Introduction

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The Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden have had a close relationship through history – politically, culturally, socially, and economically. At various points in the past, the five countries have shared common rules and laws, and were even one united kingdom (The Kalmar Union) in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, but since 1917 (1944 for Iceland), all the countries have been sovereign.

The close relationship between the Nordic states continues up to this day, both on a structural level and with regard to a kind of common Nordic belonging. The Nordic Council was founded in 1952 in order to promote cooperation between the countries (Finland was added in 1955). In 1971, the Nordic Council of Ministers was founded with the aim of coordinating intergovernmental cooperation among the Nordic countries. Initiatives included establishing a common labour market and a common passport union, making free movement between the Nordic countries a natural part of Nordic life long before free movement was possible within the European Union. This cooperation and the ideology behind it is often referred to as The Nordic Model, a specific kind of welfare state offering free education, health care, social services, and so forth, which was developed from the late nineteenth century onwards (Alestalo et al., 2009).

As a result of the Nordic region becoming a more homogenised economic and cultural entity, there has been extended cooperation between the Nordic media at an institutional level. One example is Nordvision, a collaboration initiated in 1958 between the broadcasters DR (Denmark), NRK (Norway), SR (Sweden), and YLE (Finland), with the addition of RUV (Iceland) in 1966. Nordvision is, similar to the European joint initiative Eurovision, organised by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), a pan-Nordic cooperation for the sharing of content between the member states, with the underlying aim of strengthening the Nordic

identity, as well as the more financially motivated goal of lowering the costs of production for national broadcasters in the context of small language communities (Hjarvard, 1997). Another newer initiative is the Nordic Film and TV Fund established in 1990 with the purpose of promoting film and television production of high quality through supporting top-up project funding.

Other media-related pan-Nordic collaborations include the attempts to launch a common Nordic satellite with NORDSAT in the early 1980s (Wormbs, 2003). Although this plan never really materialised, it was indicative of the will to strengthen the Nordic cultural community. More successful was the Nordic Mobile Network (NMT), which pioneered the first generation (G1) of mobile phone technology from 1981.

Related to the idea of the Nordic model, and following discussions on specific media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), Syvertsen and colleagues (2014: 2) introduced the concept of the media welfare state as a model that was "distinct enough to stand out in the world". The concept has received a fair amount of traction in media research, as discussed by Syvertsen and Enli in this issue, and rests on four pillars: "universal service, editorial freedom, a cultural policy for the media, and a tendency to choose policy solutions that are consensual and durable, based on consultation with both public and private stakeholders" (Syvertsen et al., 2014: 2). Nordic broadcasting media have thus been organised as strong public service institutions, supplementing the commercial – and in some regions partly state–subsidised – press operating in the five countries. However, the Nordic media model also covers a variety of organisational forms. The music industry, for example, includes several non-commercial alternative companies that produce and distribute "progressive" music. It should be noted that progressive music in the Nordic context did not, as was the case in the anglophone world, mean experimental, avant-garde rock music, but was an umbrella term for a musically disparate Nordic counter-culture with its own alternative production companies and distribution networks (Fornäs, 1979).

The Nordic Council of Ministers also coordinates research funding. Via the joint committee for Nordic research councils in the humanities and social sciences (NOS-HS), the Council is, for example, one of the main funders of Nordicom (the Nordic Centre for Media and Communication Research) but it also funds pan-Nordic network projects. Incidentally, the Nordic Council of Ministers is the main funder of the *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*.

For this special issue, we are focusing specifically on the concept Nordic: what does it mean to be a Nordic journal of media studies? What is the specific Nordic quality such a journal would embrace? These are the questions we have asked in our Call for papers, and which are addressed in the articles in this issue. By way of introduction, however, as the editors of this special issue, we would like to make some general comments based on the question: What is Nordic about Nordic Media Studies? We suggest that there are two basic themes covering the question of Nordicness in Nordic media studies: the blending of

Anglo-American and continental European (mainly German and French) research traditions and the comparative tradition where different Nordic countries have been set against each other, either one-to-one or in other combinations. We will then finish our introduction by relating the different articles in this special issue to these themes.

Theoretical legacies

First, from a historical perspective going back to the 1960s and 1970s, there are specific theoretical legacies that could be said to characterise Nordic media research, and which can be described as a meeting point between Anglo-American and continental European traditions. As has also been pointed out by Malmberg (2018), there has been – especially in the early phases of the field of media and communication studies – a strong influx of traditions representing "the dominant paradigm" of American mass communications research. Many of the first generation of media scholars were well-read in the American literature. However, there was also in the late 1960s and the 1970s a strong theoretical influx of continental European traditions, for example, the widespread interest in German theory. This is perhaps most easily exemplified by the early adoption and translations of Jürgen Habermas's *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* [*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*](1962), which was translated into Norwegian in 1974 (and Swedish 1984), while it became more widely known in the anglophone world with the English translation in 1989. In hindsight, the difference between 1984 and 1989 might not seem that great, but many Nordic scholars also read German and were trained in discussing Habermas (and other German critical social scientists) as students of literary studies and mass communication studies during the 1970s, probably more so than their British and American colleagues. This scholarly time lag became particularly apparent after the translation of *Strukturwandel* into English, when there seemed to be several instances of "reinventing the wheel" in the English-language literature.

Besides Habermas, there were also strong influences from the earlier Frankfurt School and from critical theory. The intersection between this tradition of critical thinking and the "dominant paradigm" of American mass communication research was well illustrated in a preface to an introduction to classic texts by members of the Frankfurt School, in which German sociologist Oscar Negt (1973) argued that the centre of media research lies outside the media themselves. This argument was eagerly debated in the Nordic countries, first in Denmark where, consequently, scholarly literature turned to studying the media in their social and cultural contexts, rather than as isolated phenomena simply concerning an individual subject and specific media content, as in traditional effects research and in uses and gratifications research (Andersen & Poulsen, 1974; Cheesman & Kyhn, 1975; Mortensen, 1977, 1994; cf. Bolin, 2003). These ideas were partly inspired by Jürgen Habermas's (1968/1972, 1981/1992) theory on the *societal* role

of science, which situates critical social science at the centre of societal conflicts and tension (Liedman, 1998). The discussion thus precedes by several decades the contemporary discussion of "non–media-centric" media studies as put forward by David Morley (2009: 114) in the English-speaking world, when he argued that media studies "should aim to develop a model for the integrated analysis of communications, which places current technological changes in historical perspective and returns the discipline to the full range of its classical concerns". This Nordic non–media-centric study avant la lettre was also based on the influx of French structuralism, semiotics, and narrative theory, as also hinted at by Kirsten Drotner in this issue.

This not only resulted in a tension between American administrative and European critical research, as Paul Lazarsfeld (1941) framed it, but to a certain extent also between the social sciences and the humanities. Media studies are placed differently in humanities and social sciences faculties in the Nordic countries. Some departments have a strong social science approach to media and communication studies, whereas in other departments, qualitative and quantitative methods, and textual and contextual analyses, have formed fruitful collaborations. It is safe to say that there has always been a strong humanities presence in Nordic media research. In an article in *Nordicom Review* some decades back, Jostein Gripsrud (1998) pondered on this confluence, concluding that there were more humanities scholars who had learned to understand social science perspectives than vice versa. However, it seems that with social media exploding as a research field both in the humanities and the social sciences, and with social sciences showing more interest in analysing the increased use of images in political conflict and the role that images play in world politics (Adler-Nissen et al., 2020; Hansen, 2018), new cross-disciplinary forms of media studies have emerged.

Comparative approaches

Second, "Nordicness" in media studies is related to the historically strong comparative focus on the Nordic dimension in media studies. Under the publishing umbrella of Nordicom, countless thematic edited volumes have been produced over the years. However, while the edited volumes have usually included researchers from all the Nordic countries, each individual chapter has typically focused on only a couple, leaving it to the introduction or afterword to draw out the broader Nordic picture. These studies have presupposed a range of similarities that together create regional uniqueness, and they also – at various points in the history of, for example, media production studies and policy studies – significantly distinguish the Nordic countries from one another. Moreover, some of these studies have also argued that the Nordic at once affects and is affected by broader European and global cultural trends. A recent such example is the Nordic Noir wave in television drama and crime fiction, embedded in Nordic culture and a certain Nordic "atmosphere" or "mood" related to landscapes and national

identities and with a strong emotional underpinning towards the bleak and melancholic. The term evidently "emphasizes the common cross-Nordic characteristics" and comprises "a feeling of community between the Nordic countries in the fictions of social conscience, dark storylines and bleak urban as well as rural settings, while touching on the weaknesses of the welfare state in the respective countries" (Agger, 2016: 138, 139). However, national differences (for example between Sweden and Denmark) often also have a distinct salience in relation to plot and mood in these crime fictions; hence the Nordicness is also often contested in Nordic Noir and used for criticising national stereotypes (e.g., Agger, 2016; Hansen & Waade, 2017).

Similarly, Nordic media research has looked into differences between systems, programming, gender distribution in production, and representation within the Nordic countries in order to oppose regionalism and scholarly Nordicness, and to discuss the embeddedness and exchanges between the Nordic (regional) and the international. Such studies concern, for example, public service media, especially around the time of deregulation in the 1980s and 1990s, when the public service media sector faced commercial competition, leading to slight differences in the ways in which each Nordic country handled this reorganisation. Another strand of discussion about the Nordic and the global relates to the film industry, exemplified by studies of the "genrefication" of Nordic films and their distinctive mixture of the Nordic and the American (e.g., Gustafsson & Kääpä, 2015). Comparative aspects of these kinds are featured in several of the articles in the issue.

The articles in this issue

This issue constitutes a collection of articles that each in their own way aligns with what we have described above. We have structured the articles in two sections: one in which the pan-Nordic dimension is central, and one in which country-specific discussions are elaborated on. Kirsten Drotner introduces the pan-Nordic dimension with a normative article on the formation and future of Nordic media research. She describes Nordic media research as a "third route" between various academic binaries, and points out how media research has been largely "shaped by Nordic welfarist ideals from the 1970s and 1980s". Furthermore, she makes a strong case for why these ideals are worth upholding and actively defending as we enter the datafied society.

Kim Christian Schrøder, Mark Blach-Ørsten, and Mads Kæmsgaard Eberholst claim there is a specific Nordic media system, and use this as a starting point for an analysis of news media audiences in four of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden). Drawing on data from a larger 38-country study, the authors find that while there are slight differences between the countries studied, there is indeed some truth in the claim that there is a unique Nordic media system. Clear news media user patterns distinguish the Nordic countries from countries in other media systems when it comes to the "preferred sources of news,

pathways to news, paying for online news, and trust in the news".

Gunn Enli and Trine Syvertsen also take their point of departure in media systems theory and reflect on the concept of the media welfare state, which they proposed in their 2014 book with the same title. Here, they identify four pillars that characterise the ways in which the Nordic media work: the specific organisational form of communication services and the specific separation of editorial decision from economic control (both of which are directly related to the media), plus the inclusion of the media in cultural policy and the general striving for consensus and joint solutions between stakeholders (which are more related to the welfare state). After having reviewed criticism of the concept and ways in which it has been used, Enli and Syvertsen conclude that there is value in retaining the analytic framework and continuing to theorise how the media contributes significantly to welfarist ideals.

Maren Hartmann conducts a thorough review of the ways in which domestication theory has been adopted in the Nordic countries. Originating in the works of Roger Silverstone and others in the UK, and primarily used to analyse how media technologies have been adapted in household settings, the uptake in the Nordic countries has been relatively widespread. It has also followed its own paths, especially in Norway, where the focus has been on technological appropriation, and in Finland, where it has been used in consumer and design research. Hence, Hartmann observes a specific Nordic development of the concept, where, for example, expanding the uses of the concept beyond the household and the idea of "reverse domestication" are among the more inventive uses.

Michael Forsman discusses the Nordic model of media literacy in the context of the idea of the emerging media citizen. Sketching the historical contours of Nordic media literacy research as it has developed in the different national contexts, he finds that – apart from some notable differences between the Nordic countries – there has been a shared change in the discourse around education and media literacy, from having been centred on "Bildung, critical theory, cultural studies, and progressive pedagogics" to a tighter focus on an instrumental understanding of education related to questions on commercialisation and datafication. As a conclusion, Forsman offers some instructive recommendations for policy-makers, educators, and researchers, and a case for preserving, but also developing, the long-standing Nordic media literacy tradition.

In their joint comparative article, authors Crystal Abidin, Kjeld Hansen, Mathilde Hogsnes, Gemma Newlands, Mette Lykke Nielsen, Louise Yung Nielsen, and Tanja Sihvonen offer a review of laws, guidelines, and best practices related to what the authors refer to as a Nordic influencer industry. Drawing from a systematic review of publicly available policy documents, corporate documents, and industry recommendations, the authors maintain that the Nordic countries share values and norms that have shaped the region's influencer industry. Among these shared norms are income and tax transparency, intra-Nordic business collaboration, and a certain gender balance in the workplace with respect to, for

example, equal pay, "thus allowing for the usually feminised influencer industry to be taken seriously as a profession".

Tine Ustad Figenschou, Magnus Fredriksson, Josef Pallas, and Heidi Houlberg Salomonsen also conduct a comparative study. They focus on government agencies in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Based on existing studies and descriptions of the three countries' politico-administrative systems, the article compares the agencies with regard to variances in terms of decision-making autonomy, politicisation (the system for recruiting advisers), and accountability as, for example, judged by the media. The aim of the article is more conceptual than empirical. By discussing how the respective countries' agencies deal with their media in different ways, the authors wish to challenge aspects of mediatisation theory, particularly by emphasising the importance of understanding non-media dimensions of mediatisation. The article suggests that government agencies in Norway and Denmark are less inclined to become mediatised than in Sweden, where government agencies are much more prone to adhere to accepted norms regarding the media. The article also shows that the relationship between agencies, ministers, and the media is complex and that this complexity should be taken into consideration when applying mediatisation theory to political systems.

Ralph Schroeder's article begins the country-specific discussions in the second section. He discusses the role of misinformation on social media in relation to the Swedish national parliamentary election in 2018. Sweden makes an interesting case in the wider international perspective, since what may be called "alternative media", that is, "news websites that promote a right-wing populist and anti-immigrant agenda", which directly or indirectly favour the Sweden Democrats, have a much stronger presence than in other countries. In his article, Schroeder analyses the role of bots supporting the Sweden Democrats as they appear in Twitter flows. The analysis builds on computational techniques through which it has been possible to distinguish fake accounts (bots) from genuine accounts. Accordingly, the method has made it possible to differentiate between which parties have received criticism and which parties have gained an advantage through the bots. It was found that bots contributed to a "distorted picture of Swedish politics on Twitter" to the benefit of anti-immigrant and pro-populist messages.

Stine Sand's article is about regional film politics in Norway and the concept of creative industries, which has attracted more and more attention in discussions of regional cultural politics in Norway. Norwegian film policy aims to promote film production outside of the capital Oslo and create regional power centres. Taking her point of departure in a comparison between two Norwegian film policy documents from 2007 and 2015, Sand discusses film production as a regional development tool. Regional film production in Norway relies on public funding, and policy development therefore impacts its very existence. However, Sand argues that even though it has been "a political goal in Norway to keep a scattered population pattern" and that it is therefore "important to address the creative industries and their relevance in a regional context", this has hardly

been the case.

The article by Karin Hansson, Malin Sveningsson, Hillevi Ganetz, and Maria Sandgren takes up an aspect of the #metoo movement in Sweden. Against the background of framing theory, the authors offer a quantitative analysis of approximately 30 petitions published in Swedish media and signed mostly by professional women. The aim of the article is to analyse how the problem of sexual harassment was framed in the Swedish #metoo petition texts and to discuss in which ways petition groups used news media to influence opinion. The authors argue that the carefully conceived framing of the sender as the bearer of a professional identity rather than a gender identity was a clever move, as was focusing on questions of democratic rights and a strong national self-image rather than feminism. However, the article ends by discussing the pros and cons of the petitions' emphasis on values like equality, democracy, and justice for all at the expense of choosing an undisguised position as feminists.

Peter Jakobsson and Fredrik Stiernstedt conduct an historical analysis in order to trace the roots of Swedish media and communications research. More precisely, they explore the extent to which the Swedish authority Beredskapsnämnden [The Board for Psychological Defence] was instrumental in providing media research with the focus it has in Sweden in the same way as its counterparts in the US influenced American mass communications research. Having compared the situation in the US with that in Sweden, they conclude that Beredskapsnämnden and psychological defence only had peripheral influence on the development of media and communication research in Sweden.

From a Nordic perspective focusing on Iceland, Jón Ólafsson takes up the issue of the status of small states in media and communication studies. Ólafsson claims that not only are small states often absent in comparative studies in general, but they also seem to be under-represented in studies of the Nordic media system. Going through a range of examples, Ólafsson argues that giving more attention to the uniqueness of the workings of very small states may enable us to ask new questions about media system analysis. For example, Ólafsson argues that the question of resource constraints needs to be expanded from being mainly used to explain structural differences to also include sociocultural factors. He argues that when it comes to the relationship between politicians and political journalists, it is even more crucial with regards to smaller countries that we ask questions about how close these relationships may be and how journalistic labour should be divided.

William Uricchio rounds off this special issue by offering some reflections on the place of Nordic media research within the wider international field, and especially in the context of Anglo-American and European media research. In this context, he suggests a possible new representational order in which the subject-object split – so central to modernity – is replaced by another "cultural operating principle", and where our media of representation have a central role. In this new epistemological order, Uricchio finds the seeds of a new audience-text relationship, which he terms the algorithmic audience. This audience is both algorithmi-

cally targeted by the text, but also related to the interactive character of online, digital, and fluid texts. Urrichio believes that the "more wholistic approach that distinguishes the Nordic from many of its Anglo-American and European peers" offers a crucial advantage when taking on this epistemic challenge.

In conclusion

One could argue that Nordic media research is marked by a certain type of self-reflexivity, where there is a perceived need to chisel out what is Nordic and what is not. In some respects, this special issue is a part of that trend. This reflexivity might partly be triggered by the research funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers – which makes it part of the long tradition of wider Nordic cooperation – but also partly by the biennial Nordic Media Conferences, NordMedia, which started back in 1973. These conferences are hosted by the five Nordic countries in rotation and attract a large number of Nordic researchers as well as an ever-increasing number of international scholars. The Nordmedia conferences have contributed enormously to creating a strong inter-Nordic scholarly community; moreover, they have engendered an ongoing conversation about Nordicness, as such, with international peers. It should be noted that the Joint Committee for Nordic Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NOS-HS) runs a funding scheme for workshops and journals, and of the 21 funded journals in 2019, ten had "Nordic" in the title, and another four "Scandinavia".

Therefore, it is not surprising that the articles in this special issue have some common threads, the centrality of the welfare state being one such theme. The blending of Anglo-American and European continental theoretical traditions is also common to several articles. Finally, the will to situate the Nordic countries – taken together as a somewhat integrated whole, or in parts as individual countries – in relation to the rest of the world, unites the articles despite their individual thematic diversity.

However, as Hanne Bruun and Kirsten Frandsen claimed in the introduction to the inaugural issue of the *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*, the journal "is being launched in an international scholarly community and focuses on a field of research characterised by diversification and fragmentation, intensified processes of globalisation, and growing interconnectedness and rapidly changing media systems. Still", they continue, "the journal is definitely also anchored in a specific Nordic context; this means that besides these commonly shared characteristics, it still has many cultural and social features ascribed to the Nordic context, including media and research practices and agendas" (Bruun & Frandsen, 2019: 3).

Along the same lines, we would like to finish off the introduction to this issue entitled "What is Nordic in Nordic Media Studies?" with the words of chief editor Stig Hjarvard, who commented the following on the Nordicom website when launching the first issue of the *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*:

The journal will be a meeting place for Nordic, European, and global perspectives on media. Nordic media scholars have much to offer the international research community, but we also have much to learn from our international colleagues. The journal will ensure a continuous dialogue with researchers from other parts of the world.

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