where the NATO decision was based on a national security-

related calculation, in Sweden the NATO debate in the spring of 2022 was inherently about domestic party politics. Two years later, with membership application submitted but ratification by Turkey and Hungary still pending, a shift in Sweden's public debate is observable: references are made to a closer alignment with Finland. National security is starting to play a greater role and an increasing consensus is emerging among the Swedish public, business community, and politicians about different kinds of security threats that are directed against Sweden.

Finland: promotion to big brother

For Sweden, the question of NATO membership has ostensibly been linked to its eastern neighbour Finland. An important facilitating factor in Sweden's decision to join Finland in the NATO bid was that Finland was also ruled by Social Democrats at the time, which somewhat mitigated the identity crisis caused by the necessity to break with Sweden's long-standing non-alignment policy. It also gave the Swedish Social Democrats (*Socialdemokraterna, S*) a way to outsource part of the political responsibility for the decision to Finland – as then-Foreign Minister Ann Linde reportedly said: 'Damned Finns, now we also might have to join NATO' (Strömberg and Nilsson, 2022). In a full circle, however, S – now in opposition – has fully taken ownership of the NATO decision and has even criticised the Moderate-led government for allegedly mismanaging the NATO process by failing to stick together with Finland (Svensson, 2023).

The rhetoric throughout the NATO process was strongly focused on the close relations, indeed friendship between the countries. Finland's President Sauli Niinistö reversed the Swedish Winter War volunteer slogan 'Finland's cause is ours' by saying that 'Sweden's cause is ours' (Bornlid Lesseur, 2022). The friendship between the countries was emphasised by both sides in the rhetoric to join NATO 'hand in hand'. The close coordination on a daily basis on all political levels was in a marked contrast to 1995 when both Finland and Sweden joined the European Union, but Sweden made the decision without appropriately informing the Finnish counterparts, who had to hurry to join at the same time – something that is still remembered in Finland with some bitterness.

The shared Finnish-Swedish history played a central role in Sweden's decision to join NATO. In the early Cold War decades, the 'Finnish question' (Dahl, 2004; Bergquist et al., 2016, p. 60) was part of Sweden's justification not to join the Western alliance: had it done so, it would have put Finland in a difficult position as the sole neutral country right next to the Soviet Union, with limited foreign policy room for manoeuvre due to the Finno-Soviet friendship treaty of 1948. In a similar vein, last year the Swedish S-led government argued that there was no feasible alternative for Sweden to stay outside of the Alliance once Finland made the decision to join. One of the alternatives that the Swedish government explored was a closer Finnish-Swedish defence union, which Finland had occasionally proposed but about which Sweden had hitherto remained lukewarm.

The NATO process reversed the traditional roles of Finland and Sweden in the bilateral relationship, upgrading Finland to the role of a 'big brother'. After jointly submitting the NATO applications on 18 May 2022, *Expressen* ran a lead article in Finnish, thanking 'big brother Finland' for 'NATO help' (Expressen, 2022), admitting that without Finland, Sweden would never have made it. In March 2023, when it began to look increasingly likely that Finland would get a green light from Turkey and could end up going ahead without Sweden, it was suggested in *Expressen* that Sweden should just join Finland instead (Barth-Kron, 2023). The fact that Finland finally proceeded without Sweden and became NATO's 31st member while Sweden was left in the waiting room was itself for Sweden a new experience: for the first time, Finland made it into an international organisation while Sweden remains blocked from membership. For Finland, Sweden's accession as soon as possible remains

the highest priority. Finland's first official act as NATO member was to ratify Sweden's membership, approximately 15 seconds after finalising its own accession.

Sweden's Nordic identity – not so non-aligned

Another important factor for the Swedish NATO decision was its Nordic identity. The rhetoric of building a 'Nord-NATO' (Nilsson, 2022) was prevalent in the NATO debates. Sweden, given its geographical position in the middle of the Nordic region, is a must-have member in NATO. This was also the conclusion in Sweden: there was no viable alternative to applying together with Finland (Nordgren, 2022). The already close Nordic cooperation, also in the field of defence, offers Sweden a natural orientation framework that eases the task of navigating the massive security policy changes in such a short time.

Nordic cooperation dates back to the failed attempt to establish a Scandinavian defence union after the World Wars and continued throughout the Cold War despite Sweden's official – and contradictory – neutrality policy. While Swedish politicians vehemently asserted the firmness of Sweden's neutrality, the armed forces had established significant contacts to and cooperation with NATO – unbeknownst to the Swedish public. The secret arrangements with NATO caused Americans to describe Sweden as 'neutral on our side' (for a more in-depth discussion of Sweden's Cold War neutrality policy and secret links to NATO, see Holmström, 2023).

The narrative of 200 years of neutrality or, after joining the EU in 1995, that of non-alignment, was indeed even in the Cold War era much more a public narrative than objective reality. Not only did Sweden cooperate so extensively especially with its NATO member neighbours Norway and Denmark, but also the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US), that it was called the '17th member' of the alliance within NATO (Dahl, 2006). In addition, behind the scenes Sweden received secret security assurances from the US in exchange for giving up its own nuclear weapons development program in the early 1970s (Jonter, 2006, pp. 258-259). In that sense, Sweden was a member of NATO already for a long time in all but name.

The end of the moral superpower?

Sweden has a long-standing, strongly normative foreign policy tradition that is deeply rooted in the Social Democratic Party that has been ruling Sweden for most of the post-World War era – S has been in opposition in only 6 legislature periods, including the current one. The legacy of the Social Democratic prime minister Olof Palme, who was Sweden's leading Cold War political figure and known for his anti-imperialist stance and strong engagement in the so-called third world, strongly formed Sweden's foreign policy identity for decades to come – beyond party lines.

It was precisely Sweden's self-proclaimed status as a 'moral superpower' and accordingly activist foreign policy tradition that has caused hurdles in Sweden's NATO accession process. Especially the Swedish Social Democrats' support for the Syrian-Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), connected to the terrorist-labelled Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and People's Defence Unit (YPG), has prompted Turkey to stall Sweden's NATO accession. Conversely, it was always the argument against NATO membership on the political Left that Sweden should not enter an alliance with a country like Turkey and let an autocrat like the Turkish president Erdogan dictate its policy. The dilemma prompted one headline in the leading daily *Dagens Nyheter* to ask, 'is Sweden too democratic for NATO?' (Ramberg, 2023).

Non-alignment was considered an essential precondition of Sweden's normative foreign policy

activism during the Cold War era and beyond. Joining NATO is therefore a greater change politically than militarily – as an opinion piece in *Dagens Nyheter* put it, 'if we join NATO, we Swedes can no longer be the world's conscience' (Skjönsberg, 2023). In a marked contrast to the S, the incumbent Moderate Party (*Moderaterna, M*) announced the end of Sweden's feminist foreign policy after coming into power in October 2022. M was initially very self-confident that they would get Sweden into NATO in a speedy manner, as they did not have similar baggage with links to Kurdish actors and had been one of Sweden's pro-NATO political parties prior to the decision to join the Alliance.

However, M soon had to learn that Turkey's objections were not easy to overcome, especially as they centred on demands to extradite people Turkey – but not Sweden – considers to be terrorists. No Swedish government can interfere with the judicial process of extradition decisions. Hence, in January 2023 Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson had to admit that there was nothing more to be done on the Swedish side and the ball was in Erdogan's court.

Reality check: values come with a price

Especially the difficulties Sweden has encountered with Turkey's objections to ratifying the Swedish membership, based on claims that Sweden supports Kurdish terrorist organisations, have proven a hard reality check. Repeated Quran burnings in the spring of 2023 that enraged Turkey and led to further delay in the NATO ratification process showed that sometimes there can be a trade-off between values and security interests. Sweden has a particularly strong, constitutionally anchored protection of freedom of speech, which is a core fundamental value in Swedish society. The Quran burning incidents were a painful example that such liberal democratic values can be instrumentalised against the country's security interests.

The public discourse on the matter initially started as unequivocally uncompromising on the freedom of speech on both sides of the political spectrum, but the consensus started breaking as the situation escalated to the point of increased threat of terrorism in Sweden and violent attacks against Swedish representations in Turkey and Arab countries. By July 2023, a total of 53 percent of respondents in a poll commissioned by SVT were in favour of banning the burning of any religious books (SVT, 2023).

In a marked contrast, Finland avoided such a situation, as it still has controversial blasphemy laws in place. What is more, the Finnish experience during the Cold War was that national survival can require compromising on some core democratic values, such as the freedom of expression, during the so-called Finlandisation period. In Finland, the culture of self-censorship persisted to an extent in the political communication even after the Cold War, as the decades-long prioritisation of securing sovereignty vis-à-vis the Russian neighbour even at the cost of domestic democratic standards had been a deeply internalised socialisation process for political elites.

From People's Home to gang violence and far-right influence

The shifts in Sweden's foreign policy identity have been accompanied by long-brewing changes in its domestic politics and security situation. Gang violence has become a regular feature of life in the bigger cities, particularly the Stockholm area. Recently, the violence has spread from suburbs mostly populated by non-ethnic Swedes to wealthier areas and city centres, forcing the public and policymakers to confront the question: what happened to the peaceful People's Home Sweden perceived itself to be?

Assessing the root causes of the wave of violence is beyond the scope of this article. We focus rather on the associated changes that have taken place in the Swedish political system in the last decade.

First, polarisation within its party system has changed. Swedish politics was long dominated by the socio-economic, left-right political axis, with a mighty S habitually gathering almost 50 percent of the vote in general elections. Parliamentary parties were, since mid-2000s, organised into two competing blocs, a green–left bloc led by the Social Democrats and a bourgeois bloc led by M.

This began to change with the ascent of the far-right nationalist party Sweden Democrats in the 2010s. Sweden was long thought to be an exception among Western democracies also in this regard: no far-right party appeared to be able to break through in its political system. No longer so. All the mainstream parties first responded by erecting a *cordon sanitaire* against Sweden Democrats, pledging that they would never cooperate with the illiberal, xenophobic party they perceived the SD to be. Yet this did not stem the popularity of SD. The party had entered parliament in 2010 with 5.7 percent of the vote; by mid-2010s, its popularity skyrocketed with the help of the so-called migrant crisis and coming to the 2020s, it was close to 20 percent in the polls.

The rise of SD has sent shock waves through the Swedish political system. Most importantly, it has meant that reaching parliamentary majorities without the Sweden Democrats' support has become virtually impossible – as was the case also with NATO membership. This is a significant conundrum for the mainstream parties that had, after all, sworn never to cooperate with the SD and ultimately led them to reach innovative solutions. In practice, keeping the SD out meant cooperating across the – thus far sacrosanct – bloc barriers. After the 2018 election, the bourgeois side could not agree on whether to try and form a right-wing government with the support of SD. The Moderates flirted with the idea, but the Liberals (L) and Christian Democrats (KD) would not have it. As a result, the L and KD broke away from the bourgeois bloc and joined the left bloc instead, agreeing to support a Social Democratic-led minority government.

The road proved to be rocky, and in the end the KD and L re-joined the bourgeois side before the 2022 election. In this election, the SD reached another milestone, surpassing the Moderates, with 20.5 per cent of the vote, as the largest party on the right-wing side. This effectively meant the end of the strategy of shutting it out of all inter-party cooperation. In a remarkable volte-face compared to their earlier position, the bourgeois parties led by the Moderates eventually agreed to form a right-wing minority government with the SD officially outside the coalition, but in practice supporting it.

The growth of SD and the re-polarisationof Sweden's party system is not only a question of parliamentary mathematics, but also – and perhaps most importantly – a question of a fundamental realignment of the political issue space. As forming majorities along the left–right axis has become more difficult, socio-cultural political issues, to do with questions of identity and ethnicity, have taken up more space in political debate. This has led to a reframing of public debate on issues such as immigration and integration policy from the perspective of security and law-and-order, excluding other perspectives – such as, a social policy perspective – that might justify other types of policy responses. The power to reframe political debate in this way is quite possibly the most potent way in which the far right currently exercises power in Sweden as well as in other Western democracies.

Image control

Sweden has not only perceived itself as a foreign policy 'superpower', but also in terms of domestic politics, the consensus has been that Sweden can do a little bit more and a little bit better than the rest. This self-narrative has arguably guided Swedish politics in a range of issues, from immigration to defence policy. As real-world events have shattered this image, Swedish policymakers and the public now have to re-write this narrative, to configure 'Sverigebilden', the image of itself both internally and

externally.

The battle over who gets to define this narrative – and ultimately, who gets to define what kind of country Sweden now is becoming – has already begun. Commentators on the political Right blame the Left – particularly the Social Democrats, who sat in government for the past eight years – for choosing rather to uphold a polished, but false, image of Sweden as a liberal, tolerant haven, than to openly talk about the problems related to immigration, integration and crime – before it was too late (Neuding, 2023). After the current government took over, the accusation goes, the Left was then quick to change position and to both admit that Sweden is facing serious problems and accuse the incumbent centre-right government for it.

At present, both sides of the ideological aisle not only agree on how serious a situation Sweden now faces with the escalation of gang violence, but also to a large extent on the measures required to combat it. So far, the political Left has given its tacit support to legislative changes proposed by the government, focusing on better surveillance and harder punishments for gang-related crime. The Left has underlined the need to focus also on preventive measures as well as the danger of trading off personal freedoms for more surveillance, but the acute seriousness of the situation has toned down partisan differences – for now.

Conclusion

The failure of Sweden's moral superpower in both domestic and foreign policy has led to a profound identity crisis. As a recent journalistic podcast put it, 'we went from being the country everyone wants to be, to being a cautionary tale' (*Svenska Dagbladet,* 2023). The situation now requires the re-writing of Sweden's narrative, both internally and externally. This new self-image finds itself open to political contestation, with both international developments and domestic politics contributing to the process of determining what the new narrative will look like. Basing policy on a moral high ground is a balancing act. While Sweden's neutrality policy enabled a prosperous post-World War development domestically and served as a cornerstone of the activist 'third way' foreign policy, the disingenuous official policy was de facto undermined by behind-the-scenes cooperation with NATO countries. The generous immigration policy combined with insufficient integration efforts is now having repercussions not only for domestic stability but also for Sweden's international image.

Currently, Sweden is facing a threefold unravelling of core parts of its foreign policy that link to domestic policy failures: the end of neutrality and non-alignment that was the cornerstone of Swedish foreign and security policy for 200 years; immigration and integration policy has proved a failure as Sweden is now exporting crime, not peace; and its Middle East policy and role as a neutral mediator has been shattered due to the Quran burnings – a recent study conducted by Novus in cooperation with an Iraqi institute finds Sweden's image at rock-bottom (Dahlberg, 2023).

Navigating these challenges in what Prime Minister Kristersson has frequently described as the most tense security situation since the Cold War, necessitates a reconfiguration in light of both domestic and international drivers. Despite alignment with Finland on the NATO decision, for Sweden's NATO profile, identity questions will likely remain more relevant than in the Finnish case. While in Finland, the political consensus shifted nearly unanimously from staying outside of NATO to supporting membership, in Sweden the parties further on the political Left (the Greens, *Miljöpartiet* and the Left Party, *Vänsterpartiet*) remain in opposition to NATO membership. Various aspects of Sweden's NATO policy, such as nuclear sharing and NATO presence on Swedish territory, can therefore be expected to become politicised.

References

Barth-Kron, V. (2023) 'Vi får nog gå med i Finland i stället', *Expressen*, 24.01.2023 [online]. Available at: https://www.expressen.se/kronikorer/viktor-barth-kron/vi-far-nog-ga-med-i-finland-i-stallet/ (Accessed: 8 June 2023)

Bergquist, M., Heisbourg, F., Nyberg, R. and Tiilikainen, T. (2016) 'Arvio Suomen mahdollisen Nato-jäsenyyden vaikutuksista', *Ulkoasiainministeriön julkaisusarja 2/2016*, https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/79159 (Accessed 10 June 2023)

Bornild Lesseur, M. (2022) 'Finland: vi går inte med i Nato utan Sverige', *Aftonbladet*, 12.06.2022 [online]. Available at: https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/a7zGRO/sauli-niinisto-sveriges-sak-ar-var (Accessed: 23 February 2023)

Dahl, A.-S. (2004) 'Vår neutralitet skulle garantera Finlands frihet', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 29.06.2004 [online]. Available at: https://www.svd.se/a/47c77d32-0021-3273-ad5d-d37d0fb9ef94/var-neutralitet-skulle-garantera-finlands-frihet (Accessed: 25 February 2023)

Dahl, A.-S. (2006) 'Sweden: Once a Moral Superpower, Always a Moral Superpower?', *International Journal*, 61(4), pp. 895-908. https://doi.org/10.1177/002070200606100408

Dahlberg, J. (2023) 'Antisvensk uppfattning sprids: "Hade bra rykte"', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 15.10.2023 [online]. Available at: https://www.svd.se/a/zEJmO1/efter-koranbranningarna-sa-tanker-iraks-befolkning-om-sverige (Accessed: 15 October 2023)

Danish Armed Forces (2023) 'Nordiske air chiefs: Vi skal have ét samlet luftforsvar', 24.03.2023 [online]. Available at: https://www.forsvaret.dk/da/nyheder/2023/nordiske-air-chiefs-vi-skal-have-et-samlet-luftforsvar/ (Accessed 09 June 2023)

Expressen (2022) 'Kiitos Nato-avusta – isoveli Suomi!', 18.05.2022 [online]. Available at: https://www.expressen.se/ledare/kiitos-nato-avusta-isoveli-suomi/ (Accessed 25 February 2023)

Finnish Government (2022) 'Defence Ministers of Finland, Norway and Sweden signed an updated trilateral Statement of Intent', 22.11.2022 [online]. Available at: https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/defence-ministers-of-finland-norway-and-sweden-signed-an-updated-trilateral-statement-of-intent (Accessed 25 February 2023)

Gyllander, O. (2022) 'Så har incidentberedskapen skärpts sedan "ryska påsken"', *SVT nyheter*, 16.04.2022 [online]. Available at: https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/flygvapenchefen-sa-har-incidentberedskapen-skarpts-sedan-ryska-pasken (Accessed 09 June 2023)

Holmström, M. (2023) *Den dolda alliansen. Sveriges hemliga NATO-förbindelser*, femte upplagan, utökad med: Sverige blir NATO-land, Stockcholm: Natur och Kultur.

Jonter, T. (2016) *The Key to Nuclear Restraint. The Swedish Plans to Acquire Nuclear Weapons During the Cold War.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Neuding, P. (2023) 'Det handlade aldrig om Sverigebilden', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 16.09.2023 [online]. Available at: https://www.svd.se/a/kEj0Aa/neuding-forst-nu-heter-det-att-sverige-blivit-farligare (Accessed 15 October 2023)

Nilsson, PM (2022) 'Ett starkt Norden i Nato', *Dagens Industri*, 24.04.2022 [online]. Available at: https://www.di.se/ledare/ett-starkt-norden-i-nato/ (Accessed 10 June 2023)

Nordgren, R (2022) 'Svenska sossarna säger ja till Natomedlemskap', Hufvudstadsbladet, 15.05.2022

[online]. Available at: https://www.hbl.fi/artikel/93586140-d452-497c-a617-e86a05c83b48 (Accessed 8 June 2023)

Ramberg, T. (2023) 'Är Sverige för demokratiskt för att släppas in I Nato?', *Dagens Nyheter*, 20.02.2023 [online]. Available at: https://www.dn.se/sverige/tomas-ramberg-ar-sverige-for-demokratiskt-for-att-slappas-in-i-nato/ (Accessed 10 June2023)

Skjönsberg, J. (2023) 'Om vi ska in I atok an vi svenskar inte längre vara världssamvete', *Dagens Nyheter*, 04.04.2023 [online]. Available at: https://www.dn.se/insandare/om-vi-ska-in-i-nato-kan-vi-svenskar-inte-langre-vara-varldssamvete/ (Accessed 10 June 2023)

Strömberg, M. and Nilsson, T. (2022) 'Så gick det till när S vände om Nato', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 02.07.2022 [online]. Available at: https://www.svd.se/a/Qy1gXx/sa-gick-det-till-nar-magdalena-andersson-kovande-om-nato (Accessed 26 June 2023)

Svenska Dagbladet (2023) 'Sverigebilden på botten – detta är konsekvenserna', *SvD Podd* 27.09.2023 [online]. Available at: https://www.svd.se/a/abEg5E/svd-s-podd-dagens-story-sverigebilden-pa-botten (Accessed 14 October 2023)

Svensson, M. (2023) 'S bitterhet hotar Natoprocessen', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 17.02.2023 [online]. Available at: https://www.svd.se/a/JQvyzR/socialdemokraternas-bitterhet-hotar-natoprocessen (Accessed 24 November 2023)

SVT (2023) 'Majoriteten svenskar vill förbjuda koranbränningar', 06.07.2023 [online]. Available at: https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/majoriteten-svenskar-vill-forbjuda-koranbranningar (Accessed 08 October 2023)

Discussion Article

Nordic, European, or Atlanticist? Finland's state identity during the post-Cold War period

Iro Särkkä, Postdoctoral Fellow, Finnish Institute of International Affairs

Abstract

This discussion article explores the interplay of three distinctive but overlapping geographically driven state identities – Nordic, European, and Atlanticist identities in Finland's official foreign policy discourse during the post-Cold War period (1995–2022). It shows that state identities are used to achieve both physical and ontological security. These geographically defined identities are mutually inclusive and complimentary in character, building on one another. The discussion article argues that even as a member of NATO, Finland should emphasise the Nordic identity, which forms the basis of Finland's fundamental value-based security community.

Keywords

State identity, Finland, Nordicity, physical security, ontological security

Introduction

In this discussion article, I analyse the significance of Nordicity, Europeanness, and Atlanticism in Finland's state identity during the post-Cold War period. I define state identity as being constitutive of two essential dimensions. The first dimension concerns the normative beliefs and values relating to a state's existence. The second dimension concerns the type of role or active agency that a state is seeking to play with its significant others. To ground my argument, I study the Finnish government reports (white papers) on foreign, security, and defence policy during the post-Cold War period (1995–2022). I examine how three institutional frameworks – the European Union (EU), NATO, and the defence cooperation between the Nordic countries – have constituted Finland's state identity.

This discussion article focuses on identity from a state perspective, the so-called *state identity,* which in its most simple form denotes what the country is and what it stands for (Ashizawa, 2008, p. 575). It describes those qualities that state elites ascribe to in determining the state's foreign policy orientation within the international community (Al Toraifi, 2012, p. 46). Hence, state identity 'is not just a descriptive character of a state', but also a social and relational concept reflecting its relations with other states (Ashizawa, 2008, p. 575; Jepperson et al., 1996; Wendt, 1999). It assumes that states, like people, seek to acquire relatively stable, role-specific understandings of themselves in international relations (Wendt, 1992, p. 398).

The internal and external distinction of state identity might be also useful in this regard: internal identity refers to state's coherent self-entity as an agent in international relations, whereas external identity is distinctively identifiable from other states (Kowert, 1998, p. 6–7). For instance, geographical denotations such as Eastern, Western, Northern, or Southern or value-based denotations such as authoritarian, democratic, liberal, or conservative help states to map themselves in global politics and identify with significant partners, allies, and adversaries.

The concept of identity, however, entails a deeper understanding and internalisation of one's position in the global community than mere role-seeking. Identity means an in-depth understanding of one's values, norms, and principles to be promoted in the threshold of a security community. Security communities have the capacity to create a sense of collective identity to its members, which distinguishes them from security regimes and other collective security arrangements. This means a wider understanding of how states pursue their national interests by developing trust and regional culture through common norms and values within their respective communities (Acharya, 2002, pp. 21–23).

Stable conceptions of the self are reinforced through socialisation within these cultural environments of security, which provides a ground for intersubjective identity building (Katzenstein et al., 1996). In this discussion article I argue that in addition to participation in international organisations (IOs) (Berenskoetter and Giegerich, 2010, pp. 422–423), regional bi- and minilateral cooperation formats, such as Nordic Defence Cooperation, can serve as platforms of cultural environments for one's identity-building. Through collaboration and cooperation with like-minded friendly nations that codify both formal and informal norms and rules, minilateral cooperation can also work as a motivational force in socialising collective knowledge building (Wendt, 1992, p. 399).

Theories of ontological security can shed some understanding on why this is so.

As much as states are physical security providers and seekers, fearing and protecting themselves from specific threats, they also seek ontological security: the security of the self (Mitzen, 2006b, p. 344). Ontological security theories assume that as well as having specific threats or fears, actors also

experience anxiety of not knowing how and which specific threats to deal with (Krickel-Choi, 2022, p. 6). A concrete example is the growing emergence of hybrid threats, which shows how undesirable and destabilising chaos might be lurking behind the corner even in peacetime.

As states must deal with a chaotic and uncertain state of global affairs, a more stable sense of the self and a fulfilment of their sense of agency is achieved through routinisation of foreign relations with other states. By increasing basic trust and anchoring social relations in both bilateral and multilateral security frameworks, states increase social trust with one another, creating a shared sense of intersubjectivity and cognitive control. To create a sense of order and continuity, various daily routines are performed (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 747). Thus, it is not capabilities but habits that determine state identity (Mitzen, 2006b, pp. 271–274).

This discussion article asserts that one's sense of security is created not only by relying on material structures and physical security, but also by habitual relations and routines with significant others. Particularly in disruptive times, when a sense of security and cognitive control is blurred, identifying and cooperating with the like-minded can reinforce trust, predictability, self-control (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 746), and a sense of belonging to a specific security community of states. These routinised relationships with friends, like-minded allies, enable promoting a stable sense of the self.

Thus, ontological security as much as physical security is important in constructing stable state identities. However, what makes it difficult to study and identify state identities is the nature of constant change. By their nature, identities are never static but temporary attachments that 'cannot be reduced to a single spatial or temporal source' (Campbell, 1998, p. 74). Instead, they should rather be viewed as a 'process of becoming' (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 748). Hence, although it might be impossible to trace a single source or a written document that fully depicts state identity, one can analyse changes in state identities through a longer period of time by comparing and analysing the content of different documents. Government papers on foreign, security, and defence policy constitute a logical source of analysis for tracking change in state identity.

Three phases of Finland's state identity in the post-Cold War period

The following discussion identifies three phases of temporal state identity development in Finland's foreign and security policy during the post-Cold War period. Firstly, there is the era of Europeanisation from the 1990s until the 2010s when Finland joined the European Union and framed itself as an EU member state. Secondly, there is the period of the rebirth of Nordic identity and cooperation in the 2010s and the 2020s, which coincides with the rise of Nordic defence cooperation. And thirdly, there is the emergence of an era of so-called Atlanticist state identity in the late 2010s and the early 2020s with fortifying bilateral relations with the United States when the transatlantic link started to grow stronger.

As a full member of the European Union since 1995, Finland's foreign and security policy position developed in relation to the particularly strong governance and institutional dimension of the EU in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. This identification with a new European reference group of nations fundamentally changed Finland's reference group thinking and brought Finland into the Western like-minded group of nations. This had two implications for Finland's state identity. Firstly, Finland sought active and diligent involvement in the EU-led Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and security and defence policy initiatives. Finland's participation in the EU's civilian crisis management activities and military crisis management operations were concrete examples of the

country's commitment to the European security community.

Finland's active involvement in developing these instruments, however, was not in itself enough to lay the ground for a European identity. The other objective was to 'Europeanise' Finland, which meant sharing European values and a strong bond with other European nations. This entailed the idea of Finland as a member of the same security culture with shared political values of dignity, the freedom of movement, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights as enshrined in the EU founding treaties.

Secondly, in the absence of an explicit physical threat, Finland sought not only physical but ontological security through an active involvement in European affairs. Identifying and becoming European meant accepting reciprocal clauses of EU treaties, particularly the solidarity and mutual security clause, without challenging Finland's special character as a militarily non-allied state. However, it also led to questioning the tangible value of European security arrangements. As the EU encompasses a vast geographical area – with neighbours of various kinds – the practical value of EU as a security community was questioned. Despite various defence and security initiatives, gradual blurring of Finland's state agency in European affairs occurred. A question was raised of who could Finland ultimately trust if the security situation deteriorated in Finland's immediate geographical region.

Against this reasoning, the regenesis of Nordicity in Finland's state identity was no surprise. Regardless of a strong European focus in the post-Cold War years, Nordicity or Nordicness never disappeared from Finland's state identity. Finland's long historical roots with the Nordic countries amplified Finland's strong sense of belonging to both the geographical region and the cultural area Norden (Brommesson, 2018, p. 391), which made it relatively easy to revoke Nordicity.

During the Cold War, Finland's Nordic identity served as an important corner stone of foreign policy and offered an attractive alternative to distance Finland from the Soviet orbit. At the same time, it provided Finland an alternative agency, attached to the peaceful alternative of Norden (Browning, 2008, pp. 195–1977). Despite these developments, the merits of Nordicity were at times questioned in the immediate post-Cold War years (Browning, 2008, p. 238).

There was, however, a new aspect attached to the state identity perspective in the late 2000s. Finland's new Nordic agency was discussed in the realm of Finland's foreign and security policy and her relations with the other Nordic defence cooperation countries (Nordefco). Especially in the early years of Nordefco, there was a strong willingness to bring added value by strengthening Nordic cooperation through these deepened minilateral cooperation formats. For Finland, the relationship with Sweden became particularly important as Sweden was Finland's closest bilateral ally and found herself in a similar position with Finland as a non-NATO member. The trilateral statements of intent between Finland, Sweden, and Norway in 2020 and further in 2022 can be interpreted as contributing factors to a strong and active Nordic agency (Särkkä, 2022). These materialistic and instrumental gains, however, would not have been fulfilled without a shared sense of Nordic identity.

Thirdly and most importantly, Nordicity developed through a common understanding of security norms and values, the so-called shared understanding of Nordic solidarity (Haugevik and Svendrup, 2019, p. 21). In addition, this Nordic exceptionalism in international relations developed around the aims and values of international peace, disarmament, solidarity, ecological sustainability, and cooperation with third world countries (Ojanen and Raunio, 2018, p. 9). In Finland, too, these values were internalised as part of the foreign and security policy agenda and state identity. However, not even Nordicity was completely immune to exogenous threats in the security environment.

While the Nordic solidarity declaration from 2011 promoted democracy, international law, gender equality, and sustainable development amongst the Nordic countries, it failed to address the physical security dilemma of Russia's emerging threat in the Nordic–Baltic region. Therefore, despite reinforcing mutual trust, the Nordic identity did not fix the problem of deterring from a specific external threat. Although Nordic identity provided Finland with a certain sense of being safe, the limits of both Nordic bi- and minilateral formats of cooperation were obvious. Deterring a specific threat, that of Russia, was not a task for the Nordic but the transatlantic security community.

With the outbreak of Russia's brutal war in Ukraine, Finland had to address and reassess the limits of its state identity. Historically speaking, Finland's relationship with the transatlantic community has not been an unproblematic one. During the Cold War, Finland was neither allowed to maintain close relations with the US nor join NATO due to its special relationship with the USSR, governed by the provisions in the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance.

After the Cold War, Finland moved closer to the West, which replaced the language of neutrality with Westernising narratives, 'a linear story from whom we were in the past up until present', a kind of 'emplotment' caused by identity transformation (Browning, 2008, p. 46). There was, however, neither strong political nor public support for NATO membership. The Western focus gave Finland a stronger ground to reach out for closer relations with NATO and the US (Talmor and Zelden, 2017, p. 160).

Building a strong relationship with NATO was a strong identity-related question for Finland but in a more subtle way. Whereas countries that joined NATO in the first enlargement rounds in 1999 and 2004 were seeking shelter from Russia, Finland and Sweden wished to profile themselves in an opposite way, not as beneficiaries but as contributors to international peace, yet nudging closer to the transatlantic community as partners. Being an international peace contributor was an important identity for Finland, manifested in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) cooperation (Browning, 2008, p. 249–250).

Finland actively participated in NATO-led crisis management missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo as well as in the NATO-led coalition force in Afghanistan. In 2014, Finland's relationship with NATO was further deepened through participation in NATO's Enhanced Opportunities (EOP) initiative, followed by reinforced bilateral ties with the United States in the late 2010s. Russia's second war in Ukraine in 2022 caused a sharp turn in Finland's policy of military non-alignment and led both Finland and Sweden to apply for NATO membership. Finland's membership in the Alliance was completed in April 2023, bringing the era of military non-alignment to an end. An indisputable motivator for such a policy choice was Russia's brutal attack on Ukraine, which worked like an avalanche, first among the Finnish public and then among politicians.

During this process, NATO and the transatlantic link were not portrayed as Finland's value community as strongly as the European and Nordic counterparts. It can be explained by the fact that during the post-Cold War period, NATO was not internalised in Finland's foreign and security policy as a constituting factor of state identity but rather as an enabling factor of security cooperation. Rather Finland's relationship with NATO was instrumental, emphasising the relevance of different means and tools that Finland's partnership with the Alliance enabled.

Finland is now at the beginning of a new path. Should the decision to join NATO be considered as a depiction of Finland's evolving state identity, which is arguably now closer to the Atlanticist approach than ever before? Although Finland was redefining its state identity and explicitly stated that Finland joined a value-based community, completing Finland's unification with other Western states is far from complete. Finland must now fully internalise the norms and values of being a member of the

transatlantic security community. This will require explicitly stating that Finland adheres to the values and norms of NATO, which complement Finland's state identity. On a deeper level, Finland must now live up to the standards and values of the security community.

Three overlapping state identities – a mix of state identity politics?

After becoming a full member of NATO, Finland has now threefold external state identities: European, Nordic, and Atlanticist. Will the three distinctive, yet overlapping state identities pose an identity dilemma for Finland? Although geographically different, European, Nordic, and Atlanticist identities have the same normative value base that cherishes democracy, liberalism, human rights, equality, and the rule of law.

A constructivist would argue that Finland is capable of internalising multiple state identities. State identities are not mutually exclusive but inclusive and complimentary, developing through longer periods of time. A strong emphasis on European state identity during the post-Cold War period created a strong basis for Finland's international value-based community. A sense of trust and mutual reciprocity between the Nordic countries reinforced Finland's positioning of the self in international relations. The third layer, becoming a member of the transatlantic value community, is a step that Finland needs to take in the years to come.

As a newly accepted member of NATO, Finland will now have to think about how to manifest Nordic identity within each of the three different security communities. If the sense of belonging to a Nordic group of nations is so strong, what practical implications could it have for defence cooperation? Should the Nordic countries try to act in unison as much as possible to advance the Nordic front just for the sake of being Nordic? Or should they flexibly advance Nordic values and interests in NATO?

Furthermore, while recognising the practical and instrumental value of Nordic cooperation and making sure that security in the Nordic region is maintained, the Nordics should continue to show an example of a sustainable value community within the wider Euro–Atlantic community, enforcing certain principles, values, and peaceful ways of cooperating.

In doing so, upholding the norms and values that are intrinsic to the strong Nordic identity, each Nordic state has a role to play in defining Nordicity. Maintaining and strengthening Nordic identity is particularly important for Finland because it reinforces both physical and ontological security. Common Nordic ways of coordinating, best practices, and routines enhance trust and a sense of control, helping Finland to deal with any possible future threats.

References

Acharya, A. (2001) *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia. ASEAN and the problem of regional order*. London, New York: Routledge.

Al Toraifi, A. (2012) *Understanding the role of state identity in foreign policy decision-*

making: the rise of Saudi-Iranian rapprochement (1997-2009). London School of Economics and Political Science.

Ashizawa, K. (2008) 'When Identity Matters: State Identity, Regional Institution-Building, and Japanese Foreign Policy', *International Studies Review,* 10, pp. 571–598.

Berenskoetter, F. and Giegerich, B. (2010) 'From NATO to ESDP: A Social Constructivist Analysis of German Strategic Adjustment after the End of the Cold War', *Security Studies*, 19, pp. 407–452.

Brommesson, D. (2018) '"Nordicness" in Swedish foreign policy – from mid power internationalism to small state balancing?', *Global Affairs*, 4(4–5), pp. 391–404.

Browning, C.S. (2002) 'Coming Home or Moving Home? Westernizing Narratives in Finnish Foreign Policy and the Reinterpretation of Past Identities', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 37(1), pp. 47–72.

Browning, C. (2008) *Constructivism, Narrative and Foreign Policy Analysis. A Case Study of Finland*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Campbell, D. (1998) *Writing Security: United States and Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Jepperson, R. L., Wendt, A. and Katzenstein P. J. (1996) 'Norms, Identity and Culture in National Security' in Katzenstein, P. J. (ed.), *The Culture of National Identity. Norms and Identity in World Politics*. New York, Columbia University Press, pp. 33–72.

Kinnvall, C. (2004) 'Self, identity, and the search for ontological security', *Political psychology*, 25(5), pp. 741–767.

Kowert, P. A. (1998) 'National Identity: Inside and out', *Security Studies*, 8(2-3), pp. 1–34.

Krickel-Choi, N. C. (2022) 'The Concept of Anxiety in Ontological Security Studies', *International Studies Review*, pp. 1–21.

Mitzen, J. (2006a) 'Anchoring Europe's civilizing identity: habits, capabilities and ontological security', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13(2), pp. 270–285.

Mitzen, J. (2006b) 'Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma'. *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 12(3), pp. 341–370.

Ojanen, H. and Raunio, T. (2018) *The varying degrees and meanings of Nordicness in Finnish foreign policy*, Global Affairs 4(4–5), 405–418.

Särkkä, I. (2022) 'Nordic security and defence brand revisited: The unutilized potential of Nordic cooperation', *FIIA Comment 15*.

Talmor, A. and Selden, Z. (2017) 'Is French defence policy becoming more Atlanticist?', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 2017 30(2–3), pp. 160–176.

Wendt, A. (1992) 'Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization*, 46(2) (Spring, 1992), pp. 391–425.

Wendt, A. (2004) 'The State as Person in International Theory', *Review of International Studies* 29, pp. 289–316.

Discussion Article

The Nordic carceral system: examining Scandinavian penal exceptionalism

Brendan Humphreys, Senior Researcher, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki

Abstract

Scandinavian (Nordic) penal exceptionalism is a well-established body of opinion within carceral studies. It means that, judged by international standards, the prison systems of the Nordic countries are considered exceptionally humane. This article asks to what extent is Nordic prison exceptionalism a valid proposition; is the prison estate of the Nordic countries reflective of their broader societies, and if so, how does this relate to the idea of a pan-Nordic identity? The core concepts examined are collective identity, social contract, and Nordic carceral philosophy. The sources used draw from the theoretical literature about Nordic society, the established body of literature on incarceration, and expert studies on the Nordic prison systems. Conclusions largely support the positive view of Nordic incarceration but point to significant challenges to the broader Nordic welfare model.

Keywords

Nordic, collective identity, penal exceptionalism, prison, social contract

Introduction

Scandinavian penal exceptionalism – actually 'Nordic' to include Finland – is a well-established body of opinion within carceral studies. Briefly stated, it means that the prison systems of the Nordic countries are considered exceptionally humane. Among the indicators are cell size and other physical factors, a high awareness of prisoner rights, and progressive practices such as rehabilitation and the re-socialisation of prisoners.

For example, Crew, Ievins et al. (2022, p. 440) concluded that 'there is little doubt that the typical experience of imprisonment is more humane and less damaging in Norway than in England & Wales'. Comparisons with other societies, whether democracies like the USA – which has a notoriously brutal prison culture – yet alone authoritarian regimes like Russian or China, will throw the Nordics into an even more positive light. Plainly, at face value, Nordic identity can take much pride in its very humane approach to imprisonment. This article examines if Nordic prison exceptionalism is a valid proposition, how do Nordic prisons reflect their broader societies, and how does this relate to the idea of a pan-Nordic *identity*?

Viewing these societies as a whole, it is common to link carceral policy with the Nordic ideals of the welfare state and egalitarianism. To quote John Pratt (208, p. 120): 'The roots of Scandinavian (prison) exceptionalism are to be found in the highly egalitarian cultural values and social structures of these societies.' He argues rather broadly that the culture of 'sameness' (*likhet*) between citizens ensured that the conduct of everyday life reflects passivity, consensus, and norm-compliance.

One is justified in asking how valid such cultural generalisations are. How much of Nordic societies can be explained by such broad auto-stereotypes as, for instance, (Danish) *hygge,* (Swedish) *trygghet,* (Norwegian) *friluftsliv*, or (Finnish) *sisu*? How much *identity* can be predicated on such concepts (if such fuzzy generalisations can be elevated to the status of concepts)? Certainly, there have been prior scholarly attempts to gain insight into societies and cultures by examination of certain keywords. The pioneering work was done by Raymond Williams (1963/1958), and later by Anna Wierzbicka (1997). Critics of such an approach can argue that it contains a tendency towards essentialisation.

Identity: Reconciling individual and collective?

The term *identity* is so commonly used in the 21st century societal and political discourses that it is worth reviewing its origins and its varying interpretations. It was long associated with psychology, in particular with the work of Erik Eriksson (1902–1994), who coined the much-used phrase 'identity crisis' (Eriksson, 1950). His theory of the 'stages of psychosocial development' firmly locates identity within *individual* psychology. *Identity* is now often associated with 'identity politics', a term often deployed in a pejorative sense, and central to many contemporary controversies. How does the jump from individual psychology to group activity, i.e., politics, look under scrutiny? One useful definition of collective identity is that of Alberto Melucci (1989, p. 34):

> *Collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their action takes place.*

He further elaborates on this formulation by stating that collective identity needs three fundamental dimensions: *cognitive frameworks*, activating *relationships among actors*, and finally the making of *emotional investments*. Combined these 'enable individuals to recognise themselves in each other' (Melucci, 1989, p. 35).

So what is Nordic identity? Indeed, is there a single Nordic identity? In the 21st century, it is probable to say that the norms associated with the Nordics are progressive, egalitarian, and liberal. Certain measurables and metrics such as press freedom, lack of corruption, and the quality of life commonly show the Nordics among the top places internationally.

The World Happiness Report consistently ranks the Nordics in the leading places, alongside others such as Switzerland. Their calculations are based on six particular categories: gross domestic product per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom to make your own life choices, generosity of the general population, and perceptions of internal and external corruption levels. Yet, are there other ways of being Nordic? Certainly. One could posit a national romantic Nordic identity, and even within that, widely differing variants. To use two Norwegian examples, one could strongly admire Edvard Grieg's music and its use of Nordic mythology.

Yet, this benign cultural identity has a malignant twin, that is, the use of images, narratives, and figures from the same mythology by nationalist and xenophobic extremists. Both the vigilante group (founded in Finland but with branches in Norway and elsewhere) and the mass-murderer Anders Breivik identify as 'worshipers' of or as 'Soldiers of Odin'. Is this not validly Nordic, too? Indeed, culture might be a very uncertain guide. The gloom and angst of much Nordic artistic production – the darker sides of Strindberg, Bergman, and Von Trier, or the genre of Scandi Noir – provides a drastic contrast to the image of the planet's happiest societies.

Common institutions might provide a more reliable guide. The Nordic welfare model is surely central here, although this is not entirely free of cultural influences, albeit cultural influences embedded in institutions. For example, historian Pauli Kettunen (2019) sees the role of work in the Nordics as being related to the politics of maximising employment, but also as a manifestation of secular Lutheranism. Lars Trägårdh (2010) posits what he calls 'statist individualism', which is an interesting combination of the individual and the state in a unique social contact. He argues: 'In this scheme, the ideals of social equality, national solidarity and individual autonomy were joined to the beneficial power of the state. This is a social contract that profoundly differs from those of most other Western countries outside of Scandinavia.' (Trägårdh, p. 234) Here we have an explicit statement of Nordic political and societal exceptionalism, of which the Nordic carceral exceptionalism is a subset.

In the light of recent political and societal developments in the Nordics, one might ask if this particular model of social contract is now under assault, or at least, undergoing significant re-evaluation. The emergence of parties that have been described as Populist Radical Right (PRR) calls into question the more benign view of Nordic politics. The rise of the Danish's People's Party, the Finns, the Swedish Democrats, and the Progress Party in Norway have challenged the long-seated and stable party system. This older model was based on a spectrum of social democratic, communist/left-wing, conservative, agrarian, and liberal.

Writing a decade ago, Jungar and Jupskås (2014) proposed the emergence of a new 'family' of radical right-wing parties in the Nordics, with the proviso that since the 1970s Christian and Green parties have emerged and altered the five-party equation. However, those emerging parties have *not* challenged the traditional Nordic welfare social contract. The same cannot be said of the recent right-wing parties. What characterises them is a conservative, even authoritarian stance on social/cultural issues, and a centrist position on economic issues. They are all ethno-nationalist in identity, and especially critical of liberal and tolerant policies towards migrants.

Punishment and society

In his influential work *Punishment and Modern Society,* David Garland (1998) makes a bold and comprehensive argument about the nature of modern punishment. He notes that there are two very influential – but divergent – bodies of thought on the development of punishment in the world. He traces these to Foucault's Weberian stress on punishment as 'an increasingly passionless and professionalised instrumental process' (Garland 1998, p. 179). This, he notes, has been typically contrasted with a Durkheimian 'insistence that penality – even modern penality – is fundamentally a passionate reaction grounded in non-rational motivations and rituals' (Garland, p. 180).

One can see throughout the history of modern penality tensions between two (seemingly irreconcilable) philosophies of carcerality. In the Anglo-Saxon world, we see both the beginnings of progressive imprisonment and strong resistance to the same. In the British Isles, the late 1840s and 1850s saw huge challenges to their prison systems, caused by the social catastrophe of the Great Famine in Ireland, and in Britain the discontinuation of the deportation of prisoners to Australia. Both events led to large increases in prison population, triggering various legalistic, moral, and political arguments over how to approach this specific challenge.

New architecture was one approach to prison reform. There were also other approaches to making the prison experience more humane. In the mid-19th century, a distinct 'Irish System' was created. In that system, the stress was placed on education, on individualisation, and on finding employment for prisoners when re-introduced into society. Supervised parole was born out of this approach. However, there were many influential voices in the Victorian period who were also strongly opposed to any carceral reform; the point, after all, was punishment of men who were seen as evil.

Prison was not about reform or rehabilitation – its purpose was punitive. Harsh labour was part of this, with such devices as the treadwheel. The argument for the remnants of Durkheimian ritual of punishment is supported here. The tensions between progressive and punitive practices did not prevent what Garland calls the 'rationalization of punishment' (Garland, p. 180). They still resonate today.

In his study of US prisons, Robert Ferguson (2014, p. 16) notes how 'a culture punishes is part of its very meaning', which echoes Garland. Ferguson goes on to tabulate some of the familiar statistics of incarceration in the United States, which remain shocking. Some two million people are behind bars, a further seven million are under some form of supervision. This amounts to one out of every thirty-two adults in the United States. 67,5 percent of all prisoners are re-offenders (Ferguson, p. 17). Ferguson argues that the 'notions that prisons serve as "houses of correction" can no longer be maintained. They exist as holding pens with incapacitation as the objective' (Ferguson, p. 16). The question that arises from this discouraging picture is what this says about the broader society: 'Why hasn't a citizenry dedicated to freedom and individual rights rejected institutional horrors that begin to rival the gulags of Communist Europe and the former Soviet Union?' (Ferguson, p. 17) Why is there a lack of any *emotional investment* when other societies have plainly taken very different routes?

Carceration in the Nordics

Among the societies that have taken different routes, the Nordics stand out as counties that have embraced progressive carceration. There are many metrics to make this case. These include the low prison populations. The World Prison Brief (Europe) ranks countries in terms of prisoners per citizens; the leading jailers being Turkey, Belarus, and the Russian Federation. The Nordics all rank very well,

with very low prison populations (World Prison Brief Europe, 2023).

Despite low prison populations, however, there are a high number of prisons in the Nordics. This large number of facilities allows prisoners relative proximity to their home regions. Family and conjugal visits are encouraged. For example, at Halden prison in Norway, children are allowed to spend nights with their incarcerated parents in special family cottages. The general approach to health care is proactive and preventative, and in line with the principles of the Mandela Rules.

This is part of a holistic approach to imprisonment. Its purpose is the deprivation of liberty only of the internee; his or her rights are not to be violated. The Finnish Sentences Enforcement Act 2002 makes this explicit: 'The content of a prison sentence is loss or restriction of liberty. The enforcement of imprisonment must not place any other restrictions on the rights or circumstances of a prisoner than those provided by law or those necessary due to the sentence itself.' (Ministry of Justice, Finland 2022, p. 1). This is a wholly different approach to those aspects of incarceration in modern society that emphasise control and punishment.

Bastoy prison island in Norway has gained much international attention, hailed as the world's first human ecological prison. In Finland, there is an initiative for the creation of 'smart prisons'. The new prison for women in Hämeenlinna uses digital technology to allow inmates to, for example, contact health staff or take courses online.

Training for prison staff in the Nordics is sustained and systematic, and many prison officers have tertiary education levels. It takes 12 weeks in the UK to train a prison officer. In Norway, it takes two to three years. Officers often train alongside probation workers, seeing their duties as closely related. The ratio of staff to internees in uncommonly high, and there are greater degrees of trust between staff and internees than would be expected in other societies.

The question of *when* these progressive conditions came about is interesting. Norway, now enjoying international status for its excellent prison culture, was markedly different four decades ago. A BBC report noted that prior to the 1990s, Norwegian prisons were not interested in rehabilitation (BBC 2019). Recidivism rates were around 60–70 %, almost US levels.

Now in Norway, punishment is deprivation of liberty only. The other rights stay. Prisoners have the right to vote, attend school, learn new skills, exercise, and see their families. In fact, in many prisons, the security officers participate in activities like yoga right alongside the prisoners. This holistic approach is called 'dynamic security', and it is widely practiced in Nordic prisons (and elsewhere). It is a radical addition to 'static security', which is chiefly concerned with the physical and technical means of preventing escape.

In line with this approach, open prisons are common in the Nordics, many internees are allowed to move with relative freedom, and some even keep their current employment. Progress and educational programs are the norm, and strongly encouraged by the various prison authorities in the Nordic countries.

In 2018, Francis Parkes, a British Professor of criminology, 'embedded' himself in Kvíabryggja prison in Iceland. He noted the level of conviviality and trust: 'Prisoners have their own room keys but they leave their doors unlocked, pretty much at all times. This is a potent symbol: life in Kvíabryggja is all about trust' (The Independent, 16 November 2018). He also noted the remarkable lack of hostility towards sex offenders: 'As far as I could see the general conviviality is extended even to the sex offenders – a population almost universally reviled in prison and at risk as a result. Sometimes this conviviality is a stretch. But it did seem to work. Despite tensions inherent in any prison, people here

got on' (The Independent 2018).

One clear measure of the effectiveness of a given system of incarceration is the rate of re-offence committed by ex-prisoners. Norway has held the lowest recidivism rate in the world, typically about 20 %, in contrast to say the UK where many prisons have reconviction rates of more than 70 %. In Finland, the recidivism rate is 33 %, in Sweden 32 %, and Denmark 32 % (Yukhnenko, Farouki, and Fazel, 2022, p. 3).

In the larger context, one also has to factor in the justice system of the Nordics, and indeed, the crime profile of each country, as these impact positively on the carceral system. Factors here include the lower crime rates and the relative lack of budgetary pressure, both of which naturally have a positive influence on the prison systems. Efforts are made by the justice systems to avoid incarceration if possible. For example, in the Swedish Penal Code, there is a special provision that prescribes that in all cases the court 'is required to give notice to any circumstance or circumstances suggesting the imposition of a sentence milder than imprisonment' (Leijonram and Lindström, 2011, p. 559).

Certainly, the Nordic prison systems are expensive. Norway spends $93,000 each year per prisoner, the US only $31,000 (First Step Alliance, 2022). Economic factors also impact upon recidivism rates. Speaking generally, countries with high levels of income inequality and poverty tend to have higher incarceration rates and recidivism rates. In contrast, countries that invest in social welfare programs tend to have lower recidivism rates. Another economic factor is the drive towards privatisation of prisons. This too has resulted in higher recidivism rates and a cycle of incarceration for many individuals. Several American sources look with envy on the Nordic prison system, wishing that their country could adopt some of its better practices. However, they are doubtful of any such influence actually taking place.

The reasons are broadly societal. Not only do most Americans, as Ferguson (2014) argues, show zero concern for the brutality of their prisons, but they seem to accept that prisons are fundamentally places of punishment, rather than sites of (potential) rehabilitation. American citizens also do not have a social contact that works (in theory at least) against the expansion of inequality, as in the Nordics. Speaking very generally, the American sense of the individual is higher than that of the collective. It is categorically different to Trägårdh (2010) 'statist individualism'.

Questioning Nordic prison exceptionalism

There are, however, voices within carceral studies who question the orthodoxy of Nordic prison exceptionalism. For example, John Pratt (2007, p. 123) notes that 'Norway has been criticized by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention for often holding remand prisoners in "total isolation" (meaning exactly this) while police investigations continue'.

Other voices, such as Vanessa Barker (2017) have argued that despite the many positive and progressive elements, Nordic imprisonment can nonetheless be over-controlling and deeply unsympathetic to certain categories of offenders. Her notions of 'welfare nationalism' (people wishing to protect their living standards and welfare state) have been extended to connect with Lynn Haney's (2014) term 'penal nationalism'. This is defined by Barker as 'relying on coercive tools such as expulsion, eviction, criminalization, and penalization to respond to mass mobility, which is perceived to be a social threat to order rather than a political expression of rights' (Barker, 2017, p. 7).

Barker (2017, p. 7) sees penal nationalism as, among other things, a reaction to the pressures of globalisation on national economies: 'Under these unsettling conditions, penal nationalism seeks to reset the frame of reference as a national frame where the nation-state maintains its authority

over population and territory.' What happens, for example, if 'sameness'(*likhet*) is withheld from certain groups or individuals? In particular, as Anniak Bøstein Myhr (2021) argues, in their treatment of migrants, the impression of benign Nordic practices come under a harsher examination. She argues that some of the broader aspects of Nordic exceptionalism are failing, such as the acceptance of refugees and migrants: 'Given that the values of Nordic Exceptionalism as described by social scientists are waning, it may not be surprising that penal Nordic Exceptionalism has also become the subject of critical scholarly scrutiny' (Bøstein Myhr, 2021, p. 3).

Within the framework of penal nationalism, the position of Ethnic Minority Prisoners (EMS) is central. This is an area where the Nordic penal system has been accused of falling short of its stated intentions. Researcher Dorina Damsas has worked with Romanian and Roma prisoners in Norwegian prisons. The inmates complain of discrimination: 'They say that the officers treat them like they do because they are Romanians and that the officers are racists. Roma and Romanians feel that they are treated differently, and often say things like "they wouldn't ask a Norwegian prisoner to do this." Communication problems do not make it any easier' (Rabe and Ystehede, 2022, para. 6).

It is noted that 'Romanians and Roma are incarcerated in Norwegian prisons for many different types of criminal offenses. Primarily, there are infractions of the Immigration Act, as well as petty crime such as less serious violence and thefts, but in a few cases more serious crimes are involved' (Rabe and Ystehede, 2022, para. 10). As they are not Norwegian citizens, they seem to fall outside of Norwegian welfare. Most are deported to Romania, but they have dismal prospects there, and try to get back to Scandinavia as soon as they can.

In Finland, prison leave is less frequent for foreign nationals (as of 2018, some 13 % of prisoners) (Keinänen et al., 2022, p. 189). The issue is problematic, as the foreign nationals commonly do not have permanent residence to which they can be released. Treatment of ethnic minority prisoners is Sweden has also come under scrutiny. Camilla Svensson (2018, p. 3) makes a bold argument about Sweden's self-image as being free of prejudice is a hindrance to the identification of negative discrimination against minorities: 'In Sweden, there are denials of formations such as "we" and "them" at the structural and institutional levels, which complicates the problem of discrimination and its investigation.' Svensson argues: 'Discrimination is rarely explicit within the legal system since professionals of the judiciary have an intention to not discriminate' (Svensson, p. 7). She describes it as an unconscious process in which 'professionals are at risk of discrimination even if they have an intention to not to' (Svensson, p. 20).

In the Nordics, prison leave uses the technology of Electronic Monitoring (EM), which is gaining in popularity internationally. Typically, prisoners near the end of their sentence agree to wear a digital device that tracks their movements, while they spend the remainder of the sentence at home. Despite its evident advantages, EM as used in Finland and Sweden raises questions about prisoner rights.

Reviewing its Finnish use, Emma Villman (2023, p. 3) writes that 'available findings show that with fairly high certainty, early release from prison with EM does not increase recidivism and has other benefits, such as cost savings'. Yet she also notes that 'for others the intensity and extent of control might contribute to noncompliance and breach of the sentence' (Villman, p. 16).

If Norway continues to carry the flag for state-of-the-art Nordic carceral practices, Denmark has embarked on two troubling initiatives. In early 2016, the Vridsløselille prison in Denmark, which had functioned since the 1850s, closed its gates. Or, more accurately, closed its gates to *prisoners*. The facility was quickly taken back into use as a refugee centre by the Danish Prison and Probation Service. As Barker and Smith (2021, p. 1541) noted:

> *Within a very short time span, Vridsløselille changed its mission from imprisoning sentenced prisoners under a relatively liberal regime to imprisoning foreigners who had committed no crimes under a much stricter regime. This dramatic transformation in population and prison regime went smoothly, raising few questions within Denmark.*

In their article, they go on to 'deconstruct Nordic exceptionalism by uncoupling the punishment–welfare nexus, an analytical framework central to the sociology of punishment' (Barker and Smith, p. 1541). They argue that the disturbing tendency towards what they call 'crimmigration', in which unwanted migration, particularly by people of colour, is treated as a criminal justice issue, with an emphasis on detention and deterrence.[1]

In Vridsløselille, there was a first inspection of the facility in 2016 by Danish officials. The conditions they encountered were disturbing. The immigrants were locked up in their cells for most of the day and night, and were allowed only a single hour's exercise. They were not allowed to have their own phones, but were allowed to make one free call per week. Conditions did improve later, but by that time there had been one fatality in the facility (Barker and Smith, p. 1552).

Another recent Danish development is that the country has formally agreed to 'export' prisoners to Kosovo. The prisoners to be sent overseas are non-Danes who are due for deportation following their sentence. To quote the (then) Danish Justice Minister, Nick Haekkerup (a Social Democrat): 'With this agreement, Denmark is also sending a clear signal to foreigners from third countries who have been sentenced to deportation: your future is not in Denmark, so you should not serve your sentence there' (Euronews, 27/04/2022).

The public justification for this move is practical: Denmark's prison population increased 19 % between 2015 and early 2021. This was exacerbated by a steady decline in the number of prison officers in Denmark. This was the third agreement in Europe since 2010 on renting prison cells in a second country. The first was between Belgium and the Netherlands (as a receiver country) and second between Norway and the Netherlands, again as a receiver (Kjaer, Minke and Vanhouche 2021, p. 5). There was no prior European cell renting agreements, although the practice was common in the US. It is interesting that the progressive Nordics were two of the sender countries. Is this practice compatible with progressive carceration?

Two immediate problems arise. Firstly, does this not violate the visitation rights of the prisoners who will be transported? It makes visits by spouses or children of prisoners very impractical. Secondly, will prisoners' rights be protected at secondary sites, especially if these are not Danish prisons, but rather sites in Kosovo? The Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) visited Kosovo's detention centres and published a report in 2021 (Council of Europe, CPT, 2021). While not overly damning of Kosovo's detention centres, the report does point out abuses that would not be tolerable in a Nordic prison, including beatings, coercion to extract confessions, sub-standard facilities, and corruption among guards. Beyond these immediate concerns, one might ask if the 'outsourcing' of prisoners to a poorer country might not be a step to the privatisation of prisons.

1. They attribute the term to Juliet Stumpf from 2006.

Conclusions

The premises of this article were to discuss Nordic identity, and to do so from the distinct perspective of Nordic penal exceptionalism, questioning the solidity of both. Collective identity, it was argued, is fluid and can be multiple. However, there is strong case for a normative and progressive Nordic identity based on a specific welfare state model with high level of egalitarianism and respect for human rights.

As part of this broader identity, there is specifically a Nordic penal exceptionalism, which seems to align with the best of a progressive, humane Nordic identity. Even voices critical of Nordic penal exceptionalism admit its value to identity. Barker and Smith (2021, p. 1546) noted that Finland 'remade its national identity in part through minimizing and reshaping penal power'.

However, the emergence of nationalist and xenophobic parties across the Nordics does pose a challenge to the, generally successful, image of a cluster of countries with egalitarian and humane values as central to their politics, societies, values, and identity. There is now a real threat to the well-established and admired Nordic social contract. As a subset of Nordic exceptionalism, Nordic prison exceptionalism seems to be disuniting. Norway still inspires global admiration for it state of the art standards – some shortcomings have been noted above – whereas Denmark is embracing some questionable and regressive practices.

References

Barker, V. (2017) *Nordic Nationalism and Penal Order, Walling the Welfare State.* London: Routledge.

Barker, V. and Smith, P. (2021) 'This is Denmark: Prison Islands and the Detention of Immigrants', *The British Journal of Criminology*, 61(6), November 2021. DOI: 0.1093/bjc/azab016.

BBC. (2019) 'How Norway turns criminals into good neighbours' BBC News, 7.7. 2019.

Bernstein, M. (2005) 'Identity Politics', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31.

Blomberg, H. and Kildal, N. (eds.) (2010) *Workfare and welfare state legitimacy*, The Nordic Centre of Excellence NordWel.

Bøstein Myhr, A. (2021) 'Challenging Nordic Exceptionalism: Norway in Literature by and about Irregular Migrants', *Law & Literature*. DOI: 10.1080/1535685X.2021.1930693.

Council of Europe. (2021) *United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo on the visit to Kosovo carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT)*, Strasbourg.

Erikson, E. (1950) *Childhood and Society,* New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Erwin, J. (2013) 'The Norwegian prison where inmates are treated like people', *Guardian*, 25.2.2013.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990) 'The Three Political Economies of the Welfare State', *International Journal of Sociology*, 20(3), The Study of Welfare State Regimes (Fall, 1990), pp. 92-123.

Euronews (with AFP) (2022) 'Denmark agrees €15 million deal to send 300 foreign prisoners to Kosovo' 27.04.2022 [online]. Available at: https://www.euronews.com/2022/04/27/denmark-agrees-15-million-deal-to-send-300-foreign-prisoners-to-kosovo (Accessed: 30 June 2023)

Ferguson, R. A. (2014) *Inferno, An Anatomy of American Punishment.* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press.

Foucault, M. (1975) *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison.* London: Penguin/Random House.

Garland, D. (1998) *Punishment and Modern Society, A Study of Social Theory.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Goborit, L. S., and Jefferson, A. M. (2015) *Human Rights in Prisons: Comparing Institutional Encounters in Kosovo, Sierra Leone and the Philippines.* London: Palgrave Studies in Prisons and Penology.

Haney, L. (2016) 'Prisons of the Past: Penal nationalism and the politics of punishment in Central Europe', *Punishment & Society*, 18(3), pp. 346–368.

Janjevic, D. (2021) 'Denmark to ship prisoners off to Kosovo' *DW*, 12.15.2021.

Jones, R. S. and Ekunwe, I. O. (2011) 'Doing Re-entry: Accounts of Post-prison release in Finland and the United States' Social and Cultural Sciences Faculty Research and Publications [online]. Available at: https://epublications.marquette.edu/socs_fac/138 (Accessed: 30 June 2023)

Jungar, A. C. and Jupskås, A. R. (2014) 'Populist Radical Right Parties in the Nordic Region: A New and Distinct Party Family?' *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 37(3) Doi: 10.1111/1467-9477.12024.

Keinänen, A., Kilpeläinen, M., Pajuoja J., and Tyni S. (2020) 'Prison Leave in Finland: Legal and Empirical Fundamentals of an Established Practice', *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 26.

Kettunen, P. (2019) 'The Concept of Society in the Making of the Nordic Welfare State' in Kuhnle, S., Pelle,

P., and Hort, S. E. O., (eds.), *Globalizing Welfare: An Evolving Asian-European Dialogue*. Globalization and Welfare series 9. London: Edward Elgar, pp. 143-161, https://doi.org/10.4337/978178897584.

Kjaer Minke, L. and Vanhouche, A. S. (2023) 'Renting cells abroad: Understanding contemporary policy responses to prison overcrowding', *Nordic Journal of Criminology*, 24(1)

Leijonram, E. and Lindström, P. (2011) Swedish Ministry of Justice, Report [online]. Available at: http://rageuniversity.com/PRISONESCAPE/PRISON%20THEORY/Swedish%20prison%20system.pdf (Accessed: 30 June 2023)

Melucci, A. (1989) *Nomads of the Present, Social Movements and Individual need in Contemporary Society*. London: Hutchinson Radius.

Ministry of Justice, Finland. (2022) [online]. Available at: https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2005/en20050767_20220222.pdf.

Nettavisen Nyheter. (2016) 'Breivik: - Odin er min gud', 16.03.2016.

Parkes, F. (2018) 'In Icelandic prisons, the cells are open and inmates do the weekly food shop', *The Independent*, 16.11.2018.

Prison Insights. (2023) 'Exploring Incarceration and Recidivism Lessons from Abroad', June 17, 2023 [online]. Available at: https://prisoninsight.com/exploring-incarceration-and-recidivism-lessons-from-abroad/ (Accessed: 30 June 2023)

Rabe, I. K. and Ystehede, P. J. (2022) 'They don't treat Norwegian prisoners like that', Oslo. Department of Criminology and Sociology of Laws.

Rentzmann, W. (2008) 'Danish Prison and Probation—Prison policy, prison regime and prisoners' rights in Denmark', William Proceedings of the Colloquium of the IPPF, Stavern, Norway, 25-28 June, Nijmegen: Wolf Legal Publishers.

Smith, P. (2008) *Punishment and Culture*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Svensonn, C. (2018) 'Disparities in sentencing depending on ethnicity, gender, and age as an outcome of discrimination within the Swedish legal system: an intersectional analysis.' Malmö University: Faculty of health and society, Department of Criminology.

Trägårdh, L. (2020) 'Rethinking the Nordic welfare state through a neo-Hegelian theory of state and civil society' *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 15(3), pp. 227-239, DOI:10.1080/13569317.2010.513853.

Villman, E. (2023) 'Early release from prison with electronic monitoring: Hook for or hindrance to change?' *Journal of Criminality and Criminal Justice*, Feb 2023, https://doi.org/10.1177/17488958221080887.

Wierzbicka, A. (1997) *Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese*. New York and Oxford: OUP.

Williams, R. (1963/1958) *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Williams, R. (1976) *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. London: Fontana.

Weizman, J. (2022) 'Denmark's overflowing prisons', Kosovo 2.0, 10.02.2022 [online]. Available at: https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/denmarks-overflowing-prisons/ (Accessed: 30 June 2023)

World Happiness Report (2022) Available at https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2022/ (Accessed: 30 June 2023)

World Prison Brief (Europe) Available at https://www.prisonstudies.org/ (Accessed: 30 June 2023)

Yukhnenko. D., Farouki. L. and Fazel. S., (2023) 'Criminal recidivism rates globally: A 6-year systematic review update' *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 88 102155.

Nordic Review of International Studies

The Nordic Review of International Studies (NRIS) publishes peer-reviewed scholarly contributions within the field of International Relations (IR), focusing specifically on Nordic perspectives. The NRIS is committed to publishing articles that examine the international sphere empirically, theoretically, or institutionally from a Nordic angle. The aim of the NRIS is to foster scholarly debates on international politics within and concerning the wider Nordic region. The NRIS embraces interdisciplinary approaches and appreciates a wide range of theoretical and methodological choices.

The journal is published by the Finnish International Studies Association (FISA) and committed to the principles of Open Access publishing.

FISA Finnish International Studies Association