Introduction

Of myths and models – the unity and diversity of Nordic educational cultures

Jesper Eckhardt Larsen, Barbara Schulte and Fredrik W. Thue

In England you find factories, in Germany barracks, and in Denmark schools.
(Harvey and Reppien, 1915, p. 163)¹

Complicating the ‘Nordic model’

The Nordic model has often been presented as a promise: the living proof that there can be a ‘quintessentially middle way between socialism and capitalism, a rationalist culture of social reform and democratic institutions’ (Andersson, 2009, p. 231). By now, the ‘Nordic model’ has become a recurring figure in academic and political discourse: the term has pervaded social science literature as well as policy papers concerned with the Nordic countries, as if the model were a natural ingredient of the specific political, economic, and social cultures of the region. This includes research on education, where the Nordic model has come to epitomise the idea of comprehensive, child-centred schooling characterised by high quality and equal opportunities (cf. Blossing, Imsen and Moos, 2014). School teachers in the Nordic countries – the focus of this edited volume – are hardly imaginable if not seen against the backdrop of the Nordic model.

However, when seen from a longer historical perspective and contextualised within both international and local intra-Nordic developments, the Nordic model may be constituted more in retrospect than in actual implementation. This is not to question that ‘a Nordic model has ever existed’, as Mjøset (1992, p. 652) puts it rather bluntly, or that the model is only used for branding the Nordic region (cf. Marklund, 2017). Rather, in this introduction, we wish to historicise, and hence problematise and unpack, the seemingly self-explanatory concept of a ‘Nordic model’.

As an idea, the Nordic model is as much the outcome of Nordic self-constructions as of non-Nordic projections: it has emerged within the complex historical dynamics characterising the entanglement of the region with the rest of the world – notably with continental Europe and the United States, but later also with Asia (see Chapter 4). Musiał (2002, p. 21) has termed these two different constructions ‘autostereotypes’ and ‘xenostereotypes’: typical ‘Nordic’ characteristics attributed by the countries themselves (autostereotypes) and by the international community (xenostereotypes), which continuously interact with each other. Hence, autostereotypes have often emerged in response to developments globally;

conversely, xenostereotypes of the Nordic countries have often been triggered and shaped by autostereotypes.

Nordic self-identification with a 'Nordic model' has historical predecessors. Partially inspired by movements outside the Nordic region, such as the unification process of the German states in the nineteenth century, the pan-Scandinavian movement sought to define a shared Nordic identity. Starting as both a cultural–intellectual and political project of Denmark and the Swedish–Norwegian union in the 1830s, pan-Scandinavianism lost its political impetus when Denmark failed to obtain military support from its neighbours during the war against Prussia and the Austrian Empire in 1864. Instead, a Nordic identity was built up through interaction and cooperation in softer areas, such as social welfare, law, culture, and education (Strang, 2016). Associational networks in civil society started to connect across the Nordic region and arranged regular, institutionalised meetings among professional groups, such as teachers, lawyers, and economists (Hemstad, 2016). The political realm also witnessed some networking activities: in 1907, the Union of Nordic Parliamentarians was founded, and in 1919, the Association for Nordic Unity. From the 1920s onwards, Finland and Iceland were also included in these Nordic meetings. The labour movement, in particular, proved to be a unifying force across the region, and succeeded in transforming the more romanticist, nationalistically minded pan-Scandinavianism into a solidarity-oriented 'labour Scandinavianism' (Hemstad, 2016, p. 187). With a shared, entangled history and a multitude of cross-border connections across civil society, the Nordic region can be considered a *Geschichtsregion*, constituting a 'heuristic concept for comparative analysis' (Hilson, 2013, p. 15).

In the educational realm, organised networking also started in the mid-nineteenth century. Plans to arrange regular 'Nordic school meetings' were made already in the 1860s; the first planned meeting, to be held in Copenhagen in 1864, was however cancelled because of the German–Danish War (cf. 'De nordiska skolmötenas silfverbröllop', 1895). Despite this inauspicious beginning, school meetings started to take place about every five years from 1870 onwards, rotating between cities in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland, and assembling each time thousands of teachers from these four countries, plus a limited number of Icelandic teachers (Landahl, 2015). The meetings served as an arena to discuss questions of pedagogy, school organisation, and education policy. Additionally, they helped create a consciousness among the participating teachers of being part of a new collective which transcended national borders. Until then, most school teachers were used to working (and reflecting) on their own, particularly in the rural areas. Thus, this new transnational arena provided space for developing a professional identity which could escape the narrowness of the individual teacher's school and village. The meetings continued to be held even after Norway terminated the union with Sweden in 1905, but interestingly stopped in the 1970s. According to a UNESCO report, the decreasing Nordic educational collaboration in the 1970s was due to dwindling interest from the Swedish side in such networking; in the 1980s, the same report states that Nordic collaboration was hampered by Denmark's neoliberal turn (Eide, 1990). Ironically, this means that educational cooperation ebbed away before the term 'Nordic model' was even coined – a paradox to which we will return below.

The Nordic region as a projection surface and Nordic self-representations

Nordic self-representations towards the outside world were not very numerous in the first half of the twentieth century, and, in fact, intensified only from the 1970s onwards. In contrast, the Nordic region aroused interest internationally already in the 1910s and 1920s.² As the quotation at the beginning of this introductory chapter indicates, Denmark was the first among the Nordic countries to attract international attention. Reminiscent of the later label of a 'third' or 'middle' way, the Irish writer and co-founder of the International Institute for Psychical Research in London, Shaw Desmond (1877–1960), diagnosed Denmark as having found the 'happy mean between the anarchy of Individualism and the benevolent bureaucracy of State Socialism' (1918, p. 135). In particular, Denmark's folk high school movement for adult education, the country's agricultural cooperatives, and Danish scholarship in the natural sciences, were met with admiration from international observers. The impression prevailed that Denmark had succeeded in democratising its education. Preoccupied with questions of rural education themselves, scholars from the United States, in particular, noted the effects of education on Denmark's rural areas. As US historian of education Edgar Wallace Knight (1886–1953) observes, the Danes were clearly 'the most intelligent rural people in the world' (1927, p. X). In turn, Denmark profited financially from the American interest in its education, receiving extensive funding from US foundations to establish and develop research institutions.

From the 1930s onwards, Sweden superseded Denmark as a role model, which was mainly due to increased domestic and international interest in the social sciences, and the concomitant expectation that these could solve social problems through reforms. Especially to progressive institutions in the United States – most notably the Rockefeller Foundation – Sweden constituted an impressive example of industrial recovery and social planning, in short: a 'rationally managed country of progress' (Musiał, 2002, p. 18), and thereby a template for successful modernisation. Sweden's concept of a social welfare-based 'home for the people' (*folkhemmet*) and its active integration of the social sciences into governmental decision-making prompted reform-minded American institutions to see Sweden as a sort of progressive micro-America: a social laboratory that could be exploited to test theories of social engineering. Similar to Denmark, Swedish institutions realised they could profit from this American interest and solicit funding for their 'social laboratory', and actively began to promote the Swedish path as potentially useful for the rest of the world. One of the best-known figures, the sociologist and economist Gunnar Myrdal (1898–1987), who began as an eager admirer of the American model, gradually turned into an influential missionary of the Swedish model instead.

When Childs' *Sweden: The Middle Way* (1936) was published, observation trips to the Nordic region as well as academic cooperation with the Nordic countries were already well underway, albeit largely limited to Denmark and Sweden until after the Second World War. As Musiał (2002) notes, drawing on Simon's *The Smaller Democracies* (1939), Finland and Norway were at best considered poor copies of Denmark and Sweden, while Iceland was hardly noticed at all. The Nordic countries themselves attempted to counter this selective international perception of the

region, and in 1937, joined forces to issue the first publication to present them as a distinctive bloc: *The Northern Countries in World Economy* (Delegations for the Promotion of Economic Co-operation Between the Northern Countries, 1937). The book begins by pondering the designation ‘Northern countries’ (as the term ‘Nordic model’ was obviously not yet used at the time): “‘The Northern countries’ – who invented that name? It is difficult to tell. It is more easy to explain why the term is needed and what meaning it bears’ (ibid., p. 1). While the book is mainly devoted to the economic and industrial development of the Nordic region, it also stresses the high levels of social equality in general, and high standards of education and accessibility of education at all levels in particular.

This type of positive self-representation became more popular after the Second World War. Following in Myrdal’s footsteps, Nordic intellectuals increasingly engaged in a sort of ‘civilising mission’ to spread the benefits of the Nordic model – still without calling it a model – to the rest of the world. As Danish author Henrik Stangerup (1937–1998) claimed in the newspaper *Politiken* on 23 April 1965, ‘our experience [...] will be of profit [to] the entire world around us’ (quoted in Musiał, 2002, p. 14). Similarly, the Joint Committee of the Nordic Social Democratic Labour Movement worked actively to transform the Nordic path into a model, with the mission to enable the rest of the world to profit from it. Against the backdrop of the Cold War in the 1970s, the Nordic model emerged within a ‘geopolitical framework’ (Lundberg, 2005, p. 7) which left a small but attractive vacuum for countries representing the ‘middle way’.

Overall, both the Nordic countries and their global environment – notably Europe and the United States – instrumentalised each other in order to push forward their own agendas. As noted above, Sweden and Denmark were able to profit from being considered distinctly Danish, Swedish, or Nordic, as this reputation could be transformed into funding. In turn, American and European countries and institutions could use the Nordic countries as positive (or sometimes negative) references for particular social policies. When powerful international agencies like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) emerged, these were also used in order to make an idea, or a reform, domestically acceptable. Models of social welfare and ideas about education thus underwent multiple instrumentalisations: first, these ideas attracted interest among the more progressive institutions, particularly in the United States; second, the Nordic countries were used, or presented themselves, as a social and educational laboratory for testing these ideas, based on which the progressive institutions could argue for change; third, some of these ideas were channelled, and sanctioned, by the OECD – which in turn legitimised them also to Nordic policymakers. As a UNESCO report notes, the OECD’s ‘blessing’ (Eide, 1990, p. 20) was frequently used thus, to lend support to ongoing education reforms in the Nordic countries.

The term ‘Nordic model’: a retroactive birth

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Nordic countries became more active in branding themselves as a distinctive region, with a so-called Nordic model (Musiał, 2002) – despite the fact that actual cooperation, for example, in the education realm,

actually decreased. Scholarship provides two different (but potentially complementary) explanations as to why the term ‘Nordic model’ emerged during this time. On one side, Musiał (2002) argues that it was only when modernity and modernisation were no longer seen as unilinear teleological processes that development could be conceived as taking place in the form of different ‘models’. Consequentially, the growing awareness of different development paths in the 1960s allowed terms such as the Swedish, Danish, or indeed Nordic model to be coined. However, Musiał provides no source attesting to the use of the term ‘Nordic model’ in the 1960s or 1970s.

On the other side, Stråth claims that the term emerged precisely when the Nordic welfare states were being reorganised or partially dissolved, as if to ‘save something which was considered threatened by development’ (1993, p. 55).³ An observation from a UNESCO report on the education activities of the OECD (Eide, 1990, p. 41) seems to confirm this claim: the more the OECD pushed towards reducing public expenses on education, the more ‘defensive’ the Nordic countries became of their model, and insisted on greater investment in, for example, equality work. Stråth further notes that the term ‘Nordic model’ is barely attested in Danish, Norwegian, or Swedish sources until the 1990s – the term ‘Swedish model’ does exist but was however coined in France to denote a middle way between the American and the Japanese models (Servan-Schreiber, 1967). ‘Nordic model’ itself only starts to be frequently used in Finland in the 1980s. In fact, the second UNESCO publication to use the term is an article about higher education by the Finnish authors Kivinen and Rinne, who write about Finland as ‘the Nordic model’ (Kivinen and Rinne, 1991, p. 426).

A look at the trend in English-language publications referencing the ‘Nordic model’ confirms that the term did not really pick up pace prior to the 1990s (see Figure I.1). In education research, it was not until the 2000s that the term was used more frequently. Recently, however, the term is booming: in education and for all subjects, the past five years (2016–2020) have witnessed more publications on the Nordic model than the 31 years between 1985 and 2015.

The Nordic model in OECD publications

This trend regarding the frequency of the term ‘Nordic model’ is also reflected in OECD publications. Prior to the 1990s, the term does not appear, except in a paper discussing inflation from 1973 and strategies for coping with it. Even here, the term appears only once in the entire publication (OECD, 1973), and there is no overlap with how we understand the Nordic model today. It is in 1996 that we first encounter it, in a publication about the Finnish economy – note, again, Finland – which mentions ‘a Nordic model of welfare’ (OECD, 1996, p. 63), and thus comes close to today’s understanding. In subsequent years, references to the Nordic model occur in OECD publications (e.g., OECD, 2000) regarding the labour market and employment policies, and later including reconciliation between work and family life. Many of these publications draw on Esping-Andersen (1990), who, in his work on the three worlds of welfare capitalism, consolidated the idea of a ‘Nordic model’ by designating the region as practicing its own

Figure I.1 English-language references to the ‘Nordic model’ in education and general research.

Source: authors’ compilation based on data obtained from app.dimensions.ai.

(‘social democratic’) type of policy regime. Given the timing of Esping-Andersen’s publication and the OECD references starting from 1996, it cannot be ruled out that it was in fact Esping-Andersen’s widely read book which contributed to the OECD’s identification of a unique Nordic model.

In education, the Nordic model starts to be mentioned by the OECD when, in Stråth’s analysis, the model was already under threat. The first publication to explicitly refer to a ‘Nordic’ (alternatively, ‘Scandinavian’) model of education is on life-long learning in Norway (OECD, 2002). Here, the model is defined by a list of characteristics: a ‘long democratic tradition’, a ‘regulated economic regime’, a ‘socially founded redistribution of benefits’, a ‘strong and relatively undivided union movement’, a ‘strong social-democratic party’ etc. Regarding education specifically, Nordic countries are described as having been ‘progressive and pupil centred underlining pupil activity in the tradition of John Dewey and the German concept *Arbeitsschule*’ (OECD, 2002, p. 23). Later OECD publications on the Nordic model of education concern the organisation’s Programme for International Student Assessment or PISA (interestingly, first with regard to Denmark; OECD, 2004), early childhood education (OECD, 2006), educational equity (OECD, 2018; however only referring to the Nordic model in the bibliography), and higher education (OECD, 2019). To date, there are only 23 OECD publications on education that mention the Nordic model, out of almost 13,500 OECD publications on the theme.

The Nordic model in UNESCO publications

UNESCO publications feature the ‘Nordic model’ to a slightly larger extent (34 publications in total). The first reference occurred a few years prior to the first OECD reference: the above-mentioned report about educational collaboration in the OECD (Eide, 1990), authored by the Norwegian civil servant Kjell Eide (1925–2011), a trained economist who, after working for the OECD in the 1960s, served as deputy under-secretary of state in the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Church Affairs for more than 30 years. In the report, Eide depicts the influence of the Nordic countries (particularly Sweden and Norway) on the OECD’s educational activities. He presents the “‘Nordic model’ for educational policy’ (ibid., p. 2) as a well-known fact about which ‘[o]ther countries seem to have a fairly clear idea’, and associates it with the following characteristics: comprehensive education until the age of 16 and beyond, school-based vocational education after compulsory school, extensive adult education, education of equal quality, small school size, decentralised decision-making power, and pupil-centred pedagogy. Further UNESCO publications referring to the model focus mostly on lifelong learning, educational inclusion, and higher education.

The two explanations of why the ‘Nordic model’, as a term, emerged so late may be linked and complemented by a third perspective. Arguably, the 1990s witnessed a hitherto unprecedented acceleration in globalisation. Rather than a straightforward process of ever-intensifying homogenisation, globalisation turned out to be a ‘dialectic phenomenon’ (Giddens, 1991, p. 22), which displayed tendencies both of global convergence and of local divergence. Also in education, scholars have noted an ‘interweaving of contrary currents’ (Schriewer, 2000, p. 327), in which processes of ‘internationalization’ were accompanied by those of ‘indigenization’. At the same time as the world seemed to become more and more similar, local quests for distinct identities and traditions also began to emerge – and were themselves an integral part of globalisation (see, e.g., Schulte, 2004). Seen from this perspective, the ‘Nordic model’ may be just that: a symbol of Nordic identity which became all the more vital as the region became more connected to the rest of the world. In a sense, this perspective integrates both Stråth’s hypothesis that the term was coined only when the concept was already under threat, and Musiał’s that modernity had first to be considered as consisting of multiple alternative paths for the Nordic tradition to be seen as a model among other models. Globalisation provided a conducive context for seemingly local models and traditions to arise; all the while, these traditions would not have emerged without the global setting against which they stand out. In Hobsbawm’s meaning of an ‘invented tradition’, the Nordic model can thus be seen as ‘a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past’ (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 4).

What does the Nordic model entail?

As is pointed out above, the countries most closely associated with the Nordic model have not been constant over time: while Denmark was the first to be considered a model, Sweden took over in the 1930s and remained the synecdoche for

the Nordic model for many decades, until the 1990s when an economic debt crisis and ensuing economic, political, and social struggles destabilised its position. Particularly in education, the long-celebrated supremacy of the Swedish system, not least due to its deteriorating PISA results, began to crumble, giving way to a hitherto little-acknowledged country to become the rising star: Finland (Dervin, 2016).

Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden have of course their own distinct education systems. In a strict sense, one would have to stretch the model considerably to accommodate all five. It is difficult to arrive at a shared set of indicators that compose, in their entirety, the Nordic model, and that are equally valid for all five Nordic countries. As the contributions to this volume show, there is great diversity within the Nordic region. Seen from a distance, the Nordic countries may come across as rather similar; however, the more closely they are studied and compared, the more differences are likely to emerge. At times, specific Nordic countries may share more similarities with a non-Nordic country than with their Nordic peers (see Chapter 13 in this volume on Norway, Sweden, and Germany).

Moreover, different Nordic states can claim rather different characteristics to be part of the Nordic model (Telhaug, Mediås and Aasen, 2006; Andersson, 2009; Wiborg, 2009; Sejersted, 2013). While in the Swedish understanding, workers' education was central to the educational project, Denmark and Norway would rather stress farmers' education as a core tradition. Similarly, secularisation was, for a long time, an important ingredient of Swedish education (though not necessarily in implementation), while Denmark featured numerous Christian denominational schools. Rationalist state-building was a trait shared by Sweden and Finland, but less so by Denmark and Norway.

If we search for historical commonalities shared across the Nordic countries, the countries' Lutheran heritage since the sixteenth century is one of the most frequently noted common traits. Besides, most Nordic educational trajectories can be characterised as state-friendly, centralised, and based predominantly on public forms of ownership – with the partial exception of Denmark, where the Free School Act of 1855 also made it possible for non-state schools to emerge (alongside the above-mentioned religious schools). After the 1920s, these often had a progressive education agenda (the 'reform pedagogy' movement). Regarding state–society relationships, and when compared with other countries internationally, all Nordic countries are characterised by high public trust in state (including educational) institutions. Furthermore, the Nordic countries largely subscribe to a child-centred pedagogy with mixed-ability classes and relatively egalitarian teacher–pupil relations – arguably with the exception of Finland, which traditionally was more influenced by Herbartianism than by progressive education. For Denmark and Norway, the progressive tradition can be traced back to Grundtvigianism, which broke with conventional (and bookish) conceptions of pedagogy (see Chapters 1, 2, 7, and 10).

What can be maintained for all five Nordic countries is that from the late nineteenth century onwards – and reaching back to some early school initiatives during the eighteenth century – there has been wide political support for education as a public good. During the twentieth century, a socially inclusive primary and lower-secondary comprehensive school has arguably been the basis of social and societal integration in the universal welfare state model (Wiborg, 2009; Sejersted, 2013).

Since 1900, the Nordic countries have utilised education as a deliberate means of supporting egalitarian values and social justice, and increasingly so after the Second World War. This includes a strong emphasis on what Brunila and Edström (2013, p. 301) have termed ‘gender equality work’ in education (see also Warin and Adrian, 2017). Compared to other countries, education systems in the Nordic countries are also highly supportive of relatively late curricular differentiation and thereby tracking of pupils. They also largely lack pronounced forms of high-stakes competitive assessment and tracking.

Overall, the Nordic model can be regarded as possessing four different dimensions that are of relevance for comparative analysis:

- i The Nordic model denotes the social and empirical reality as experienced by, among others, pupils, parents, teachers, educational authorities and policymakers, and education researchers. As such, there is constant negotiation as to what is to be included in the Nordic model and for what reasons.
- ii The Nordic model serves as a domestic tool for defining a Nordic (Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish) cultural identity that is both nationally distinctive and regionally unifying. As argued above, the need for regional distinction may have become all the more pronounced as the Nordic countries became increasingly integrated into the global economy.
- iii The Nordic model can be utilised by the Nordic countries to distinguish their region internationally, as a sort of agreed-upon mouthpiece to the non-Nordic world. Or, as we might perhaps put it today, the model can be used for branding and marketing purposes – although at least in the realm of education, Finland is less and less prone to use ‘Nordic’ as an identifier, but rather straightforwardly sells its education as ‘Finnish’. This is somewhat ironic given that Finland, as explicated above, was the first country to frequently use the term ‘Nordic model’.
- iv Finally, and as our brief historical retrospection has illustrated, the Nordic model often serves as a projection surface: a sort of utopia (or at times dystopia), for a variety of people and countries outside the Nordic region. What is projected upon the Nordic model, and in which ways, is often more dependent on the projector (that is, the non-Nordic country) than the projected (the Nordic countries) (for multiple cross-national projections with regard to PISA, see Steiner-Khamisi and Waldow, 2019).

For teachers, all four dimensions are relevant. First, inasmuch as education continues to be a part of a nation-building (or nation-maintaining) process, teachers are expected to actively take part in this process by enacting an educational model that is by many still considered ‘Nordic’, in spite of all differences. Second, and perhaps increasingly, teachers are also recruited for the purpose of education export – to preach the benefits of the Nordic (or Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish) model. Third, teachers have to cope with what we might call the ‘backlash’ of non-Nordic projections on the Nordic region: when particular (allegedly beneficial) characteristics of the school system keep being reported internationally, they become increasingly difficult to ignore, and often lead to a consolidation of

those characteristics in the system. For instance, Swedish gender equality policies can be understood as arising from the dynamics between domestic developments and increasing international attention to how Sweden has dealt with the issue. Similarly, there is high pressure on Finland to present itself as a country of education excellence after all the positive coverage by the media and international research following its PISA results. As an anonymous Finnish colleague expressed it to the Swedish educational researcher Ulf P Lundgren, ‘it was a shock to be the best’ (Lundgren, 2013, p. 28). This pressure means, among other things, that changes that were previously seen as necessary to improve the school system are impossible or difficult to argue for.

Nordic teacher education

The history of teacher education in the five Nordic countries reveals relatively uneven developments, leading some researchers to conclude that in the specific field of teacher education there is no such thing as a ‘Nordic model’ (e.g., Jóhannsdóttir, 2008). Institutions of teacher education called seminaries (*seminarier*, i.e., secular teacher education colleges) were established from the late eighteenth until the early twentieth century in all Nordic countries. Their task was to train primary and lower secondary school teachers, while upper-secondary (or *gymnasium*) teachers were educated at the universities. In the initial phase, we can observe strong German influences, particularly in Denmark and Norway. Denmark’s first seminaries can be traced to the 1750s in the regions of Schleswig and Holstein (then belonging to the Danish Realm), whose first private, then state-run, teacher education institutions served as models for the seminary established in Copenhagen in 1791 (Blaagaard). Denmark’s first national law on teacher education was passed in 1818. Norway’s first public seminary was established in 1826. Sweden’s earliest initiatives arose in the 1830s, and Finland introduced its first seminaries under Russian rule in the 1860s, whereas Iceland did not have a teacher seminary until 1907. However, Icelandic teacher students were commonly trained in other Nordic countries, particularly in Denmark (Buchardt, Markkola and Valtonen, 2013).

In all Nordic countries, teacher education during the twentieth century was characterised by relatively late academisation in comparison to German-speaking areas where, already in the late 1920s, the seminary tradition was transformed by the introduction of new academies for teacher education (*Pädagogische Akademien*). A comparable academisation did not gain strength in the Nordic countries until the 1970s, when Finland was an early adopter. Today, in Finland, Iceland, and to a great extent in Sweden, teacher education is solely located within universities. In Norway, teachers are mostly trained at university colleges; however, inasmuch as some university colleges have been upgraded to universities, their teacher education programmes now take place at the university. Denmark is located at the other end of the spectrum: there, teacher education is located exclusively in university colleges (Jóhannsdóttir, 2008; Nordic Council of Ministers, 2009).

In this area, Finland is probably the best studied of all the Nordic countries due to the country’s reputation for having an excellent system of (teacher) education.

Many studies on best practices have taken ‘Finnish lessons’ because of the country’s success in the PISA studies since 2000. In his bestselling book, Sahlberg (2015, p. 98) devotes a whole chapter to celebrating the ‘good teachers’ in Finland, and calls them ‘the Finnish advantage’. Finland has clearly succeeded not only in ranking near the top in international assessment studies like PISA but in presenting itself – or being perceived – as a model worthy of following, in contrast to other high achievers like China or South Korea (Steiner-Khamsi and Walldow, 2019). This pertains in particular to Finnish teacher education, whose allegedly research-based character, as Schulte shows in this volume, attracts considerable attention also in China, even though the Chinese regions that have taken part in PISA have achieved top results themselves. Denmark, in contrast to both Finland and the other Nordic countries, has endorsed an official policy of ‘development-based’ teacher education. This difference has been attributed to differing national knowledge cultures and their repercussions in present-day policies and politics of teacher education (Larsen, 2016).

Debates around teacher education are also related to questions of recruitment and retention. The higher social status of the teaching profession (e.g., as observed in Finland) has been connected to higher degrees of academisation and longer pre-service teacher education. As a consequence, this perceived correlation between excellence and academisation has propelled further academisation in the other Nordic countries. In the light of the fact that Nordic teacher education was originally more practice-oriented, these developments have spurred debates on what academisation implies for the theory–practice dynamics in teachers’ work – a question to which we will return when discussing the new teacher professionalism below.

Nordic teachers, globalisation, and the new professionalism

Schoolteachers were, and continue to be, central agents in keeping the Nordic model alive and enacting it in a way that makes sense to pupils, parents, and teachers as a professional group. Historically, and depending on the context, we can observe two contrasting developments: on the one hand, teachers mainly followed a centrally designed top-down approach towards implementing universal education; this was the case particularly in the eastern Nordic countries (Finland and Sweden). On the other, teachers understood themselves as part of a wider popular movement, making education a crucial ingredient of a bottom-up enlightenment project. Jesper Eckhardt Larsen (in this volume) names these the ‘colonising’ and ‘organic’ types of teachers, respectively. Arguably, it was the ‘organic’ teacher type – and how it symbolised schools’ democratising potential – which has left a more enduring imprint on the Nordic model of education, and on the model’s impact on non-Nordic countries. Already in the 1920s, the organic teacher type was noted as far away as China: reform-minded Chinese educators noted the non-hierarchical relationship between Nordic (in this case, Danish) teachers and the rural population. Envisioning a popular education movement in the rural areas, these reformers were particularly enthusiastic about the integration of agrarian knowledge into the curriculum (Zhu, 1923).

To be sure, the ‘progressive’ Nordic teacher is not without contestation: rather than constituting a historically fixed and regionally unitary figure, Nordic teachers – particularly as represented by the teacher unions – have shown regional disparities and temporal discontinuities in their orientations and actions (Telhaug, Mediås and Aasen, 2006; Wiborg, 2017; see also Chapter 9 in this volume). Depending on individual countries’ historical and political contexts, Nordic teachers could assume different roles: in Denmark and Norway, the tripartite relationship between educational policy, teacher recruitment and dispatchment, and the population had a more horizontal nature, while the Swedish enterprise of mass education was organised much more vertically (see, e.g., Boli, 1989). In the latter, segregation through education was an integral part of the educational system, and even though schooling was to reach all, not everyone was to enjoy the same kind of education – two complementary processes that Stoler and Cooper (1997) have termed *incorporation* (education for all) and *differentiation* (a tiered education system). Importantly, however, across all the Nordic countries, it is the progressive and democratising nature of teachers and their unions that has become part of Nordic self-understanding and self-branding, eclipsing developments that do not fit narratives of equality, rationality, and progressive democracy.

Against the backdrop of increasing globalisation since the 1990s, Nordic teachers find themselves in a paradoxical situation. In line with worldwide developments in education governance, the credibility and legitimacy of the teaching profession are constantly questioned, and teachers are increasingly held accountable for their performance – often in ways that obstruct, rather than improve, their work. At the same time, and as has been pointed out above, a defining characteristic of the Nordic model is the high level of trust in state–society relations, including between teachers and government. How to reconcile these seemingly contradictory forces is an ongoing debate. In recent years, for example, the Swedish government has established a ‘Trust Delegation’ (*Tillitsdelegationen*) to investigate how trust relations can be (re-)installed to raise the efficiency and quality of education, among other sectors (SOU, 2018:48). In its 2018 report, the delegation notes how deregulation and privatisation have made it more difficult for political decision-makers to govern, and that ‘a more profession-based governance including inspection has been pushed back in favour of a model that is more bureaucratic or oriented towards the logic of the market’ (ibid., p. 19). To date, it is uncertain whether these attempts will lead to more professional autonomy for teachers and school leaders, or whether they are simply the last gasp of the Nordic model.

Terms such as *profession* and *professionalism* in connection with teachers and teaching have experienced an upsurge in recent decades, in the Nordic as well as in other Western countries. This new ‘discourse of professionalism’ seems to represent a breach with the past, at least in the Nordic countries where there is not a strong tradition of defining primary school teaching as a ‘profession’. The concept of profession was introduced rather late in the Nordic countries, primarily through US-dominated social sciences. Moreover, occupations such as primary school teaching, nursing, and social work were not seen as full-blown professions but rather as semi-professions, deficient in autonomy, social prestige, and epistemic rigour (Etzioni, 1969).

In the Nordic countries, it was education scholars and government agencies which initiated this new discourse of teacher professionalism, rather than teachers and their organisations. However, when facing demands from the outside to ‘professionalise’, Nordic teachers reacted by developing their own discourse of professionalism, centring on ideals of autonomy and responsibility (Mausethagen, 2015; see also Chapter 11 in this volume). This bifurcated process can be described in terms of Evetts’ highly influential distinction between *professionalism from above* and *professionalism from within* (Evetts, 2003, 2013). In the Nordic countries, professions and ‘semi-professions’ have typically been shaped by interchanges between professionalism from above and from within (see also Chapter 13). Whether, or to what extent, recent attempts to professionalise teachers ‘from above’ are compatible with or in conflict with professionalism ‘from within’ is in dispute among scholars and stakeholders in primary and secondary education. In Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, scholars have widely described the situation as ambiguous and open-ended, while varying in their degree of optimism or pessimism about teachers’ future professional status (Hjort, 2003; Dahl et al., 2016; Nilsson-Lindström, 2019).

The new discourse of teacher professionalism has emerged as a response to several trends that have challenged the traditional contract between teachers, the state, and society in the Nordic countries. New calls for professional accountability have been propelled by the widespread impression that teachers’ social status and intellectual quality were in decline, by the change of the government paradigm from welfare-state corporatism to nationally adapted varieties of New Public Management, as well as by the ‘PISA shock’ – that is, the response to deteriorating results in PISA – which struck all Nordic countries in the early 2000s, with the notable exception of Finland. Thus, the call for ‘professionalism’ also reflected the need for a new social contract that could (re-)define the boundaries between teaching, policymaking, and school management (Dahl et al., 2016). Additionally, teacher professionalism was driven by the overhaul of various teacher training programmes, which followed different paths in the individual Nordic countries, as the contributions to this volume also show (see, e.g., Chapters 1, 2, 5, 7, and 8 in this volume; cf. also Hjort, 2003; Nilsson-Lindström, 2019; Nilsson-Lindström and Beach, 2019).

Most of the debate on teacher professionalism has centred on teachers at comprehensive schools, while academically trained teachers at upper-secondary schools have received much less attention. The latter group has historically enjoyed a more secure professional position, which, however, came under increasing pressure from the 1970s onwards, when the traditional *Gymnasium* in Sweden and Norway was integrated into a comprehensive secondary school system (Skarpenes, 2007). The ‘professional turn’ regarding teachers can, to some extent, be seen as an attempt to mutually adjust and thereby reduce the traditional gap between the two categories of teachers (see Chapter 9): comprehensive-school teacher training has become more academic and research-based, while the pedagogical components of high-school teacher training have been strengthened, at least in Norway and Sweden. In Finland, the early integration of teacher training at the universities went hand in hand with the sustained emphasis on pedagogy and didactics.

Has the new discourse of professionalism driven a wedge between Nordic teachers' historically developed identities and current constructions of their professional selves? To what extent do historical layers of occupational identity and institutionalised practice modify or condition the ways in which 'professionalism' is defined and implemented (Telhaug and Mediås, 2003)? On the one hand, it might be argued that the professionalisation of teachers from above hardly represents something radically new in the Nordic region. Particularly in Sweden, but also in the other Nordic countries, governments have repeatedly reformed teacher training as a means to create new, scientifically based, reform-oriented, and 'progressive' types of teachers and thereby a more democratic and efficient school (Nilsson-Lindström and Beach, 2019). On the other hand, teachers' recent professionalism from within has also been interpreted as an attempt to revitalise their traditional understanding of teaching as a vocation or calling, which they had previously rejected aggressively following a narrowly defined trade-unionist occupational strategy in the 1980s and 1990s (Grinder-Hansen, 2013).

The production of ambivalence regarding teachers' roles and role expectations is a constant, ongoing process in education and teacher development. New expectations are often superimposed on older ones (see also Chapter 13). A recent Norwegian government report on teachers' roles describes this as the historical sedimentation of 'layer upon layer' (Dahl et al., 2016, p. 41), which exposes teachers to complex and contradictory demands: democratic and elitist, collective and individualistic, and socio-ethical and performance-oriented. Such attempts at combining social-democratic and liberal-competitive norms and values in primary and secondary education may be particularly pronounced in the Nordic countries. These attempts at bridging opposing ideals are also connected to a shift that we can observe in all Nordic countries: from the *Didaktik* tradition inspired by German pedagogy, to the curriculum tradition which has, above all, been shaped by research traditions originating in the United States and the United Kingdom (cf. Westbury, Hopmann and Riquarts, 2015). The terms we have used above – *accountability, liberal, competitive, performance-oriented* – already bear witness to the current primary countries of reference for the Nordic region: the United States and other examples of liberal welfare regimes. Against this background, we find it timely to also consider alternative models that have been serving as relevant global benchmarks. However, this volume should not be considered a mission to promote the Nordic model; on the contrary, the contributions to this volume illustrate the heterogeneity behind the Nordic model. By contextualising the model(s), we aim to reveal the rich traditions and diverse cultural and political expectations that have fed into what today is called the Nordic model.

Nordic education and Nordic teachers: a brief presentation of this volume

The volume is divided into three parts. Part I – *The social roles, status and images of Nordic teachers* – scrutinises the question of what and whom teachers represent in the Nordic region: Who were they vis-à-vis state and society, from both a historical and a cross-national comparative perspective? How did they interact with urban

and rural populations, and what kinds of resources did they tap to fulfil their roles as educators? And, picking up on the distinction discussed earlier, between autostereotypes and xenostereotypes, what does Nordic education represent, and with it Nordic teachers, to the non-Nordic world?

In Chapter 1, *Jesper Eckhardt Larsen* looks at teachers through the lens of teacher types. Using data on teachers' social background and recruitment patterns from all Nordic countries as well as from Germany, Ireland, and the United States for the period from 1880 to 1920, Larsen differentiates between the 'colonising' and the 'organic' teacher types. While the former type is modelled on urban, elitist conceptions of teaching, the latter is grounded in folk models of education, with tight connections to the rural population. Making use of Elias's (1978) concept of nation-states as survival units, the two teacher types are then correlated with, on the one hand, culturally defensive types of nation-states, and, on the other, culturally expansive types. With the help of this matrix, Larsen breaks up the monolithic concept of a Nordic model, and illustrates how Denmark, Ireland, and Norway fall into the organic, culturally defensive category, while Germany, Sweden, and the United States are categorised as the colonising, culturally expansive type. Finland and Iceland, while featuring the colonising teacher type, can be considered culturally defensive nations, while the organic teacher type cannot be found in culturally expansive nation-states.

Fredrik W.Thue, in his chapter on the religious origins of Nordic teacher cultures (Chapter 2), explores the dynamics of two seemingly contrary approaches to pedagogy and education, namely secular and religious approaches in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Employing a Foucauldian perspective on the teacher's technologies of governing the mind, Thue argues that the Nordic primary school teacher can in many ways be seen as the continuation of the Lutheran pastor, in that formerly Lutheran practices of forging the responsible, self-reflective subject are transferred into the educational realm. 'Nordic' educational characteristics, such as the focus on common social values or the child's subjectivity, do therefore not necessarily have to be read as the mere consequence of modern state-building, but are rooted in longer cultural traditions. Yet, the chapter also shows how the figure of the pastoral teacher has been enacted differently in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, due to their distinct development paths and teacher cultures.

Taking a close up look at teachers' everyday social roles in Denmark (in comparison with Norway and Sweden), *Christian Larsen* shows how teachers of the nineteenth century have constituted a bridge between the state and the peasantry. Danish teachers, in particular, were not only educational role models, but also agrarian pioneers: as each teacher was given a plot of land as (part of) their salaries, they would use these plots as exemplary farms to convey modern agrarian knowledge to the local population. Engaged in 'teaching by doing', these pedagogues emerged as genuine 'people's teachers'. Larsen's contribution thus fills in the historical development that prepared the ground for the 'organic' teacher type (referred to in Chapter 1 by Jesper Eckhardt Larsen) to emerge.

The fourth and last chapter in Part I (Chapter 4), by *Barbara Schulte*, takes a view from a distance, and looks at how Chinese education scholarship has referenced Nordic education between the mid-1990s and today. Developing further the

concept of the reference society as originally coined by Bendix (1967), Schulte explores how the Nordic region – in comparison with the United States – has served as a projection surface for Chinese scholars. Interacting with what we have called autostereotypes and xenostereotypes above, these projections shed light not only on what is perceived as particularly Nordic, but also on how the different Nordic countries (excluding Iceland, which is hardly noticed in China) perform different functions in these references. The chapter then zooms in on the Chinese discussions of Finnish versus Swedish teacher education, revealing how references to Finland and Sweden are used for different purposes: while the interest in Finland is more instrumental in character, aiming at the partial adoption of inquiry-based Finnish teacher education, the references to Sweden are much more political in nature, and serve to question the ideological foundations of current Chinese (teacher) education.

Part II – *The emergence of Nordic teacher education and teacher identities* – addresses the question of what characterises Nordic teacher training, both from an intra-Nordic perspective and in comparison with non-Nordic countries. As has been pointed out above, an important development in the professionalisation of teachers has been the academisation of teacher training. How has academisation evolved in Finland, which arguably boasts one of the most academised forms of teacher training, and how does this development compare to Sweden, where it has been less extensive? Which pedagogical traditions have come to play a role in Nordic teacher training, and how does that affect teacher students' perceptions of good teaching? How have changes in teacher education interacted with, on the one side, global pressures, and, on the other, with interest groups such as the teacher unions?

In Chapter 5, *Marjo Nieminen* investigates the history of Finnish primary teacher training between the 1860s and the 1960s through reports issued by government-appointed committees to analyse the situation of Finnish teacher education and recommend potential reforms. The committee reports are not only a valuable source for tracing the processes of the increasing academisation of the Finnish teacher training system, for which the Finnish education system has become world-famous. Through an analysis of the international references in these reports, Nieminen also shows that the other Nordic countries played only a minor role in the Finnish quest to modernise and academise teacher education. Thus, even though Finland was one of the first countries to utilise the concept of a 'Nordic model', as we have discussed above, Nordic countries were not significant sources of inspiration for the Finnish reforms of teacher education, which were instead remarkably international in their outlook.

Taking a closer look at the academisation of Finnish and Swedish primary teacher training in the twentieth century, *Janne Holmén* and *Johanna Ringarp* investigate the interaction between higher education reforms on the one side and reforms of teacher education programmes on the other. They show that even though Finland and Sweden had much in common in terms of developing welfare societies, the paths of the two countries are different when it comes to integrating the previous (and less academic) folk-school seminaries in the university system. While Finland succeeded in putting the successors to the folk-school seminaries on an equal footing with traditional universities, the Swedish university colleges

which have (partially) emerged from the folk-school seminaries, do still not command the same resources as older, established universities. Different political prioritisations thus created different trajectories whose effects we can still witness today.

In Chapter 7, *Beatrice Cucco* and *Jesper Eckhardt Larsen* also investigate teacher education but focus on the different pedagogical approaches used in Danish and Finnish teacher education. Through an analysis of both historical and contemporary developments, they show how different national educational schisms and different strategies of institutionalising pre-service teacher education have shaped the diverging historical trajectories that have impacted Danish and Finnish teacher training until today. Danish pedagogy, they show, built upon folk institutions of education to develop a dogmatic hermeneutical approach to pedagogical knowledge, while Finnish pedagogy has been driven by urban academic elites and a strong academisation, which has resulted in a cumulative positivist paradigm.

Lindsey Waine and *Susanne Wiborg*, in Chapter 8, use a Nordic/non-Nordic comparative approach to analyse the teacher education reforms that have taken place in Sweden, Germany, and England over the last decades. As we have discussed above, global pressures and new governance models have also affected expectations towards teachers, which has led to various strategies to seize control of, and reform, teacher education. All three countries investigated by Waine and Wiborg responded to the new pressures, but in different ways. Germany and England each started from opposite directions; while Germany sought to move towards less theoretically driven and more practice-oriented teacher training, England's traditional 'anti-pedagogism' left many student teachers without education theory. Waine and Wiborg argue that Sweden, as a Nordic country with a conventionally collectivist teaching body, has gone through the most drastic changes: subject expertise and individualised performance measures have been foregrounded at the expense of a more unified professional identity, leading to what could be called fragmented professionalism.

In the final chapter of Part II (Chapter 9), *Björn Furuhausen* and *Janne Holmén* delve into the interaction between, on the one hand, Finnish and Swedish teacher education and its changes, and on the other, teacher unions, over the last five decades. While this volume's contributions have so far paid most attention to political decision-making and pedagogical traditions as crucial factors shaping teacher education and teacher identities, Furuhausen and Holmén reveal the important role of teacher unions in this context. The ways in which teacher unions acted and allied themselves with political partners were markedly different in Sweden and Finland: in Sweden, the antagonistic existence of two teacher unions – one siding with upper-secondary school teachers and their emphasis on subject expertise; the other representing comprehensive school teachers and favouring general pedagogical skills – resulted in continuous ideological battles which were also fought in the party-political arena. In contrast, the Finnish teacher union acted as a unified agent, strengthening both the autonomy and the flexibility of teacher training vis-à-vis politics.

Part III of this volume – *Nordic variations on teacher professionalism* – returns to the discussion of teacher professionalism, and enquires how the professional status and practices of Nordic teachers have been affected by societal changes and educational reforms. How has teacher professionalism been impacted by the mass expansion of

education? To what extent have perspectives on teacher professionalism been integrated in teacher education? What are the dynamics of professional autonomy on the one side and teachers' grading and assessment practices on the other?

In Chapter 10, *Lars Erik Larsen* and *Fredrik W Thue* shed light on how the mass expansion of secondary education affected teachers' professional status and autonomy in different ways in Denmark and Norway, during the second half of the twentieth century. Both countries underwent upper-secondary school reforms, however, different cultural and political traditions left teachers with more or less agency. In the Danish case, gymnasium (upper-secondary) teachers seized an active role in shaping the reforms, preserving to some extent the elitist tradition of the gymnasium. Larsen and Thue explain this by the stronger presence of elitist pedagogical traditions and upper-middle-class culture in Denmark, as well as the widespread tradition of self-organisation of schools. In contrast, Norwegian upper-secondary teachers were marginalised in the reforms, which Larsen and Thue attribute to the social-democratic political hegemony in Norway, which has emphasised comprehensive education and a tradition of top-down school organisation.

Solvi Mausethagen, in her chapter on teacher professionalism in Norway (Chapter 11), analyses the discursive construction of professionalism in different teacher education doctoral programmes, and relates these constructions both to the Norwegian policy discourse on teacher professionalism and Swedish and Danish views on professionalism. Mausethagen finds that professionalism – now a hegemonic discourse in Norway – has been operationalised in three different ways in teacher education. The first two ways, which Mausethagen calls 'instrumental' and 'relational', are closer to the government discourse and refer to the production and use of research-based evidence and practice research, respectively. The third, 'critical' way to conceptualise teacher professionalism concerns the production and use of meta-knowledge about teacher practices. Mausethagen concludes that much of the debate around teacher professionalism reflects the conflict between old pedagogical traditions and the newly emerged education sciences. Arguably, experience-based and contextual teacher knowledge is marginalised within new forms of professionalism.

Chapter 12 by *Kathleen Falkenberg* and *Johanna Ringarp* addresses one of the core practices of teachers: assessment and grading. Comparing German and Swedish guidelines, practices, and legitimisation strategies regarding assessment and grading, Falkenberg and Ringarp point to both similarities and differences between the two countries. While their findings reveal diversity within the respective national contexts, they nonetheless suggest that teachers' justice beliefs interact with each context's institutional settings, national (or state-specific) guidelines, and the school system in overall. Falkenberg and Ringarp identify four underlying justice beliefs that are actualised to varying degrees in the two contexts, due to different preconditions, such as the extent of micro-regulation and normative expectations concerning grading, of collegial collaboration between teachers, of documentation guidelines, and of possibilities of individualised assessment. In conclusion, Falkenberg and Ringarp note that Swedish teachers are characterised by an organisational professionalism and hence by a professionalism from above, while their

German colleagues rather follow an occupational professionalism or a professionalism from within.

In the final chapter (Chapter 13), *Wieland Wermke* and *Tine S. Prøitz* discuss how teachers in Sweden, Norway, and Germany are confronted with different degrees of complexity in their daily work. Facing a broad range of, at times, contradictory expectations and regulations, teachers need to engage in 'risk management' by making choices that least jeopardise their work. Wermke and Prøitz relate the varying forms of risk management to these countries' diverse socio-historical trajectories as well as the varying complexity of the governance regimes emerging from these trajectories. While Swedish teachers, due to the quick pace of educational reforms, are exposed to multiple pressures and a complexity that is difficult to navigate, their German colleagues operate in a system that is characterised by a remarkable continuity, with traditions in place that have a 'complexity-reducing' effect. Norwegian teachers, although subject to new accountability measures and results-based governance logics, can rely on strong teacher unions and a consensus-based style of communication with government agencies, equipping them with greater autonomy than their Swedish peers. Importantly, Wermke and Prøitz conclude that inasmuch as Norway rather resembles Germany than Sweden, there is no uniform Nordic teaching profession.

Notes

- 1 According to the authors William J. Harvey and Christian Reppien, who were conducting a survey on Danish society, an anonymous Dane conveyed this statement to them.
- 2 In the following discussion of xenostereotypes, we draw on the study by Musiał (2002).
- 3 All translations from non-English sources are the authors' own translations.

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