

Introduction

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The Historical Background

This is a book about five independent states which are commonly included in definitions of the Nordic region (and now formally associated through membership in various organizations): Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. These countries are characterized by a high, and in a European context arguably unique, degree of commonality in terms of traditions, cultural habits, institutional structures, languages and closeness of cooperation.

At various points in time from the late medieval era to the period after the Second World War, there have been advanced plans for the creation of a common political entity. In the course of the fourteenth century, at least from 1319 onwards, there was a sequence of efforts, partly successful, to join two or all three of the main Scandinavian countries in a union. This occurred to a large extent in reaction to the extension of influence by various rulers and constellations from the German lands south of the Baltic. The most long-lasting and successful of the Scandinavian unions was the all-Scandinavian united state, the so-called Kalmar Union (1397–1523). This entity constituted the largest country in Europe, extending from Greenland in the west to what is now Western Russia in the east, and from North Cape to what is now Northern Germany.

In the mid- and late nineteenth century, in an age of increasing nationalism, there was a strong movement of Scandinavianism, also promoted by the royal houses of Denmark and Sweden. A main focus of this movement was opposition to German nationalism and the threat it posed to the then Danish-ruled province of Schleswig-Holstein (Slesvig/Sleswig-Holsten). The movement, however, rapidly lost momentum in the wake of the Danish defeat in the war against Prussia in 1864. Fur-

thermore, in 1873, Sweden and Denmark concluded a currency union with the use of the monetary unit of the crown having equivalent value in both countries. Two years later Norway joined this currency union which officially dissolved only in 1924 in the wake of the economic turbulence after the First World War.

In the period after the Second World War, plans for a Scandinavian defence union failed. However within the framework of the Nordic Council, founded in 1952, a uniquely close collaboration evolved that by decades antedated what the European Union has relatively recently achieved or is about to achieve in terms of a common labour market, exemption from the needs to carry passports at crossings of national boundaries and extensive rights, not only social but also political, being preserved beyond national boundaries. In the contemporary period the Nordic countries have often appeared, and presented themselves, to the outside world as a group of small, peaceful and socially concerned parliamentary democracies, independent but operating within a framework of a shared political culture. This image still has considerable validity. However there is also another side to Nordic history.

For three centuries from the early sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, that is, during what is normally referred to as the early modern period in European historiography, the Nordic countries were divided by a chasm between on the one hand the conglomerate monarchy of Denmark, including Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and a range of other possessions, not least in Northern Germany, and on the other hand the Central-Eastern Swedish Realm that had today's countries of Sweden and Finland at its core and with Baltic and German possessions attached to it. This chasm was a persistent feature of Northern European history and has shaped institutional and political legacies of relevance up to the present day. It was also deep enough to lead to some of the most bloody military conflicts in European history.

At a few points in time in this period, it seemed as if one of the contenders, most notably so the Swedish Realm, was about to achieve a violent reunification of all the Nordic countries. The late summer of 1659, when, in the words of the Danish historian Uffe Østergård, Denmark was reduced to Copenhagen inside the walls, is the most obvious case in point. It does not require an excessive use of counterfactual history to envisage the possibility of radically different trajectories of the history of the North-Eastern half of Europe, should something analogous to that have occurred. However the Baltic region was at the time becoming ever more part of a wide nexus of trade routes of an increasingly trans-regional and indeed global reach. The Western seafaring powers of Britain and, as in 1659, the Netherlands, strenuously tried to safeguard their interests and

see to it that the Baltic did not become entirely controlled by one of the land powers along its shores and did not hesitate to intervene, whether by pressure or sheer force, to try to secure these objectives.

This feature of Western interest in access to the Baltic was a persistent one in Nordic history at least from the sixteenth century, through the events of the Great Northern War of 1700–1721 and the so-called Crimean War, originally planned as a Baltic War, up until the contestations of the Cold War. It was paralleled by Russian efforts, from the failed efforts of Ivan IV in the Livonian war of 1558–1564 and including the successful ones of Peter I in the war of 1700–1721, and of Alexander I in the war of 1808–1809, and up until the dramatic changes of the present period, of gaining, extending and maintaining access to the Baltic.

Thus to use a conventional map, embracing the five core countries of the Nordic region, is not to deny that further qualifications may be needed for various purposes. Observers of the contemporary scene might suggest that the autonomous parts of the Danish state (the Faroe Islands and Greenland), now in all probability embarking on a more independent history, deserve more attention, and together with Iceland they are sometimes seen as a North-Western periphery of the Nordic world, marked by – or at least open to – trans-Atlantic connections in a way that the Scandinavian countries, more narrowly conceived, are not. Furthermore, a long-term perspective links the core of the Danish kingdom to continental neighbours and suggests that its history cuts across the divide between Northern and Central Europe (if the latter region is further divided between east and west, Denmark is an obvious candidate for inclusion in West Central Europe). The Schleswig-Holstein/Slesvig/Sleswig-Holsten connection is perhaps the most striking reminder of this cross-regional dimension. It goes back to the twelfth century and culminated in nineteenth-century military conflicts between Denmark and Prussia (at the time in alliance with Habsburg Austria) which led to the loss of a third of the continental part of the Danish realm. Indeed, the pre-1864 Danish realm extended into the suburbs of Hamburg.

Another historical overlap is the blurred frontier between the Nordic and the Baltic world, important enough in modern times for some scholars to construct North-Eastern Europe as a historical region including what are now Sweden, Finland and the Baltic countries. Indeed in the post-Soviet era, the ministers of the member states of the Nordic Council now regularly meet with their peers from the Baltic countries, and there is a preponderant Swedish and Finnish presence in the economies of Estonia and Latvia. Present Nordic perceptions of regional boundaries still allow for some flexibility: at a minimum, Estonia, a country linked to Finland and Sweden in historical, cultural and lin-

guistic terms, can claim the status of a particularly close neighbour. But the most massive trans-regional link, and the only one to be extensively discussed here, was the Finnish experience of integration – on special terms – into the Russian Empire between the Napoleonic Wars and the First World War. As the dates indicate, this episode is also an example of European geopolitics affecting the course of Nordic history. The results were crucial to the making of modern Finland.

Regional and National Patterns

With the exception just mentioned, the contributions to this book will nevertheless focus on relatively clear-cut Nordic patterns of history and approach them from the perspective of the units that emerged as nation-states in the modern phase of development. The well-founded emphasis in much contemporary scholarship on regional, European and global perspectives should not lead to a complete disregard for the nation-state frame of reference, especially not in cases where processes of nation formation and national settings of modernization have been as central as in the Nordic countries. And as will be seen, national variations in the way of relating to the common Nordic domain are still of considerable importance.

If the arguments of individual authors are thus geared to the national level of analysis, the introduction will foreground some basic features of the regional context as such, and situate the approaches represented in this book in relation to other perspectives. Since the 1930s, international interest in *Norden* (see ‘Note on Terminology’ at the end of this chapter) – both scholarly and political – has tended to focus on the regional record of the welfare state, including the strategies of adaptation to global capitalism in the closing decades of the twentieth and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and on the political projects of the parties most directly involved in its development. Scandinavian, and more specifically Swedish and Norwegian Social Democracy have often been presented as the most authentically successful branch of the socialist movement. These aspects of the Nordic experience have, most recently, figured in the debate on multiple modernities. If we distinguish the category of alternative modernities from the more general notion of multiple modernities, and reserve the former for cases of explicit ambition to contest and replace established models on a global scale, the Nordic way appears as one of the intermediate types.

There is no doubt about its status as a distinctive pattern of modernity; it did not emerge as an alternative with global claims or aspirations, even if some of its architects were guided by ideological

orientations defined in an international context. Most of them were also acutely aware that this international context at the time was characterized by waves of transitions from parliamentary democracy to various forms of authoritarian regimes. With both the Soviet Union of Stalin and Nazi Germany in close geographical proximity, it was inevitable that the Nordic welfare states had to position themselves vis-à-vis these explicitly alternative modernities. Thus some of the architects of the Nordic welfare states sought to articulate a vision of society that would deny any lure among their own population of policies embraced by these large and powerful alternative modernities next door. These efforts of the Nordic welfare states must, in a comparative perspective, be deemed highly successful – see for instance the minor modern classic (Lindström 1985) for a comparative analysis of fascism, or rather the relative weakness of it, in Scandinavia in the interwar period.

It is also true that from an early stage, observers of the model in the making included those who wanted to spell out its message for a more global audience. Marquis Childs's book on the Swedish 'middle way', first published in the aftermath of the Great Depression (Childs 1936), set an example later followed by many others. This line of interpretation was sometimes also embraced by representatives of the parties in power. At the time of the inception of this debate, outside interpreters and internal representatives alike were aware of the context and the antinomies that characterized the emergence of a specifically Scandinavian model of a modern state. Two such prominent features were, especially in the Norwegian and Swedish cases, the fact that there occurred a transition from a situation in the early part of the interwar period with very high levels of labour conflicts and strikes, to one characterized by a remarkable degree of peaceful accommodation in the labour market. The strong labour movements in these countries were clearly reformist in their orientation but there existed relatively strong radical leanings in both movements; in the Norwegian case the majority of the Norwegian Labour Party had even briefly joined the Third, Communist International. Similarly it was certainly not a foregone conclusion that it would be possible to successfully forge an alliance between the labour parties in these countries and parties representing the peasantry. In much of the rest of Europe, agrarian strata had often come to form the backbone of fascist political movements, but in Scandinavia this did not occur.

With the passage of time, however, the context of emergence of the model became less prominent and its contemporary achievements tended to become more directly linked to the policy choices of leading political parties. As a result, contingencies existing at various earlier points

fell into relative oblivion, and imaginations about Nordic welfare states took on features sometimes of an account of a story of political wisdom and heroism. With the growth, in Scandinavia itself but largely in major universities and research institutes in the United States, in Britain, and, somewhat later in Germany, of quantitative studies of welfare regimes from the 1960s onwards, interpretations of the experiences of the Nordic states once more became strongly comparative but now within the framework of a large scholarly discussion and also close research collaboration between Scandinavian sociologists, political scientists and economists and their peers abroad, not least in leading British and American universities. At roughly the same time, there was a growth of interest in social history and conceptual history (*Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, *Begriffsgeschichte*, to use the German terms of origin) among Scandinavian historians, some of them being represented in this volume, which also prompted an interest in long-term patterns of social development and state formation in Scandinavia in a broad comparative analysis (with Torstendahl 1991 as one of its towering achievements). Still these different debates have coexisted with little or no interaction. Nor have they led to a more comprehensive stocktaking of the different Nordic paths to modernity.

This book, in contrast, seeks to examine precisely the key issues concerning Nordic modernity in a broader historical-sociological context than that which has dominated the policy interpretations from the 1930s onwards. Thus a main emphasis of this book is on long-term historical processes. To put it another way, with reference to the title of the book, our concern is with ‘paths to’ rather than ‘patterns of’ modernity. One particularly important outcome of the developmental trends to be analysed is the consolidation of features of political culture across the region, but certainly not without significant differences between countries. The Social Democratic movements and governments, more important in some states than in others, implemented their projects in the context of a much older and broader political culture. This is not to belittle the stature or the achievements of these political actors, but their actions were less self-contained and less sovereign than analysts of the Nordic experience have sometimes tended to assume.

The stress on long-term dynamics should, as already emphasized, not be mistaken for a one-sided construction of continuity. It is definitely not the intention of the present group of authors to argue for a vision of Nordic history prefiguring and inexorably ushering in the twentieth-century version of Nordic modernity. As will be seen, there are surprising turns to the story, and contingent events unfolding in a larger arena affected the regional trajectory. A long-term perspective must take note of changing balances between continuity and discontinuity, of the

different twists to such constellations in particular countries, and of the trans-regional entanglements, which also vary from one case to another.

Geopolitics and Transformations

A historical sociology of the region should make at least a passing reference to medieval beginnings. The major European regions are to a great extent (but not exclusively, and not all to the same degree) defined by the historical circumstances in which they became parts of the civilization of Western Christendom (see also Árnason and Wittrock 2004). That seems eminently applicable to the Nordic world, where the formation of Christian monarchies in Denmark, Norway and Sweden (as well as the more marginal non-monarchic Christianization of Iceland) during the High Middle Ages set the stage for regional history. The medieval phase will not be discussed at length in this book (although more so in the Icelandic case than the others, due to the particular importance of the medieval legacy for the Icelandic pattern of nation formation).

Let us however note that some of the most interesting current debates on Nordic history have to do with this period and with comparative perspectives on its characteristics. The comparison with another peripheral part of Western Christendom, taking shape at roughly the same time, the Central Eastern European cluster of Christian monarchies, is a key theme of a long-term research project organized by the Centre of Medieval Studies in Bergen; these two extensions of the European world beyond its Roman and Carolingian core areas are particularly revealing cases of civilizational expansion, as distinct from the military conquests that led to enlargement on other frontiers during the same period. Nordic echoes and ramifications of the twelfth-century developments that transformed Western Christendom – the ‘first European revolution’, as R.I. Moore (2000) described it – have also become the subject of scholarly controversies. Denmark was closest to the centres of change, and the most divergent interpretations have focused on its twelfth-century experience: one school of thought stresses commercial dynamism and even the formation of an early capitalist spirit (Carelli 2001), thus aligning itself with the most modernistic accounts of twelfth-century Europe, while another insists on the continuity of kinship-based aristocratic domination (Hermanson 2000). On the cultural level, the debate revolves around the ‘twelfth-century renaissance’, to use the classic term coined by C.H. Haskins, and its analogies and/or influences in the Nordic world; here the main theme is the flowering of a vernacular literary culture in Iceland (Johansson et al. 2007).

It is, of course, one of the most basic facts about Nordic history that the original geopolitical constellation did not remain unchanged. In that sense, claims to regional continuity must be qualified. The high medieval monarchies (including the thirteenth-century enlarged version of the Norwegian realm) were absorbed into a late medieval composite state, centred on Denmark but operating on a new geopolitical scale. Here too, a comparison with East Central Europe is instructive. In both cases, monarchic states (or, as in Iceland, a non-monarchic polity) of medieval origin disappeared from the scene, but cultural memories of them contributed to the building of states with a more clear-cut or at least more explicitly claimed national identity centuries later, although in East Central Europe the rupture of continuity came later and took a different turn. The main intra-regional candidate for an imperial role, the Polish kingdom (reunified in the fourteenth century and then expanded into a Polish-Lithuanian Union), failed to realize its ambitions, and the historical states were in the end absorbed by empires built up from outside the region, none of which achieved uncontested domination within it (the failure of the Habsburg Empire to do so was of momentous importance for European history).

The Nordic composite state mentioned above, commonly known as the Kalmar Union (1397–1523), is for many reasons a noteworthy chapter in the history of the region. Its record in the two Scandinavian parts of the realm was strikingly different. In Sweden, it was troubled by periodic revolts with both aristocratic and peasant support, and by intermittent *de facto* restorations of Swedish independence, whereas control over Norway was more stable and became a prelude to tighter integration into the Danish kingdom after the Reformation. In addition to this uneven reach, the union was plagued by dynastic instability; even so, some progress was made towards a more effective mode of administration, and the mere fact that some kind of authority was exercised over the most far-flung European territory ever claimed by a single state (from Greenland to the western marches of today's Russia) was not insignificant. Last but not least, the late medieval period saw a massive growth of German influence, largely due to the activities of the Hanseatic League, and as can be seen in retrospect, this created preconditions for the particularly rapid and successful spread of a new religious culture coming from Germany.

Reformation brought about radical changes to the relationship between state and church, as well as to the broader complex of relations between state and society. This break was more conclusive in the Nordic world than anywhere else in the contested domains of Western Christendom, but a historical account of its dynamics must also take note

of conditions resulting from earlier developments, even when there is clearly no immanent evolutionary logic at work. Even if reformation eventually came to be thoroughly implemented in the Nordic countries, its implementation was, as in Britain, a protracted process with many contingent features. In the late sixteenth century it also became entangled with immediately political and dynastic affairs. In the case of the Swedish Realm, it entailed the legitimate king of this protestant country and also of Catholic Poland-Lithuania, Sigismund/Zygmunt Vasa, being deposed in a short but bloody civil war in Sweden proper. During the ensuing century the main line of international contestation in the north-eastern half of Europe became focused on these two parts of what for a brief period was a Swedish–Polish confederation ruled by a single king. The great Northern War of 1700–1721 led to a dramatic weakening of both of these contenders, eventually ushering in three partitions of Poland and the disappearance of this country as an independent state. The war was also linked to the rise of two new regional hegemonic powers that were to dominate North-Eastern Europe for the next quarter of a millennium, namely, Russia, claiming the status of an empire, and Prussia, being officially formed as a state at this time. The events of the years 1809–1811 mark the end of this nearly tercentennial period in the history of a large part of Europe beyond the Atlantic seaboard.

In the Nordic world, early modernity began with a geopolitical and religious mutation that paved the way for further social and political changes, with significant differences between countries. The period was also conducive to more pronounced regional affinities that came to be of lasting importance. In particular an earlier pattern of somewhat different cultural orientations between the southern and western parts of the Nordic world and the central and eastern ones was being reinforced through the emergence of two dominating, more or less absolutist, regimes, a western Scandinavian composite monarchy under the Danish king and a more unitary east-central state with Sweden–Finland as its core, locked in rivalry and intermittent warfare, but also involved in power struggles in the larger European arena.¹

As already highlighted, for three centuries these states were the main protagonists of Nordic history. Their record is crucial to the understanding of later developments, but also – as Bo Stråth stresses in his synoptic essay – provides a warning against reading too much continuity and logical progression into the regional trajectory. These regimes, with their strongly militaristic orientations, do not fit into narratives of old traditions maturing into democratic forms of political and social life. As elsewhere in Europe, the Nordic paths to modernity were shaped by absolutist backgrounds as well as by cultural, political and social forces

developing in opposition to these; regional variations to this general pattern are still reflected in more recent turns of Nordic history.

Aspects of this complex process will be discussed in several papers. But there were also differences between the two states, their roads to absolutist rule and their ways of institutionalizing it. One of the most frequently noted contrasts has to do with the much stronger presence of burghers in the Danish and peasants in the Swedish version of the estate order, but in both cases these forces made royal-popular coalitions against the aristocracy possible. The Danish model of absolutism has rightly been singled out as the most uncompromisingly consistent one among European regimes of the same kind. The Swedish 'age of freedom', a return to estate rule with a severely curtailed monarchy between two phases of absolutism, was a notable deviation from the dominant European pattern. Nothing comparable happened in Denmark, but reform projects emerged from within the absolutist framework.

Finally, the exits from absolutism also differed in timing and texture of events. In the Swedish case, it was an improvised coup from within the very centre of the political elite that put an end to absolutism in 1809; it is all the more striking that the new rules of government were at once codified in a mature and, by international comparison, very long-lived constitution of 1809, which at the time of its replacement in 1974 was arguably the second oldest in the world (after the American constitution). In the Danish case there were two exits: the Norwegian secession in 1814, characterized by a high level of mobilization and quasi-revolutionary overtones, and then, in 1848, an unspectacular but irreversible self-cancellation of absolutism – one of the few liberal success stories of that year.

As will be seen below, the differences between the modern trajectories of individual Nordic countries – both the heartlands of the two absolutisms and the dependent regions that became separate states – go far beyond these early signs of divergence. It is nevertheless difficult to deny that commonalities of political culture, especially those involved in the construction of welfare states (and thus in the achievements most frequently presented as models for wider use), have been more pronounced than historical evidence might have given ground to expect. This observation raises questions about long-term effects and echoes of both socio-economic and cultural forces active in the early modern mutation. It is often argued, if sometimes with some exaggeration, that much, if not most, of the Nordic world, except the continental heartlands of Denmark, had comparatively speaking far fewer feudal traits than much of the rest of Europe, and that at least in large parts of the Nordic world there existed a degree of local self-governance by free-holding peasants with few direct analogies. As for cultural developments, there can be little doubt about the overriding importance of Lutheranism.

The Nordic world is not the only part of Europe where Lutheran influences have counted for something in modern history, but it seems to be the region where this version of the Reformation played the most decisive and durable role. Lutheran doctrines and practices helped to consolidate the early modern state, but their socio-cultural potential went far beyond these beginnings. There are for instance immediate links, not least via the growth of universities and their role in the training of a new and disciplined Lutheran clergy in the seventeenth century, and the enhancement of state capacities in this period. Later developments are discussed in several papers, and the relationship between Lutheran religious culture and social movements emerges as a particularly important issue. Lutheranism, which for a long time supplied the moral backbone of an absolutist or semi-absolutist state, also came to serve as a source of reading, critical thinking and movement in the course of the nineteenth century. There were, of course, differences between individual countries: the state Church was strongest in Sweden, whereas a Grundtvigian people's Church played a more significant role in Denmark and Norway.

If the concept of the composite state is defined as historians of early modern Europe have done, that is, not just in terms of ethnic, cultural or regional diversity, but with a more specific reference to different political traditions and constitutional or quasi-constitutional arrangements, it is clearly applicable to the Danish monarchy during its absolutist as well as its post-absolutist phases (this is discussed in contributions by Uffe Østergård and Niels Kayser Nielsen). It is less clear how far it can be taken on the Swedish side of the early modern divide. The territory lost to Russia in 1809, which now had become the main part of the Grand Duchy of Finland,² had been an integral and long-standing part of the Swedish kingdom. Indeed, the grand old man of Swedish twentieth-century historiography, Erik Lönnroth, has described these events as the 'First Partitioning of Sweden'. In fact both Finnish and Swedish historians use analogous terms today when the events of 1809 are being commemorated. In late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Sweden, the fate of Poland and its three divisions were a recurring theme in public discourse. It was also invoked by the Swedish king, Gustavus III, as justification for his coup d'état of 1772, putting an end to the remarkable period of parliamentary rule, but also extensive foreign involvement in this process, and for his further strengthening of power in 1789.

The expanded realm of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries – Sweden's 'great power period' – was in many ways an entity with some composite features but also with uniquely developed integrative forces in institutional terms. Step by step – and in reaction to the anticipation and eventual reality of large-scale and protracted war – this state engaged in

efforts to overcome the limitations of its resource base by way of finding means of more efficient organization and indeed mobilization. In its later stages, it came to take on features of statehood and warfare that were not to be seen in Europe until some two centuries later and which still do not easily fit into prevalent analytical frameworks. By the same token, the conventional label ‘empire’ seems doubtful. In the early modern European context, the latter concept is, in any case, an essentially contested one: even its applicability to the Habsburg monarchy has recently been questioned.

There is one more Nordic example of a composite state that should be of particular interest to comparative historians: the Swedish–Norwegian union that lasted from 1814 to 1905. In this case, the two constituent countries were, through a mixture of conquest and negotiation, brought together under a monarchic government; this happened after constitutional transformations on both sides, but they differed in regard to the social context as well as to the levels of innovation (the Norwegian one was more radical). As Bo Stråth’s recent and comprehensive history of the union (Stråth 2005) shows, the development, crisis and disintegration of this composite state can only be understood in light of the complex, unequal and in part divergent modernizing processes that affected the two national societies as well as the common political framework.

Although the monarchy was obviously more Swedish than Norwegian, it also represented a third force in relation to the two countries which it strove to keep together. The whole process unfolded within a constitutional order and in connection with an increasingly articulate public sphere; this makes it a very instructive experience of a kind relevant to broader comparative issues. Most of all it is perhaps instructive in terms of the peaceful nature of its dissolution in 1905 at a time when much of the rest of Europe, from the sequence of horrendously bloody contestations over land in the Balkans to the imaginaries of future imperial and oceanic contestations between Germany and the Anglo-Saxon powers in the West, seemed inexorably to be moving towards the catastrophe which occurred only nine years later. The felicitous course of events in the Nordic case, contrary to that of European history at large, was undoubtedly related to a sense of pragmatism among leading politicians but also to one of the curious antinomies of the Nordic world. Thus on the one hand, there was, and is, a sense of commonality and relatedness that warded off the worst in terms of pronouncements of the evil nature of the adversary – ‘the other’ was simply a bit too much like oneself for that to be possible. On the other hand the many centuries of separate institutional development led, on the Swedish side, to a somewhat more dispassionate view of what was at stake in the event of a dissolution of the personal union than might otherwise have been the case.

Modernity and its Variations

Before moving closer to concrete themes in Nordic history, let us briefly return to the issue of modernity and its variations. Although both editors have been deeply involved in the international discussion on the understanding of modernity, extensive comments on the theory of modernity would be out of place in this book. However, a brief indication of alternative perspectives may help to clarify the background of individual arguments that appear in the volume. Basically, there seem to be three main answers to the question of modernity's defining characteristics.

An influential but far from homogeneous school of thought has explained modernity in terms of a rationalizing dynamic, expanding across the whole spectrum of social life and moving beyond every particular embodying structure. This view was already adumbrated by the modernization theorists who were – as they saw it – dealing with the sum total of changes brought about by the sustained growth of applicable knowledge. Later approaches have been more inclined to stress differences between regimes or cultural models of knowledge; as will be seen, such distinctions have a significant bearing on the history of reformist policies in the Nordic region.

Another interpretation of the link between rationality and modernity focuses on a supposedly epoch-making reflexive turn. A well-known example is Anthony Giddens's conception of reflexivity as the essence of modernity. But the Habermasian model of an increasingly articulate distinction between instrumental, expressive and communicative types of rationality (not *ipso facto* translating into balanced development) should also be included in this category; echoes of Habermasian themes and ideas will be noticeable in several contributions to the book.

If the first kind of theory goes in search of a highly abstract common denominator, the second attributes historical or structural primacy to more specific factors. A strong tendency to equate modernization with industrialization and its social consequences was for some time characteristic of mainstream sociological discourse, and is still of some importance. In relation to the Nordic region, this point of view has always seemed less plausible than in many other places. Not that industrialization was a minor aspect of the overall modernizing process. However this occurred within a broader societal context that shaped the contours of long-term outcomes. In this regard, there were major differences between individual countries.

More recent scholarship has placed a stronger emphasis on the modern state, with its bureaucratic organization and its mobilization of cognitive resources. The Foucaultian theme of 'governmentality' is an offshoot of

this approach, and like the interpretations highlighting statehood in a more conventional sense, it has proved suggestive and fruitful relative to the Nordic record. Finally, growing interest in nations and nationalism during the last decades has in some cases resulted in constructions that put this long-neglected problematic at the very centre of modernizing transformations. Ernest Gellner's work is the most representative example. There is no doubt about the importance of nationalism for Nordic paths to modernity. But there are also – as argued by several authors – good reasons to stress the complex nature of processes of nation formation. The arguments of these authors suggest that these processes of nation formation were, interestingly but perhaps not surprisingly, much less derivative and less functionally determined than Gellner's analyses of nationalism suggest.

A third perspective projects the pluralism signalled by 'multiple modernities' into the very idea of modernity, a concept articulated by S.N. Eisenstadt and drawing on projects in which both editors have been involved. The common denominator now appears as a cluster of multiple factors or forces, capable of combining in different ways and thus giving rise to divergent patterns of modernity. An obvious way to articulate this view is to distinguish between economic, political and cultural components. The economic sphere can then be seen as the field of capitalist development through industrialization, together with the socio-political correctives and counterweights that affected its historical forms, and the critical responses that can translate into visions of non-capitalist alternatives. In the political sphere, the process of modern state formation and the new forms of power which it generates intertwine with the long-term dynamics of democratic transformations. In the cultural sphere, this line of analysis can begin with the interconnected but at the same time polarizing currents of enlightenment and romanticism, both defined in a broad sense: the former as institutionalized cognitive progress, especially in its scientific form, the latter as a quest for meaning responding to the challenges inherent in that progress. In all the different spheres it is also possible to discern antinomies and inherent tensions that should be analytically spelt out rather than glossed over within all-embracing processes of modernization.

S.N. Eisenstadt himself has consistently highlighted that complex interplay between institutional and cultural programmes of modernity, and also the degree to which such programmes, all of them with their own tensions and antinomies, are still formulated against the background of the cosmological heritage of the different great world civilizations. This, of course, to some extent resounds in our own interest in the perennial debate in ancient and medieval Scandinavian studies on the interpretation of Norse civilization and its traces across time, and its role for later institutional and cultural paths of development.

In the present context, however, the idea of a Nordic model is not interpreted against the background of the most long-term trajectories. Rather it is seen to be based on a distinctive way of balancing the demands of capitalism and democracy, of economic, political and cultural tendencies in a broad comparative perspective. Such balancing, however, takes place within a nexus of diverse cultural programmes that bring out a variety of differently articulated relationships between enlightenment and romanticism, between rationality and critique, between horizons of expectation and sites of the familiar and local. In fact, such cultural programmes of modernity seem to have contained greater antinomies than those in most other countries. In this respect the Nordic countries do not only exemplify a successful search for a middle way. In some respects, different cultural and institutional programmes of modernity may have been more successfully, if contingently, balanced, and more thoroughly, if not completely, implemented in the Nordic countries than in virtually any other countries in Western Europe or North America. The Nordic countries have, in different ways and to different degrees, been both more nostalgically backward-looking and more decisively forward-looking than other European countries. In fact, at crucial points in time, not least as exhibited by the great exhibitions in Stockholm in 1897 and in 1930, these two tendencies have coexisted locally so as to mutually enhance and reinforce each other.

The following essays contain references, allusions and implicit connections to all the metatheoretical images of modernity mentioned above. But ways of ranking or synthesizing them are not on the primary agenda of this book. At the present stage of the debate, it seems, more useful to allow for pluralism also on a basic conceptual level. Even so, it is clear that comparative sociological and historical analyses have enriched our general understanding of modernity as an epoch and as a socio-cultural condition. That result can certainly be expected from more sustained reflection on the Nordic experience and its distinctive features.

Examples and Interpretations

At this point, coming to specific questions about more recent phases, it seems best to turn to summaries of the arguments developed in individual contributions.

Bo Stråth's synoptic essay surveys the complex process of economic, social and political modernization in the Nordic region. The trajectory that led from militarized absolutist regimes to the twentieth-century welfare states went through several successive phases; detailed histori-

cal analyses do not support the idea of predetermined progress, and alternative lines of development seem to have been possible at various critical junctures. The results were nevertheless coherent and uniform enough to constitute the core of a regional profile. The social forces involved in the process are comparable to those known from the history of other Western European countries, but their interplay took a specific turn, and the coalitions that decided the outcome were unique to the region. As Stråth notes, the political orientation of the peasantry differed from the typical cases of continental Europe, and this was reflected in epoch-making alliances with labour movements led by Social Democrats. It was also important that the reformist coalitions included sections of the liberal bourgeoisie. The notion of a clear-cut and central conflict between labour and capital is, generally speaking, not an adequate key to nineteenth- and twentieth-century history, but in the Nordic context it would be particularly misleading. As for ideological aspects, it is noteworthy that themes often associated with conservative currents in European history were adapted to more left-leaning strategies in the Nordic countries. The classic example is the appropriation of the idea of a 'national home' (*folkhem*) by the Swedish Social Democrats. Stråth's essay finishes with sceptical reflections on the prospects of the Nordic model. The inroads of neo-liberal ideology and rhetoric since the 1980s, the strong influence of an international environment dominated by financial capitalism, and the divergent responses of the Nordic countries to European integration are good reasons to conclude that the region faces an uncertain future.

Uffe Østergård discusses the Danish path to modernity, with particular emphasis on changing relations between statehood and nationality. Danish nationalism stands out as one of the cases that do not fit easily into the dichotomy of Eastern/ethnic and Western/civic models: it obviously combines features of both types. The explanation is to be found in the history of the Danish kingdom and its position on the receiving end of European geopolitics. The lost war against Prussia in 1864, which brought the victor closer to the goal of a unified Germany, also changed the character of the Danish composite state. For its self-understanding and its European profile, its remaining North Atlantic dependencies mattered less than the Schleswig-Holstein bridgehead into Central Europe. A national framework of modernization prevailed, and it was characterized by a remarkably strong economic, political and cultural position of the peasant farmers. The dominant ideology that grew out of this constellation and set the course for further development was marked by a combination of libertarian and solidaristic elements, and a strong emphasis on consensus among the people, in Danish *folk*. A distinctive kind of populism – *folkelighed* – came to be shared

by all political parties. The long-term outcome was an industrialized agrarian capitalism with a nationally homogeneous face.

Niels Kayser Nielsen proposes a somewhat different perspective on the same process. His main emphasis is on the centralizing drive that shaped the course of modern Danish state-building, and on its interaction with social and civic movements. Both factors were crucial, and the peculiar turn taken by their interplay had much to do with an evolving religious culture. The Grundtvigian movement is one of the decisive forces of modern Danish history. Together with a high level of popular education (which it helped to further), it was instrumental in fusing the notions of *demos* and *ethnos*, and thus in reconciling democracy and nationalism. Against this background, the later rise of Social Democracy can be seen as a sustained and successful effort to bring a third notion, *oikos*, into the synthesis. The care of family and household was integral to the model of the welfare state; at the same time, the working class became an important and equal part of the hegemonic social coalition. All these trends converged in the making of one of the most centralized and culturally homogeneous societies of Europe. It is of course true that the underlying reality is rather more complicated than the codified self-image, but any critique along those lines must recognize the latter as a reality in its own right.

Björn Wittrock traces the making of Sweden back to medieval origins and stresses two cultural fault lines that mark Nordic history, thus setting the region apart from its neighbours to the east and south: the differences between Western and Eastern Christendom, and between feudal and non-feudal societies. The Swedish state was constituted as a Christian kingdom somewhat later than the Danish and Norwegian ones, and re-established after a brief and unruly union with them at the beginning of the period. This state was neither a feudal nor a composite one. It ruled over one of the largest but also least populated countries in Europe, and its relative lack of resources gave rise to unusual but effective techniques of statecraft, demonstrated most strikingly in two periods when Sweden was prominent on the European scene: first as a great power (1620–1720), when it developed characteristics that did not appear elsewhere in Europe until the twentieth century, and then during the rapid modernization that began around 1870. This latter period and its key junctures are analysed in some detail, with particular emphasis on the social democratic breakthroughs that in turn led to the antinomies of present-day Sweden.

Peter Hallberg's paper deals with an episode that represents – in comparison with the other Nordic countries – a distinctive aspect of Swedish history. The 'Age of Freedom' during the middle decades of the eighteenth century is perhaps more memorable because of its role in the for-

mation of a Swedish public sphere than because of short-lived constitutional arrangements. This period gave a new meaning to cultural contacts between Scandinavia and continental Europe, and its legacy was important for later developments. The efforts to build a public sphere drew on an intensive appropriation of Enlightenment discourses and the accompanying ideas of civil society. Hallberg discusses this cultural flowering with particular reference to history writing and its expected contribution to the elaboration of modern social norms. Historical reflection was understood as a social practice that creates civic bonds between individuals and groups, bonds that are crucial for the creation and prosperity of civil society and, more broadly speaking, the institution of modernity. The paper concludes with an analysis of texts that articulated the notion of history as a teacher of life and a source of exemplary behaviour, especially through two different media: statues and biographies.

Rune Slagstad's analysis of Norwegian reformism, in its successive nineteenth- and twentieth-century incarnations, focuses on the question of changing knowledge regimes. In the Norwegian case, shifting political frameworks have to a remarkable extent been accompanied by shifting knowledge discourses. More specifically, and regardless of whether the ideological principles invoked have been liberal or socialist, the reformist projects have been grounded in different versions of social science. The nineteenth-century state, dominated by civil servants, relied on a legal knowledge regime. Towards the end of the century, this was replaced by a democratic-pedagogical knowledge regime. When the Labour Party gained control over the political centre in 1945 (after a less conclusive episode during the 1930s), it did so in coalition with the new economists. Following the setbacks suffered by the Labour Party in the 1980s (seen by some as a demise of the Social Democratic state), some features of a new knowledge regime have become visible. A critique of instrumentalism, with moral and political implications, has been developed, but its relationship to an emerging depoliticized market regime of economic knowledge is still a matter of dispute.

Gunnar Skirbekk links his analysis of the Norwegian case directly to the debate on multiple modernities. Divergent interpretations of modernity are amply attested by the disagreements that began to develop within classical modernization theory and became more radical during the closing decades of the twentieth century; the question of different modernizing processes in various historical settings is less straightforward, but comparative studies have now built up a strong case for a pluralistic approach; the most crucial issue is whether, or to what extent, we can distinguish multiple versions of basic cultural orientations, including in particular the core ideas of the Enlightenment. With this prob-

lematic in mind, Skirbekk focuses on nineteenth-century Norwegian developments. The story begins with a bid for independence and an attempt to establish a new political regime, remarkably advanced in the European context of the time; the results were scaled down but far from obliterated by the enforced union with Sweden. Within the Norwegian part of the unified state, the decisive factor was the interplay between Lutheran state officials on the one hand, and popular movements and their elites on the other. Skirbekk concludes that the changing constellation of political agents, with their distinctive versions of Enlightenment ideas, was at the centre of a modernizing process that sets Norway apart from more familiar models based on Anglo-American, French or German experiences.

Finland differs from the Scandinavian countries in many significant ways, and there is wide scope for disagreement on its Nordic identity. Risto Alapuro discusses this question in light of nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical experience. He first notes that compared to the core Nordic countries, the Finnish trajectory has obviously been massively more affected by external factors. The pan-European upheaval that followed the French Revolution separated Finland from Sweden and linked its destiny to a very different kind of great power. More dramatically, the revolution that destroyed the czarist regime had an instant and decisive impact on Finnish history, and the consequences unfolded in two steps. The first was a rapid completion of the democratizing process that had already been more advanced in Finland than in other parts of the empire before the war. But the crisis in Russia continued to affect the course of events in Finland, and the result was a polarization that culminated in civil war. This event remains the most potent reminder of Finland's unique path to modernity, and still confronts historians with unsettled questions. However, its aftermath, and more specifically the road to national reconciliation, testifies to enduring institutional and cultural similarities with the other Nordic countries. Alapuro concludes that in the long run, this deeply rooted affinity has prevailed over the external forces that seemed more conducive to divergence. The decline and dissolution of the Finnish Communist movement, whose strength had long been one of the conspicuously non-Scandinavian features, can be seen as a final twist to this re-converging process.

Henrik Stenius focuses on the experience of the Finnish Grand Duchy (1809–1917) as a politically privileged part of the Russian Empire, and on the significance of this period for the maturing of a political culture based on foundations laid during the preceding early modern phase. As he argues, the 'Finnish way of being Nordic' goes back to the comprehensive cultural repatterning brought about by the Lu-

theran Reformation. His interpretation agrees with Alapuro's in stressing the pervasiveness and resilience of a common regional pattern, but he places a stronger emphasis on a Finnish paradox: it was precisely the separation from the rest of the region, with safeguards of partial statehood and guarantees against complete absorption into the Russian Empire, that enabled Finland to develop an almost paradigmatic version of the more general model. A statist culture with universalistic solutions to societal problems achieved an unusually solid hegemony. But against this background, the civil war looms very large indeed. How did a society characterized by a strong emphasis on civic loyalty and obedience to the law, together with a remarkable capacity to mobilize support for social and cultural projects, lapse into the vicious circle of violence? On the social and political level, the legacy of the civil war may have been successfully overcome, but the intellectual challenge has not been laid to rest.

The other country frequently seen as an atypical case in the Nordic region is Iceland. Jóhann Páll Árnason reflects on this case and begins with the observation that two very different perspectives on Iceland have emerged in comparative studies. On the one hand, Iceland, and more precisely its medieval experience, has been a key theme for those who defend the idea of a distinctive Nordic civilization. On the other hand, it has been suggested – most forcefully by Richard Tomasson, who drew on the work of Louis Hartz – that Iceland's affinities with the Nordic region are less important than its similarities to other 'new societies' created by European settlers overseas. Both approaches are problematic (although the short and in the end self-destructive neo-liberal episode raises new questions about settler society characteristics that might account for Iceland's receptivity to this ideology), but their common kernel of truth has to do with the importance of the medieval heritage. It is crucial to Icelandic national identity, but not a sufficient explanation of later nation-forming processes. The nationalist turn in the early nineteenth century began as a response to changes at the centre of the Danish composite monarchy, but led to demands for separate statehood. Convergence on this point did not prevent the emergence of different forms of nationalism, which continued to influence Icelandic politics after final separation from Denmark.

Guðmundur Hálfðanarson is more sceptical about medieval inputs into the process of nation formation and takes issue with nationalistic accounts of Icelandic modernization. There has been a pervasive tendency, dominant in political discourse and strongly represented in traditional historiography, to depict the radical transformation of Icelandic society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as being a direct result of the regained self-determination and independence of the Icelandic

nation. There are several fundamental problems with this view. Icelandic modernization has, to a very high degree, been an externally induced process; it has entailed a particularly marked break with socio-cultural patterns that had, until the late nineteenth century, been remarkably resistant to change; and the result has been a rapid assimilation to trends exemplified by capitalist and democratic modernity in Western Europe. To the extent that nationalist narratives presuppose continuity, or at least indigenous directions of change, they are manifestly inadequate. But if nationalism is not a good guide to explanations, it is a large and lasting part of the story to be explained. As the twentieth-century record shows, nationalist ideology, rhetoric and imagery have proved adaptable to a wide range of strategies from different parts of the political spectrum. The rise and fall of neo-liberalism added another chapter to this story.

Note on Terminology

Since the authors of this book do not always use the same labels to describe the geographical field of inquiry, some clarifying remarks may be useful.

The term *Norden*, commonly used in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish to refer to the five countries mentioned at the beginning of the introduction, is now often adopted by anglophone writers on the subject and may be regarded as synonymous with the ‘Nordic region’ or the ‘Nordic area’ (the areas dealt with in area studies are more or less identical with historical regions). Sometimes the term ‘Nordic countries’ has also been used in public discourse in anglophone countries to refer to *Norden*, a translation that is reasonable in terms of denotation but less than ideal in terms of connotation. ‘The North’ has vaguer connotations and is best avoided in this context. As noted above, the boundaries of the region are blurred, but no more so than in comparable cases, and the covering label will sometimes be stretched to include borderline territories.

By contrast, ‘Scandinavia’ tends to refer to a more narrowly circumscribed heartland, but it is not always demarcated in exactly the same way. The most common usage refers to Denmark, Norway and Sweden only.

Finland has sometimes, more often so in the past than the present, been described as not being part of Scandinavia with reference to the fact that the majority language of the country does not belong to the family of Scandinavian languages. Nowadays, however, Finland is often labelled a ‘Scandinavian’ country although this tends to occur less in terms of the comprehensive term ‘Scandinavia’ and more often in the linguistic guise of the ‘Scandinavian countries’, a term then being used as a synonym for the ‘Nordic countries’, and with reference to

the cultural, political, institutional and religious heritage that Finland shares with its Western neighbours, in particular with Sweden.

In Iceland, by contrast, the term ‘Scandinavia’ often denotes only the Scandinavian peninsula, that is, Norway and Sweden. If the three core countries are grouped together, Finland and Iceland stand out as more specific cases, but not in a way that would suggest a common category.

There is one other perennial terminological problem that should be mentioned at the outset. That is the problem of how to deal in an analytically and historically satisfactory way with the relationship between shifting geographical boundaries and linguistic denotations. One possible strategy is to utilize only linguistic denotations that were dominant or at least prevalent in the period at hand by the rulers or inhabitants of a particular region or country. In many ways this is an attractive and justifiable strategy. It has, however, two obvious problems.

Firstly, there are ruptures in terminological usage that may have to be highlighted in order to make clear to readers that different terms are actually referring to the same geographical region or site although in a new political or linguistic context. Can it be safely assumed that most readers immediately grasp that the terms Christiania and Oslo refer to the same urban agglomeration or that the same is true of Viborg, Viipuri and Vyborg? Different authors in the volume have addressed this problem in different ways, but they all try to highlight shifts in usage as well as the non-contemporaneous nature of political and linguistic transitions. Obviously one simple way to do so is to indicate parallel or competing linguistic denotations of a region, for example the Danish versus the German names for the borderline provinces of the two countries, namely, Slesvig/Sleswig and Holsten versus Schleswig and Holstein.

Secondly, there is a natural, perhaps an inevitable, tendency on the part of most readers to adopt the linguistic perspective of the present day and implicitly to read the denotations of present-day terms backwards into history. One obvious case in point is the area now covered by the two countries Sweden and Finland, an area that used to form a comprehensive political entity for more than six centuries. If the term Sweden–Finland is used to describe this area in historical perspective a terminology is being imposed that was alien at the time. Furthermore such seemingly neutral usage cannot avoid the fact that it enters a contested discursive landscape. In this case it might risk being identified as signalling the adoption of a particular, and somewhat old-fashioned and nationalistic, position in the context of Finnish historiography. However, if the area is described in an historical account as simply ‘Sweden’ many present-day readers might grossly misunderstand the text. In this particular case, the easiest solution might simply be to use the term

‘Swedish Realm’ to refer to the political entity for the period until 1809 and then use the term ‘Sweden’ for the remaining post-1809 ‘Rump-Sweden’ or the Western part of the separated historical entity.

Similar problems abound, although this particular case may be the hardest one since it involves a rapid and deep rupture of an entity of very long duration. Again the most viable strategy in this and similar cases appears to be to signal by way of both terminology and narration the contingent and shifting nature of the boundaries of geography and language.

Notes

1. The choice of terms in referring to political entities in historical context poses inevitable problems (see the above note on terminology). It is not only a matter of transmitting a relevant idea of what geographical area a term may refer to but also of the nature of relationships within this area. We have tried to solve these problems not only by being as explicit as possible about geographical designations but also by indicating in terms familiar to early twenty-first century readers some rough outlines of the nature of a given political entity. In some cases and for the sake of abbreviation it is, however, convenient also to use short-hand descriptions even if they were not used in the given historical context itself. In this sense a term such as the Swedish Realm, with present-day Sweden and Finland at its core, is a label used at the time but also one that highlights the strong integrative nature of that entity, in contrast to other areas of the realm, in this case, in particular the Baltic and German provinces.
2. The Grand Duchy was constituted not only by areas lost in 1809 but also by some areas of Eastern Finland, most notably Carelia, which had been lost by Sweden already as a result of defeat in the failed war of revenge of 1741–1743.

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