

The Nordic model and its contemporary inhabitants

– exploring stability and change from a micro perspective

Christian Albrekt Larsen

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The societies developed in the Nordic countries attract widespread international attention. These societies are among the richest in the world, they are among the most equal in the world, and their inhabitants seem to be among the happiest in the world. These merits and the fact that these countries are secularised, have (post)modern family structures, and always have been (small) open economies increase the interest; the Nordic countries seem to provide a successful model for establishing a well-functioning post-modern society in a globalised economy. Therefore it is no wonder that there has been a large scholarly interest in the function of the Nordic countries. The most famous contribution is without doubt Esping-Andersen's work "The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism" (1990) where he describes the existence of a social democratic welfare regime in the Nordic countries that can be distinguished from the conservative welfare regime found in the Continental European countries and the liberal welfare regime found in the Anglo-Saxon countries. This work substantiated the idea of a "Nordic model" and despite internal variations comparative statistics continues to show that the Nordic countries distinguish themselves. The suggested research program wants to explain how this seemingly coherent (seen from a larger comparative perspective) "Nordic model" is reproduced. Thus, the task is to explain why people living in the "Nordic model" continue to make decisions that underpin the institutional settings; why do the inhabitants continue to support heavy redistribution (project 1), why do the inhabitants continue to trust each other (project 2), why do the inhabitants continue to support state solutions (project 3), why do inhabitants continue to supply labour (project 4), and how is the new inhabitants (immigrants) influenced by the institutional characteristic of the "Nordic model" (project 5). The thesis is that one can only understand this process of reproduction by understanding the links between the institutional characteristics of the "Nordic model" (which are well described) and the orientations, values and beliefs among people living in these structural settings.

There are four main reasons for engaging in this endeavour of establishing a "micro foundation"; 1) feedback processes are central to the dominant theories in the field but the exact mechanisms are seldom specified and analysed, 2) many of the political forces that created the "Nordic model" have weakened, which makes it difficult to explain the (seemingly) stability, 3) due to the lack of a micro foundation many previous studies are not sensitive to the possibility of change, and 4) a bulk of new micro data, which still are little explored, makes the project feasible.

Firstly (1), the lack of a theoretical micro foundation in comparative welfare state research is eminent. Esping-Andersen writes that “welfare states are key institutions in the structuring of class and the social order” (1990:55) and “each case will produce its own unique fabric of social solidarity” (1990:58) but the exact mechanisms are not specified and analysed empirically. The power resource theory (Korpi 1983) also highlights the importance of feedback processes – one of them being that comprehensive welfare schemes strengthen the working class movement - but besides measuring compensation rates the micro level is not empirically analysed. In 1998 Korpi & Palme rightly argue that “the empirical testing of the macro-micro-links among institutions and the formation of interest and coalitions provides a major challenge for social scientists” (1998: 682). The feedback idea is also prominent in Pierson’s (1996, 2000, 2001) work on “the new politics of the welfare state”; he uses the term path-dependency to highlight the impact of feedback. It is e.g. claimed that the degree of electoral resistance to welfare reforms is highly influenced by the institutional structures of the welfare state. But besides some simple self-interest arguments (Pierson e.g. calculate the number of public employees and welfare recipients in different countries, 2001: 413) the macro-micro link is not analysed. These scholars are (partly) excused by the fact that at the time of writing not much comparative micro level data was available. As comparative micro data on beliefs, attitudes and values have become available there has been a move towards empirical analyses (see references below) but often these studies are theoretically guided by the very general statements provided by previous scholars i.e. in many cases the exact mechanisms remain unclear.

Secondly (2), the relevance of analysing the micro level is increased by the fact that many of the forces that created the “Nordic model” seem weakened. If we take Esping-Andersen’s work the regime concept was used to highlight the interplay between the state (in the Nordic case characterised by public services and universal benefits), the market (in the Nordic case characterised by a Protestant work ethic, high wages, high employment rates and active labour market policies) and the family (in the Nordic case characterised by dual earner families, Lewis 1992). But the historical forces behind this social democratic welfare regime have clearly changed. The social democratic parties, which controlled the state, have lost their monopoly on political power (which they had throughout most of the post-war period, especially in Sweden). The unions, which controlled the labour market, have also lost power (at least in terms of class awareness). The women’s movement, which advanced the dual earner family structure, has also lost political power. And even our religious beliefs seem to decline. Therefore it is difficult to explain stability by referring to the political forces that created the “Nordic model”. Thus, just in order to explain (the seemingly) stability we need to look for new theoretical explanations.

The research program will take a number of new theoretical arguments into account. One of the arguments, which dominate much of current historical research (but which also seem to gain acceptance within political science e.g. Smith 2003), is that the “Nordic model” needs to be understood as a “national creed” linked to the process of nation building. Historians also pay attention to the fact that the “Nordic creed” was developed in small and very homogeneous states (see e.g. the NordWel network). However, even if the “Nordic model” is to be understood as a socially constructed “creed for equality within small homogeneous nation state” it still needs to be explained how these national creeds are reproduced in a period with more ethnic heterogeneous populations and less stable identities (including the national identity). In our view this can only be done by turning to the perceptions, attitudes and values of the individuals living inside the “Nordic model” i.e. to go to micro level. We cannot compare the national “imagined communities” (Anderson 1991) of the Nordic countries of the 19th century with those of today. But we can analyse how the current “creed for economic equality” is reproduced and influenced by feelings of national belonging (see project 1). Besides this “creed argument” the projects listed below will take the point of departure that the forces that reproduce the “Nordic model” might not be the same as the forces that created the “Nordic model”. One theoretical suggestion (see project 2) is that the current Nordic societies are caught in a high-end equilibrium of social trust, which enables humans to function and act in highly differentiated societies (e.g. Luhmann 1979), make democracy work (e.g. Putnam 1993) and even produce economic growth (e.g. Knack & Keefer 1997). Project 3, 4 and 5 builds on more specific theoretical frameworks. Project 3 takes its point of departure in the theory of contingent consent (Levi 1988), project 4 takes its point of departure in economic theories that incorporate norms (Akerloft 1980; Frey 1998), and project 5 takes its point of departure in theories about recognition (e.g. Fraser 1995). The ambition is not to develop one grand theory but to construct a fruitful interplay between a number of meso- and micro theories and empirical data. However, there is a shared ambition of developing explanations where the individuals act within the institutional settings of the “Nordic model” without being fully rational (as in the simplest rational choice theory) or “culturally doped” (as in the simplest macro sociological theory).

Thirdly (3), besides explaining stability, a better theoretical micro foundation will also make the analyses much more sensitive to the possibility of change. It is a basic insight, e.g. from Giddens structuration theory (1984), that it is “disruptions” in the process of reproduction that drives change. If important subgroups become reluctant towards economic redistribution, loose faith in fellow citizens and the state, or lower the strong work orientations then the “Nordic model” is likely to change. These “disruptions” might naturally be caused by macro level changes – it is e.g. a classic argument that the general process of individualisation decreases solidarity and it is a prevalent argument that a large inflow of immigrants might drive interpersonal trust and support for

welfare benefits down (Alesina & Glaser 2004) – but the effects can be analysed at the individual level. Methodologically a classic way to identify such “disruptions” is to analyse time trends (in the case when time series are available) and to analyse differences among generations and other subgroups (when only cross-sectional data are available). Thus, one needs to disaggregate the analyses much more than is typically the case in comparative studies (but see Svallfors 2006/7 for an exception). Though social science is bad at producing predictions such analyses will enhance our understanding of current dilemmas and will be open to the idea that the Nordic countries might develop in different directions.

Fourthly (4), the ambition of analysing the micro foundation of the “Nordic model” is feasible. The research program benefits from the fact that the amount of available micro level data have increased dramatically within the last decade. Thus, the task in the projects described below is not to collect new data. The task is to explore and make much better use of the available data. A number of scholars have already used these possibilities (e.g. Svallfors 1997, 2006, 2007; Brooks & Manza 2007; Larsen 2006; Oorschot, Opielka Pfau-Effinger 2008; Oorschot 2010; Lolle & Torpe 2010ab) but it is fair to say that much of the data is still very little explored. And few studies have a distinct focus on the Nordic countries (but see Ervasti et al. 2008). On the methodological side the research program will improve the field by disaggregating the analyses (e.g. look for generational effects), incorporate new data (which both gives better measurement and more points in time), and apply better statistical methods (multilevel regression (which enable us to distinguish between macro and micro effects) and structural equation models (which enable us to improve the causal reasoning). But at the same time the research program will remain true to the very premise of comparative research; namely that the Nordic patterns can only be understood if they are compared to the patterns of non-Nordic countries.

Project 1: The Nordic creed of equality – stability or change?

(PhD project NN)

It is crucial to understand that the “Nordic model” was part of a larger nation building process. Asked about national pride it is clear that welfare schemes have turned into a strong national symbol for Nordic citizens (e.g. Larsen 2008). Thus, in order to understand stability and possible change it is important to theorise and analyse the reproduction of the “Nordic creed”. Central to all national creeds is the idea of establishing equality among members of a given nation state. In order to establish democracy one basically needs to have equal civic and political rights. It is a fact that across Western European countries there is strong public support for these basic democratic rights (e.g. Deth, Montero & Westholm 2007). More interestingly is the idea of economic equality, which historically has been a crucial part of the “Nordic creed”. It is also this part of the creed that

constitutes a moral foundation for the extreme degree of redistribution that takes place in the Nordic countries. Therefore the theoretical aim of the project is to theorise how the institutions of the social democratic welfare regime influences the reproduction of this “creed of equality”. In this field Homans is often cited for the feedback argument that “the rule of distributive justice is a statement of what ought to be, and what people say ought to be, is determined, in the long run, and with some lag, by what they find in fact to be the case” (Homans 1974). This might be true but we need a micro theoretical argument that specifies the mechanisms that underpin this feedback process. Here one promising theoretical starting point is the psychological literature that has demonstrated the human need to believe in a just world (see the Lerner experiments; Lerner 1980).

Empirically little is known about the Nordic countries, as none of them were included in Klugel’s (et al) comparative studies but measured by public support for increased redistribution (World Value Survey (WVS)) the Nordic populations seem to be more and more sceptical about redistribution. However, the finding is troubled by the fact that respondents are asked in relative terms; as inequality increases it might only be natural that support for more redistribution decreases. This project will advance the field by using the ISSP module on social inequality, which was conducted in 1999 (Norway, Denmark, Sweden plus 31 others countries) and replicated in 2009 (including Finland). The 1999 data have been freely available but despite the fact that the module contains the best measures of attitudes towards economic equality (e.g. absolute measures of the perception of fair wages for different occupations) the data has been little explored; both in a Nordic and in a broader international context. The 2009 data is still in process but will be available by the start of the project period. The more precise measures, the possibility to compare with non-Nordic countries and the time span of a decade will create very good possibilities for a successful PhD-project. Finally it should be mentioned that the ISSP data will be supplemented with national Nordic data series (primarily from the Nordic election studies) that goes back to the 1980s and 1970s.

Project 2: The Nordic social trust – stability or change?

(C.A. Larsen & H. Lolle)

As already mentioned social trust has been described as a main candidate for explaining the contemporary stability of the “Nordic model”. It is an empirical fact that interpersonal trust is extremely high in the Nordic countries and that trust levels actually increases in Denmark and Sweden (e.g. Larsen 2007; Lolle & Torpe 2010b). The Nordic exceptionalism in terms of interpersonal trust has been researched but again there is a need to improve the micro theory and to conduct much more detailed analyses. Rational choice theory (e.g. Axelrod 1986) and micro sociological theory (e.g. Hardin 2002) provide a promising theoretical starting point but there is a

need to specify the link between the institutions of the social democratic welfare regimes and trust levels. In a Nordic context the theoretical argument is dominated by Rothstein who delivers an argument about how trust in the state “rubs of” to interpersonal trust (e.g. 2001, 2005). However, it is difficult to determine the direction of causality and at the individual level interpersonal trust and trust in the state is only weakly correlated (see Uslaner 2002 for a detailed critique). The project will try to develop this field by theorising how the outcome of the “Nordic model” – in terms of economic equality, low poverty and modest housing segregation – influences interpersonal trust.

The project continues currently ongoing research on the link between economic inequality and interpersonal trust in USA, UK, Sweden and Denmark (Larsen), the link between ethnic homogeneity and interpersonal trust (Lolle) and an attempt to sharpen the methodological aspects of measuring interpersonal trust and happiness (Lolle). It is a fact that it is extremely difficult to draw causal inferences in this field – and so it will be for this project. But the endeavour is worth pursuing, as there are good theoretical reasons to believe that interpersonal trust deliver the basic foundation for the high degree of collective action that takes place in the Nordic countries. Empirically the project is based on WVS, ESS (European Social Survey), and ISSP data, which all contain trust questions. The investigators also have access to specific survey modules conducted in the British BSA (2009), the Swedish ISSP (2009) and the Danish ISSP (2008 and 2009). Finally the project will be based on experiments conducted among Danish and Swedish students. The experiments allow us to make specific tests of some of the causal mechanisms suggested in the general project.

Project 3: The Nordic belief in government – stability or change?

(PhD project NN)

A Nordic “creed of equality” might provide a moral foundation and the high trust levels might provide a basic foundation for collective action. But the “Nordic model” is also dependent on strong beliefs in government. This is the area where the link between the institutions of the social democratic welfare regime and the micro level is best theorised and analysed (e.g. Svallfors 1997 Larsen 2006; Brooks & Manza 2007). The most promising micro theoretical line of reasoning is the idea of contingent support (Levi e.g. 1988). The idea can be develop in various ways. Rothstein has e.g. researched on the importance of perceptions of procedural justice in the universal welfare state (1998) and Goul Andersen has highlighted the importance of public trust in economic sustainability and perceived efficiency of state institutions (2008).

However, despite the micro theoretical interest the field have been troubled by a lack of empirical data. (1) Typically the items have been too general; in the WVS the items do not measure much more than support for (more) redistribution. Thus, the public have not been asked

about feelings of fair treatment, perceptions of efficiency of various institutions, and perceptions about the economic sustainability of the welfare state. (2) Most studies are based on one moment in time (typically 1996 where Norway and Sweden conducted the ISSP role of government module). Therefore – at least in the international literature – the Nordic beliefs in government are often described as stable, as predicted by Esping-Andersen, Korpi & Pierson. But again many of these studies have not really tested a micro theoretical argument and they have not looked for “disruptions” in the process of reproduction.

The project will advance the previous studies by testing the suggested micro theoretical arguments on new and better data material. The data source will be 1) the ESS from 2008, which contains more of the relevant items for a contingent support perspective, 2) the ISSP role of government module that was conducted in 2006, which gives us more points in time but still is little explored, and 3) a comparative Danish and Norwegian dataset (2006/2009), which included detailed perception of procedural justice, efficiency and economic sustainability in specific sectors (especially old-age pension, unemployment insurance and health care). The latter also contain detailed questions on support for privatisation of specific sectors.

Project 4: The Nordic work and family orientations – stability or change?

(Post doc project NN)

In order to be economic sustainable the “Nordic model” is heavily dependent on supply of labour; using the terms of economics it is necessary that many choose to participate on the labour market and that many choose to work many hours. In the ideal type social democratic regime described by Esping-Andersen this supply of labour was in the 1970s and 1980s secured by a female strive towards the labour market; made possibly by child care facilities, individualised tax systems, and the general expansion of the service sectors. Underneath this development was a Protestant work ethic and new social norms about double-earner family structures (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Lewis 1992). But again the suggested feedback process are little theorised and analysed.

On the micro level the question about labour supply is normally analysed within the economic discipline, which tends to construct models around variations in (short term) economic incentives. This often leads to worries about whether the Nordic work orientations can continue to be reproduced. The worries become severe when economists look into the future. If the Nordic countries will continue to become richer the models suggest that future generations will choose leisure time (or family time) over work (e.g. The Danish Welfare Commission 2006). However, within this framework it is somewhat of a mystery how labour supply can actually be so high in a situation where both economic incentives to participate at the labour market and economic incentives to work many hours seem modest by comparative standards. Thus, to understand the

labour supply behind the “Nordic model” we need a theory of non-economic incentives and empirical analyses of these.

The theoretical alternative to the neo-classic account of labour supply is often inspired by sociological theories that highlight the importance of stigmatisation of non-workers, new family norms and an increased demand for self-realisation (e.g. Goul Andersen & Clement 2006). Survey studies have e.g. shown that the inhabitants of the Nordic countries seem to have the largest non-financial work incentives in Western Europe (e.g. Larsen 2003). Thus, it seems reasonable to argue that the lack of economic incentives in the Nordic model is counterbalanced by strong work orientations. But again most studies only provide aggregated correlations, do not theorise the macro-micro link properly, and rarely look for “disruptions”. Therefore the theoretical point of departure will be micro economic theory that (due to the acknowledgement of severe information problems) tries to incorporate norms (e.g. Akerloft 1980, Georges & Romme 1990; Frey 1998). Our theoretical ambition is to specify how the Nordic context influences norms of work without operating with actors that are fully informed “economic men” or cultural “doped” puppets.

Empirically, the main contribution from this post doc -project is to provide comparative empirical evidences in the field. The main data source will be the ISSP work orientation module that was fielded in 1997 and again in 2005 (from Norway data is also available in 1989). The project will also use data from the ISSP family and gender module that was conducted in 1994 and 2002. Again these data sources are little explorer (but see Esser 2008 on non-financial commitment), provide more points in time, and enable us to compare Nordic patterns with international patterns.

Project 5: The new Nordic inhabitants and their orientations – stability or change?

(Post doc; Karen Breidahl Nielsen)

This post doc project will address the orientations of immigrants and their descendents. The point of departure is that immigrants provide excellent cases for exploring the feedback processes of the institutional structure of the “Nordic model”. If these feedback processes are strong we expect that immigrants (here defined as non-Nordic persons) quickly will come to hold “Nordic orientations” (see e.g. Kuhmlin & Rothstein 2010 for a study of trust increase among immigrants). We would also expect that the immigrants of the Nordic countries will come to have other orientations than immigrants coming into liberal or conservative welfare regimes. If the feedback processes are weak, immigrants can be expected to uphold cultural orientations and we should observe few cross-national variations in the orientation of immigrants. The dependent variables will be family and work orientations (especially among first and second generation women), attitudes to economic inequality, interpersonal trust and belief in government.

The relevance of the of project is increased by the fact the Nordic countries have adopted were different policies towards immigrants, which the investigator covers in her PhD project. It has even been argued that the Nordic countries belong to different integration regimes (Koopmans 20109; Denmark is often described as a “hardliner” in terms of demand for assimilation and Sweden as a clear-cut case of multiculturalism, e.g. Breidahl 2009). Thus, besides cross regime variation we might also expect variation across the Nordic countries. One central question is whether variations in cultural recognition (Fraser 1995) lead to variations in orientations of immigrants living in Denmark and Sweden; theoretically one can both expect compliance and disobedience (e.g. Whiteley 1999). It is e.g. a fact that participation rates especially are low among Swedish female immigrants but it is unclear to what extent this is caused by labour market structures or individual orientations.

The ambition is again to provide empirical evidence that can be evaluated in a comparative context. We are aware of data limitations but will make an effort to construct a reasonable database. The project will lump together the immigrants (both Western and Non-western) interviewed in the many ISSP, ESS and WVS surveys and make analyses on basic variables. This enables us to compare the new Nordic inhabitants with native populations and immigrants in other countries. The conclusions will naturally be restricted by the fact that drop out rates in ordinary surveys are high among immigrants. Therefore the project also relies on national surveys where immigrants (or a high share of immigrants) are interviewed. In Denmark the survey data are fairly comprehensive (we use the survey on work and education attitudes among young immigrants and their parents, 2006/7, and the new Danish citizenship survey from 2010). In Sweden and Norway data sources are scarcer but in Norway the “level of living among immigrants 2005/6” is available and in Sweden the “Swedish citizenship survey 2002/03” and “Everyday life and politics in Greater Stockholm” is available.

Organisation

The research team will be headed by C. A. Larsen who previously has researched the macro-micro links both in terms of beliefs in government, social trust, and orientations at the labour market. His 2006 book was e.g. given the following review from Esping-Andersen”...Christian Albrekt Larsen succeeds, like none before him, in uncovering the precise mechanisms that shape citizens' support for policy. And he does it with rigor and elegance. This is a book that must be read”. In the review in *Sociology* (vol. 43:3) A. T. Hanson wrote “Prof. Larsen has written a work of startling clarity on a topic that does not usually inspire such vision. His work on the institutional logic of welfare attitudes is a rare attempt to answer a fundamental question that is often overlooked in academic attempts to account for societal behaviour: do the welfare regimes of particular countries

influence the attitudes of their inhabitants?”. H. Lolle has also conducted research on the Nordic welfare state, has a long experience in teaching quantitative methods, and is one of the leading Danish researchers in applying multilevel regression. Both senior scholars are members of the Danish election study and the Danish ISSP program, which gives good knowledge about data availability. K. Breidahl is early in her PhD project but has already a number of publications. Professor Jørgen Goul Andersen (Aarhus University, Political Science), Professor Bo Rothstein (Göteborg University; Political science), and Professor Wim Van Oorschot (Tilburg University, Sociology) have agreed to serve as advisors for the research program. All three are leading capacities in the field and will annually be invited to comment on preliminary results. Finally it should be mentioned that the research team will be embedded in the Centre for Comparative Welfare Studies (1995-) at Aalborg University.

International embedding

The research team will use the contacts established in the European network of excellence (RECWOWE) and in the Nordic network of excellence (REASSESS) where CCWS is a partner. In CCWS PhD-students are required to study one semester in another country. In this research program the PhD's and Post-doc's are planned to conduct field research at Gothenburg University (1/1 2013 – 1/6 2013). Sweden is chosen because it serves as the model country of “the Nordic model” (in the international literature). Gothenburg University is chosen 1) because it hosts the Swedish election study and the SOM surveys, i.e. there is good local knowledge about Swedish survey data, and 2) because it hosts the Quality of Government institute, which is of especially relevance for project 2 and 3. The research results will naturally be presented and discussed at international conferences organised within the networks of excellence in which CCWS is embedded. However, the research team will also make an effort to link to the US sociological research, as it often shares the ambition of providing micro theory, often operate with actors with rationality (bounded), and often study labour supply. The research team will participate in the annual conference of the American Sociology Association in 2013 (without papers) and in 2014 (with papers).

Timetable

The applied research program runs from 1/6 2011 to 31/5 2015. The research group of six persons is planned to function and develop as a team. The two PhD-students and the first post-doc will start at the same time (1/1 2012 to 31/12 2014), which is crucial in order to develop a group with advanced skills in analysing survey data. Within the first eight months the group will be trained in multilevel regression and structural equation modelling (both national and international courses e.g. Essex

summer school). The second post doc project runs from 1/5 2012 to 31/4 2015. The applicant will join the methodological courses. As all data material will be available when the research program starts, there is little that can disrupt the timetable.

Deliverables

The main output from project 1 and 3 will be two PhD-theses. The PhD-students will be given the choice between writing a monograph or a number of international per-review articles. Project 2 will deliver four to five international per-review articles. Project 4 and 5 will deliver two to three international per-review articles per project. Besides these project specific outputs the research team will produce one English book “The Nordic model and its contemporary inhabitants” (edited by Larsen) that summarizes the cross-project findings. The research team will also deliver a book in Nordic language (edited by Larsen) targeted at a broader Nordic audience. We predict a considerable public (Nordic) interest as cross-national survey findings are easy to communicate and judged by media attention (e.g. Larsen 2008; 1999) the public seem to have a considerable interest in understanding what distinguish the Nordic way of living.

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