CONSTRUCTING NORDIC WELFARE?
Nordic Social Political Cooperation
1919-1955

Klaus Petersen

"The Northern countries, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, constitute five independent states. They form no political or economic union of any sort. Still, they are often looked upon as a collective entity. [...] especially in the social field differences are less essential than in several other domains. In their approach to a number of vital problems of community living the five countries show a basic similarity at the same time that this approach presents certain aspects peculiarly characteristic of these people."

This is a quotation from a study on social patterns in the Nordic countries, published jointly in 1953 by the Nordic Ministers of Social Affairs and deliberately entitled Freedom and Welfare. Its emphasis on simultaneous uniformity and diversity – one model with five exceptions – permeates internal Nordic discussions on the Nordic (Scandinavian) model. From the outside, in the macro perspective, the model seems quite uniform; however, seen from the inside there are obvious differences. This article tries to develop a new approach to the study of the Nordic model – an approach which does not focus on the actual similarities or differences accounted for in Freedom and Welfare, but instead tries to study the social

1 Nelson 1953, I-II.
2 Sträht 1993 has remarked that the concept “Nordic Model” was only used from the 1980s. This might be true, but, without being anachronistic, it is possible to argue that people involved in the Nordic social policy cooperation actually looked upon what they “created” as a model. In this way, in 1949, the Nordic delegates at a UN meeting presented “Nordic social policy legislation a model for West European countries”. Quoted in the Norwegian newspaper Vår land August 30 1949. This and the following quotations are in my translation.
practice of which the book itself is an illustration of; the Nordic conviction that it is both natural and desirable to make comparisons within the Nordic circle, not least when it comes to social policy.

During the last decades, there has been a growing interest for understanding the "Nordic" and for studying Nordic cooperation. Without offering any detailed survey of the existing bulk of literature, three tendencies can be pointed out. One group of studies focuses on the formal collaboration between the Nordic nations. Some of these have even tried to develop some kind of general theory of Nordic cooperation. A second group of researchers has focused on non-state agents such as the labour movement, professional groups or the national Associations for Nordic Unity, showing that below state level there has been a strong Nordic feeling. The third group consists of studies of Nordic identity. The first and second groups have studied how national interest interplay with Nordic partnership, but have only to a very limited degree looked into how Nordic cooperation influence national polices. The studies in Nordic identity have tried to approach this question mainly discussing it on a very general and theoretical level and focusing on the period prior to the development of the Nordic welfare states.

The aim of this chapter is to combine these three tendencies in an empirical study. The purpose is to examine the close social political cooperation established in the 1920s and developed in the period after 1945. A single article cannot hope to cover all aspects of the period in detail, and, therefore, the focus here will be on social policy cooperation on the national level, as in the so-called Nordic Social Meetings arranged regularly on national political level since 1919. One of the purposes of

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3 For clarification, it must be underlined that Nordic in this context also includes what is discussed as Scandinavian. See the discussions in the Introduction.
4 Some of these studies, as e.g. Wenden 1979, are uncritical accounts of progressing Nordic cooperation and others, as Laursen 1994, Boring Olsen 1994, are focusing on the failing attempts.
5 See for example Sundellius & Winklum 2000 – and also Karvonen 1981 for his theoretical approach to policy diffusion between Sweden and Finland.
7 See the contributions in Sorensen & Stråht (eds.) 1997.
8 See also Østergaard 1997, 44.
9 A detailed overview can be found in Wenden 1979.
this chapter is to describe the organization and functioning of these talks
and the way they establish a framework for social political collaboration.
Furthermore, the chapter will try to study the interplay between Nordic
and national policies: How national interests have determined Nordic
cooperation and how Nordic cooperation have influenced national wel-
fare policies. The argument is that Nordic social policy cooperation was
important for the construction of the Nordic model of welfare – as a
rhetorical figure as well as in reality.

This article will examine the Nordic Social Policy Meetings from
the start in 1919 until the establishment of the so-called Nordic Con-
vention of Social Security in 1955. This period can be seen as having
witnessed the development towards a common Nordic social citizenship
(one Nordic model of welfare). Such thoughts were strong in the years
following 1945; and could be found especially among state bureaucrats
and social democrats. A closer cooperation and mutuality was estab-
lished in a growing number of areas, and the establishment of common
Nordic social statistics makes possible an accurate comparison between
the countries. But establishing common social political legislation was
difficult – with reference to national interests and institutional legacy.
On several occasions, Nordic social politicians have chosen pragmatic
and less ambitious solutions offering full mutuality for Nordic citizens.
This means that Nordic citizens receive full social rights whatever their
nationality. Thus it seems that the Nordic model of welfare, in so far
we can speak of a Nordic model, has to be understood as a pragmatic
model.

From a Scandinavian to a Nordic Frame
The idea of Norden or Scandinavia as a distinct, special part of the world
with own Nordic values and expressions can be traced back to at least
the 19th century.\(^{10}\) In the early phase, it functioned as a reference in the
national (and nationalistic) struggles in the young Nordic democracies
within the ranks of the intelligentsia, of course with differences due to
the different national contexts. From the late 19th century, this idea of
Norden developed in the direction of inter-Nordic collaboration. Most

\(^{10}\) Rosenbeck 1998.
initiatives started by including the three Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden), but developed gradually to include all the Nordic countries in the interwar years.

In what can be termed the welfare political sphere, it is possible to distinguish between three types of cooperation. Firstly, there is the establishment of networks among scientific or administrative experts. In the early period prior to World War I, the Nordic/Scandinavian cooperation existed as part of an international network where e.g. Nordic experts visited Germany or other leading social political countries. But gradually the inter-Nordic cooperation became more prominent and was established as something special. The beginning of this kind of collaboration coincided with, and in some cases preceded, the first comprehensive social legislation in the Nordic countries. From the 1870 onwards, cooperation was initiated in different fields of social policy. For example from 1872, Nordic lawyers started to meet. From 1880, there were regular meetings for educationalists. Similarly, from the same time a close collaboration existed between national economists in connection to the Nordic monetary union of 1872. Furthermore, in 1886, the first Nordic Workers Congress took place. Behind these activities was a wish for a closer cooperation and closer coordination of Nordic politics. One successful example of this was the reform in family laws that took place in the Nordic countries in the 1920s, which was the result of close collaboration between Nordic lawyers as well as tight relations between the national women’s movements. Most of the social political expertise in this period was employed in the public sector and therefore, cooperation has also led to a widely ramified network between national administrations. This kind of collaboration is one of the cornerstones in Nordic cooperation. Further examples are listed in table 1.

11 See Rodgers 1997 for a general introduction to the international social policy networks.
12 Wendt 1979, 8-10; “De nordiske arbetarkongresserna under 100 år” 1986; Hilden 1994; Järnbring 1998; Rosenbeck 1998, 345-349. See also the contribution in this collection by Nils Edling.
13 On this, see Rosenbeck 2000.
Table 1: Starting year for regular Nordic meetings of public servants in specific policy areas 1900-1955

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Policy Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Workers' accident insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Nordic Social Political Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Protection of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Sickness insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Disability and old age pension insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>General social insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Social statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Unemployment insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Nordic Social Political committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Social political sub-committee of the Nordic Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, state departments established sections for the sole purpose of making professional contacts with corresponding departments in other countries.\(^{14}\) And furthermore, it was common for prominent public servants to have excellent personal relations with Nordic colleagues. This is illustrated by the common references made to other Nordic countries in the national political and administrative reports. If official reports include references to other countries, it is predominantly to Nordic experiences. Through this type of mutual reference, it is possible to talk about an internal Nordic ranking. In the 1920s and 1930s, it seems that Denmark was looked upon as the leading social political country in Norden. The main reasons were Denmark’s early economic modernization and K.K. Steincke’s social reform of the 1930s.\(^{15}\) In the post-1945 era, Sweden established itself as the uncontested leading country in social policy and served as a point of reference for the other countries.

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\(^{14}\) See for example report on Nordic cooperation from September 30 1918, ILO-kommit-ten, FI:1 (National Archives Sweden).

\(^{15}\) For Steincke’s reform, see Christiansen & Petersen 2001. Steincke himself has also pointed towards the admiration of his reform from Sweden and Norway. See Steincke 1953 and Edelbalk 1994, 171-72 for Swedish Gustav Möllers interest.
Secondly, this close collaboration between experts and public servants had parallels on the political level, giving Nordic politicians and ministers the opportunity to meet. As early as 1907, members of the national parliaments in Denmark, Sweden and Norway founded the Nordic Inter-Parliamentary Association. More influential was the collaboration among national ministers of different departments established in the early decades of the 20th Century. Summits of this kind continued throughout the century, but from 1953 mainly under the auspices of the Nordic Council.

The combined effects of the First World War, the Finnish and Icelandic independence (1917 and 1918) and a general interest in international cooperation in the 1920s stimulated this kind of initiatives. The inter-Nordic cooperation was not only about transferring social knowledge and coordinating social political legislation; it was also about coordinating Nordic policies towards international organizations such as the ILO or the League of Nations. This wish for a united Nordic appearance on the international scene was important for establishing the notion of a Nordic (or Scandinavian) model as an international brand. It was also during this period that foreign observers began to describe the Nordic countries as especially democratic and socially progressive. This international attention had been growing since 1945, when, in the words of the historian Peter Baldwin, “Scandinavia had earlier attracted notice mainly from those interested in, say, pig farming or temperance movements, it suddenly found itself the center of international attention.” This, eventually, also helped to construct the ideas of the Nordic model inside Norden.

Thirdly, there were a number of initiatives for collaboration, which can be characterized as semi-national. One example of this was the national

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16 See Johansson 2004 for a detailed account of the cooperation between Sweden and Norway.
17 At the same time WW I did also mean that the Scandinavian monetary union in real terms (it was never formally abandoned) broke down. See Wendt 1979, 10.
18 On ILO, see Pauli Kettunen’s contribution.
Nordic Associations founded in the years following World War I. The main purpose of these associations was to spread knowledge of the Nordic countries inside Norden and to strengthen inter-Nordic relationship. The leaderships included well-known politicians besides cultural figures, businessmen and other influential persons. This kind of cooperation was not without problems – with regard to the Norwegians who from time to time were very sensitive towards any feeling of domination by Sweden or Denmark. Nevertheless, these associations were influential pressure groups seeking to strengthen Nordic cooperation in general, and in the 1940s, they were among the principal proponents of a further development of collaboration in the area of social policy. Another example of this kind of semi-national cooperation was the close relations within the Nordic labor movement (starting as early as 1886). After some unsuccessful precedents, this was formalized and extended in 1932 with the founding of the so-called SAMAK-conference ("Arbejderbevægelsens Nordiske Samarbejdskomite"). This close collaboration coincides with the Nordic Social Democratic parties coming to power in Sweden and Denmark. Consequently, the Nordic cooperation became an influential factor in the ideological development of Social Democratic perceptions. In practice, SAMAK-conferences often became Nordic summits attended by several national government leaders, giving them a very close relation to both the state apparatus and the political system.

In several ways, Norden served as an important reference in the national processes of modernization inside the Nordic countries. The actual collaboration took place between three groups of political agents: I) Social political experts and public servants, II) politicians and members of government, and III) semi-national associations as the Nordic Associations and the Social Democratic SAMAK-conferences. In the field of social policy cooperation, it was the first group of social political experts and public servants who played the major role. A possible explanation for this might be that social issues were considered as being "low politics" when compared to defense and foreign policy. Left to themselves, the

22 "De nordiske arbetarkongresserna under 100 år" 1986, 4-5; Bliidberg 1994. The Norwegian Labor Party had left the 2nd International at that time and therefore it only participated from 1935. For the role of SAMAK in the latter part of the 20th century see the contribution by Urban Lundberg in this book.
public servants, experts and politicians interested in social policy owned a window of opportunity to set the political agenda. This also helps explaining why social policy cooperation became more successful than partnerships in the fields of national security and economic policy. Following the national expansion of welfare state reforms, during the 20th Century, institutions and environments were established where Nordic public servants and experts could discuss social policy – everything from child psychiatry to old age pensions and social statistics. This has given the members of the Nordic social policy establishment the opportunity to transfer social knowledge, to compare and to imitate. This kind of cooperation has been a decisive element in the social construction of the Nordic model.

Nordic Social Policy Meetings 1919-1945
At the Scandinavian meeting for members of government in Copenhagen, June 1918, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish politicians decided that delegates from the three countries should examine the possibility for a closer and more continuous social political cooperation. During the following month, especially Danish public servants worked to realize the idea. This resulted in the first Nordic social political meeting held in Copenhagen in April 1919, to which besides the three countries also Finland and Iceland sent delegates. The Danish host, Th. Stauning, was the only Minister of Social affairs to attend the talks. The delegations from the other countries consisted of mainly politicians and public servants, and, besides from Iceland, also trade unions and employer organizations were represented.

This first meeting attempted to establish common goals and agendas for successive talks. These were firstly, to coordinate national Nordic

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23 The idea of a Nordic Defense Treaty was abandoned in 1949; the idea of a Nordic economic and trade market (NORDEK) was abandoned in 1970. See Borring Olesen 1994; Laursen 1994.
24 See VPM, September 16 1918, ILO-Commission, FI:1 (National Archives Sweden); Minute “Nordic social political cooperation”, dated November 7 1919, Department of Social Affairs, International Office, 1929, record 23 (National Archives Denmark).
policies towards ILO-conferences and the approaching social political conference in Washington later the same year. Secondly, the intention was to strengthen existing tradition for mutual orientation on the national social policy development. Thirdly, the conference in Copenhagen voiced the wish for "... uniform guidelines and forms for social development and mutuality concerning social rights and duties, in so far this is found in accordance with specific conditions inside the different Nordic countries." Such ambitions, though, were not without problems.

National or Nordic interests

The historical context of each of the Nordic countries influenced their approach towards political cooperation. Degrees of modernization, economic and political capacity (reform capability), previous social political reforms, and nation building processes varied between the countries, not least in the 1920s. It was also a time of institutionalization of social policy as a political field in the Nordic countries. Unsurprisingly, there were significantly different views on how to proceed towards social policy collaboration. That meant large differences in ambitions for and in internal political reactions to the wish for further social political cooperation. In general, in this early period, Denmark and Sweden pressed for closer cooperation, whereas the Norwegians were much more hesitant.

In the autumn of 1919, the Norwegians were doubtful about close cooperation, and at a Nordic summit in April 1920, it was decided to continue the social political collaboration but without tying the effort to any specific goals. The main reason for the Norwegian hesitation was a strong and loud critical domestic opinion. Norway had only a few years before (1905) dissolved the union with Sweden, and many Norwegians feared that a too close Nordic cooperation would reinstall Swedish (or

26 Quoted from Minute "Nordic social political cooperation", dated November 11 1919, Department of Social Affairs, International Office, 1929, record 23 (National Archives Denmark).

27 In Denmark, social affairs became a department of its own in 1921; Sweden 1920, Finland 1917, Norway 1913, Iceland 1939.

28 Minute "Nordic social political cooperation", November 7 1919, Department of Social Affairs, International Office, 1929, record 23 (National Archives Denmark).
Danish) domination. For example an agreement between leading Nordic politicians to perform as a unity at the conferences of the League of Nations in 1921 caused massive protests in Norwegian newspapers, and also the work of the national Nordic Associations was criticized. In a few instances, even the social political cooperation was criticized as threatening the young Norwegian nation.

Johan Castberg, the prominent Norwegian politician, who also became the first Norwegian Minister of Social Affairs in 1913, seems to have been especially against Nordic social policy cooperation. That did lead to an episode at the international social policy conference in Washington 1920. The other Nordic countries wanted to form a united front at the conference. This would, among other things, strengthen the possibility of having Nordic delegates elected for the board of ILO. At the conference, Castberg announced himself as a candidate, but owing to his well-known rejection of Nordic social policy cooperation, the other countries refused to support him. In the words of a participant, they did not consider Castberg to represent the "common social political culture" of the Nordic countries. This of course restrained initiatives toward further collaboration, and in a letter from May 1920 to a leading Swedish colleague, the later Finnish Minister of Social Affairs, Niilo Mannio, summed up that "Our beloved child, the cooperation, will not get on it's feet."

Only in the summer of 1922 a new meeting was set up in Helsinki in order to discuss a forthcoming ILO-conference. The minutes from the meeting show that besides debate on ILO-matters, the delegates very carefully avoided to discuss the original, more ambitious plan for actual

29 Furthermore in 1921 Denmark claimed full sovereignty over Greenland. This caused a diplomatic crisis and loud protests from Norway. The conflict was solved at the International Court in Haag in 1933, where the Norwegian claims towards Greenland were rejected.
30 See for example Dagbladet March 16 1921, July 7 1921, November 11 1921.
31 See Dagbladet February 19 1921.
32 Seip 1984, 290
33 PM from March 1920 on Castberg and his viewpoints on Nordic cooperation, ILO-Commission, FI:4 (National Archives Sweden).
34 Letter from Niilo Mannio to G. Huss May 5 1920, ILO-Commission, FI:4 (National Archives Sweden).
coordination of social policy initiatives. The only decision pointing in that direction was the one to establish a more formalized exchange of publications. This process of mutual consultation continued in the following years, but the social policy meetings as such were only taken up again in 1926. There were other reasons for this than the Norwegian hesitation mentioned above. Denmark and Sweden had initiated the talks in 1919 and 1920, but both countries had non-socialist governments (Sweden 1923-24, Denmark 1920-1924), which were hesitant towards any form of social political activity. And even in Denmark and Sweden, the Nordic collaboration in the field of social policy was not looked upon entirely in positive terms. For example a Danish comment to the meeting in 1926 mentioned that a “prominent Swedish national economist” had criticized the talks for leading to an “import of bad social political ideas” and to “alone aim at a quantitative maximum of social policy.”

Besides the national traumas, it was also of importance that in this early phase of the cooperation the social systems in the Nordic countries were more or less embryonic. Furthermore, there were large differences between the national social security systems. Sweden for example did not have a national unemployment insurance until 1934, Norway had compulsory sickness insurance, which was voluntary in both Sweden and Denmark, and looking at the benefit levels, it seems as if the Danish system was the more generous one in the 1920s. This made it quite difficult for all countries to approach the collaboration on an even level. The practical solutions to this difficulty was that, on several occasions, bilateral mutuality agreements were preferred to broad Nordic agreements, as in the case of the agreement between Denmark and Sweden on sickness insurance in 1911.

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36 Johan Castberg’s resistance to a close social political cooperation seems to have been very strong. A confidential report from the Swedish Embassy in Oslo in 1926 tells that Castberg was strongly opposing the idea. See letter from Oslo Embassy to Swedish Foreign Department October 29 1926, Department of Foreign Affairs, vol. HP 2032 (National Archives Sweden).
As the meetings finally were resumed in 1926, it was necessary to underline their non-committal character.\textsuperscript{39} Declarations accepted at the meetings were only to be understood as recommendations. However, even with this cautious approach, the Swedish embassy in Oslo could report to Stockholm about renewed Norwegian protests.\textsuperscript{40} Only from the late 1920s did the social political cooperation start taking form with regular talks and concrete results (see below). And only in 1939 did the delegates of the Nordic social political meetings repeat demands for closer coordination and increased mutuality between the social political systems of Nordic countries.\textsuperscript{41}

\textbf{Organizing the Nordic Social Political Meetings}

In 1926, a new meeting was organized at the initiative of Danish public servants and the Social Democratic Minister of Social Affairs, Fr. Borgbjerg.\textsuperscript{42} Denmark was in the process of undertaking a general reform of its social security system and they consequently wanted to use the knowledge of the neighboring countries in this process. The Danes invited delegates from the other countries, rather symbolic in the buildings of the Danish Conciliation Board (\textit{Forditskommissionen}), to discuss the future of Nordic social policy cooperation.\textsuperscript{43} As a result, the next official meeting was held the following summer in Stockholm. From then on, the talks started to take a more formal and regular form (see the list in table\textsuperscript{2}). The original objectives (from the 1919 meeting) were maintained including the goal of establishing “equality for citizens of all five countries towards national social legislation.”\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{39} See various documents from the 1926-meeting, ILO-Commission, Fl:6 (National Archives Sweden). It is illustrating that one draft for the final declaration included a wish for “a more uniform social legislation”, but this was not included in the final version.
\textsuperscript{40} Confidential report from Embassy in Oslo to Minister of Foreign Affairs October 29 1932, Department of Foreign Affairs, vol. HP 2032 (National Archives Sweden).
\textsuperscript{41} Report from the 1939 Nordic Social Political Meeting in Socialt Tidsskrift, 1939, part A, 161-162.
\textsuperscript{42} See correspondence from April 1926, ILO-Commission, Fl:5 (National Archives Sweden).
\textsuperscript{43} Program and minutes for the 1929 meeting in Copenhagen, ILO-Commission, Fl:5 (National Archives Sweden).
\textsuperscript{44} Minutes “Nordic social political cooperation”, November 7 1919, Department of Social Affairs, International Office, 1929, record 23 (National Archives Denmark).
Table 2: Nordic Social Political Meetings 1919-1953

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>City</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Copenhagen</td>
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<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Helsinki</td>
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<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>Oslo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Helsinki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Copenhagen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Oslo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Helsinki</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Copenhagen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Copenhagen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Oslo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Helsinki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Reykjavik</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following meetings were arranged regularly, from 1945 biannual, in the Nordic capitals. From the start, invitations and the related communication had to pass the formal diplomatic channels. When arranging the first meetings it made the communication rather complicated. Gradually, the national departments of social affairs established their own line of communication, but still, for the autumn meeting in Oslo 1927, the Norwegian Department of Social affairs asked the Foreign Department to invite delegates from the Danish, Finnish, Swedish and Icelandic governments. Only after being channeled through the Minis-

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45 For a formal discussion of this see Note from Department of Foreign Affairs to Department of Social Affairs April 22 1919, ILO-Commission, FI:1 (National Archives Sweden).

46 Concerning Iceland, this procedure was complicated because of the fact that Iceland formed a union with Denmark.
try of Foreign Affairs did the invitation end up in the hands of relevant ministers and leading public servants. In this way, the meetings can be described as Nordic social political summits, and the official character is also symbolized by the official receptions and banquets. There were a limited number of participants at the meetings; in Copenhagen in 1929, not more than 17 people were actually seated round the conference table.\textsuperscript{47} All the participants were ministers or senior civil servants. On most occasions, a number of lower ranking public servants participated in different working groups. The plenary session then could take the principal debate and leave the filling out and technicalities to the working groups.

It is characteristic for these talks as well as the social political collaboration in general in that it was a highly male dominated world. During the period 1919-1955, only a limited number of women showed up. The gender bias might be illustrated with a remark from a Swedish participant Hans Järnbrink, who in 1968, looking back on how collaboration had developed in the field of social insurance, noted: “That also the ladies of the participants took part in the convivial gatherings and other social arrangements, which traditionally are arranged as part of the meetings, has given something party-like to the benefit of also the serious discussions.”\textsuperscript{48}

Eventually, the correspondence between the national state administrations leaves the impression that also much more informal contacts were established. First among leading public servants, who developed quite strong personal relationships. Later, from the 1930s and 1940s, and onwards strong relations was developed between a numbers of social democratic politicians.

\textbf{Content of the Meetings}

The agenda of the meetings consisted of both regular and varying items of current interest.\textsuperscript{49} One of the regular items on the agenda was an account

\textsuperscript{47} Plan for conference table 1929, Ministry of Social Affairs, International Office, 1929, record 23 (National Archives Denmark).

\textsuperscript{48} Järnbrink 1968, 337.

\textsuperscript{49} This section is based on general impressions from Swedish, Norwegian and Danish archival sources.
of recent social policy legislation that had occurred since the last talk. These had a tendency to grow in size and were often written accounts circulated prior to the meetings. The size of the written accounts gives a physical impression of the welfare political development in the period. The national reports became, especially after 1945, thicker. From 1945, it is possible to measure the Swedish social political leadership towards the other countries. Another regular item on the agenda was the ILO-conferences; mainly being information from public servants specialized in coordinating Nordic activities in the field of international assemblies. Also regularly discussed were actions taken on decisions made at the prior sessions.

These agenda items were a kind of institutionalization of the day-to-day practical orientation between public administrations in the Nordic countries (consisting of things like exchange of reports, legislation and more or less official minutes). The changing items based on current interests, on the other hand, illustrate a number of important and critical issues in Nordic welfare political history. Here, the countries could present major breakthroughs such as the Danish social reform from the early 1930s, the Norwegian Folketrygdsmelding of 1947 or Swedish family policy ambitions. Typically, the Nordic colleagues were informed before a reform was enacted, as e.g. the Danish report on the social reform work in 1929 (the reform was finally enacted in 1933). It was here, in these discussions, that the idea of a Nordic model of welfare started to take form.

However, a closer look at the planning processes of the meetings reveals that it was not always easy to establish agreement on the agendas. Disagreement began to show when major issues such as “the relationship between employer and employees” (1929) or “Norden as a common labor market” (1946) were to be discussed. In many cases, differing opinions on what could be debated and what should be debated existed. Firstly, the countries wanted to use the meetings as a show window for their individual national reform projects. This was obvious in the case in 1929, when the Danes proudly presented their plans for a coming social

50 Handwritten list of subjects discussed at the Nordic Social Policy Meetings 1927-1947, Department of Social Affairs, Nytt 3. sosialkontor B, pk. 116 (National Archives Denmark).
reform, or in 1947, when the Norwegians proudly presented their plans for encompassing social reform. 51 Secondly, as a kind of downside of this Nordic cooperation, there were topics, which the participants may have avoided to discuss for fear of displaying national social political weaknesses or shortcomings.

Results
The most concrete result of this Nordic social political cooperation was a number of transnational agreements in several fields. A series of such agreements was established in relation to labor market issues, for instance the mutual convention on workers insurance between Denmark, Norway and Sweden in 1919. A list of such formal arrangements in the different fields of social policy can be found in table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Repatriation not possible after 12 years of residence (DK, S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Possible to move between sickness insurance funds (DK, S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>Nordic Poverty Convention: Mutuality with reimbursement (DK, S, N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Finland joins the Nordic Poverty Convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Possible to move between sickness insurance funds (DK, N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Nordic convention on mutual workers accident insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Possible to move between sickness insurance funds (DK, I)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As mentioned, already the first Nordic meeting in Copenhagen 1919 posed the question of mutual Nordic social rights. Due to opposition

51 In 1928, the Swedish embassy in Helsinki suspected Finland of trying to use social policy cooperation as a tool for diplomatic goals (Finland as a bridge between Scandinavia and the Baltic).
from Norway this was laid aside for some time. But as the talks became more regular from 1926, the issue was raised again, and in 1928, in Helsinki the possibility of extending Nordic social political mutuality was set on the official agenda. At the first subsequent meeting in 1929, participants only agreed to extend existing mutuality concerning workers’ insurance. But later, in October the same year, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland officially signed the Nordic Poverty Treaty (Den nordiske Fattigdomskonvention).

The Nordic Poverty Treaty was an extension of existing agreements and a codification of an existing practice of treating all Nordic citizens equally in terms of social legislation. The treaty mainly treated rules for reimbursement of expenditures between the countries and did not actually establish mutual social rights. The rule was that the home country should repay 80% of the expenses of the host country. The alternative to mutual social assistance was repatriation, but the possibilities for choosing this solution were limited by the 1928 treaty. If a person had stayed for 10 years or more in another Nordic country, he or she could not be repatriated on the assumption that during the last 10 years, he or she had not received help under the poor laws or been imprisoned. This hardly qualifies as a Nordic social citizenship.

At the Nordic social policy meetings, there was limited debate on this kind of treaties. The general principles were of course discussed, but the technicalities and setting up in legal terms were handed over to subcommittees of experts and public servants. This reflects the general social political development, where social political legislation and reforms only on the general level was publicly debated. The many, often decisive, details were not the subject of a public democratic debate but were decided upon among senior civil servants at closed talks. This depolitization gave the state experts a very high degree of influence in the process of Nordic social policy cooperation. And very often, it seemed like it was the experts working closely together, focusing on practical solutions that secured the practical results.

52 This was partly due to the 1925 Geneva Convention on equal treatment for domestic and foreign workers in case of accident.
53 Socialt Tidsskrift, 1929, Section A, 26-27. The former agreement was from 1915 and had been supplemented by a row of bilateral agreements. See table 3.
The tradition of Nordic social policy collaboration was established prior to the meetings discussed here. As early as in 1911, it was made possible to transfer members between Danish and Swedish sickness insurance funds, and from 1919, there existed Danish, Swedish and Norwegian mutuality when it came to workers' insurance. These were the result of cooperation outside the Nordic social policy meetings. But in Copenhagen 1929, it was decided to strengthen the coordination between the existing forms of collaboration and to make the Nordic social policy meetings the senior level of the Nordic cooperation. This idea of an umbrella organization and different sub-committees was intended to integrate the Nordic meetings for Sickness Insurance and the meetings for Workers Accidents Insurance. On several occasions, both had served as a kind of secretaries for the Nordic Social Political Meetings, for instance in the case of the Nordic Poverty Treaty.

Officials from the Danish Sickness Insurance Funds were opposed to this organizational change. Putting national institutional interests above Nordic cooperation, they argued that the two fields of sickness insurance and workers accident insurance did not have any similarity from a professional point of view. If anything were to be changed, at the most it would be a question of coordinating arrangements for the purpose of saving time and traveling expenses. The Danish resistance was not taken into account on the Nordic level. At a Nordic meeting for Workers Accident Insurance experts in February 1930, the participants accepted this unification beginning in 1935 as the so-called Nordic Social Insurance Meetings.

A New Start: The Period after 1945
The Second World War brought the Nordic social policy meetings to a halt. Both Denmark and Norway were occupied by Germany, the latter with a government in exile in London. Finland went to war with Soviet Union. Sweden remained a neutral country, while Iceland, due to its

54 Stockholm Dagbladet November 21 1929; Järnbrink 1968, 322-324.
55 The initiative from the Nordic Ministers of social affairs and leading public servants was discussed on several occasions. See e.g. the different letters, comments in Ministry of Social Affairs, International Office, 1929, Record File 23 (National Archives Denmark).
56 Järnbrink 1968.
military strategic importance, became closely related to Britain and USA. Under such circumstances, it was not possible to arrange official meetings. Furthermore, with the exception of Sweden, all thoughts of social policy reforms were set-aside during the war years.

This did not mean, though, that all internal Nordic transfer of social knowledge was stopped. As mentioned earlier, below the surface of the official collaboration, a dense network of personal relations between public servants and social political experts was established. In this way, it was possible for Danish and Swedish social politicians to keep up close contacts. For instance the Danes were well orientated and followed with interest Swedish family policy discussions (population policy) in the 1940s.

As the war ended in Europe in May 1945, the formal talks were soon to be resumed. A Nordic Social Political Meeting was held in Copenhagen the same year. It was a time for both visions and reservations. The impact of the war on the Nordic countries had varied significantly. Norway, Denmark and especially Finland “limped” after Sweden, who had escaped occupation and acts of war and still possessed a working infrastructure. At the same time, all countries witnessed a renewed belief in the future based on a conception of the post-war era as a transition from an old to a new kind of society. This was illuminated in the ambitious post-war programs of the Nordic social democratic parties.

In the 1930s, the Social Democratic parties had started the so-called SAMAK-collaboration. Originally, it had been orientated towards creating a common Nordic front within the 2. International, but during the war years, it developed thoughts of a more formalized Nordic cooperation. Historical research has focused on either the Nordic Defense Treaty or Nordic economic collaboration (NORDEK), both attempts unsuccessful. But there were also ideas on closer Nordic collaboration in the fields of labor markets, social policy and culture. Such a development was advocated, especially by the leading Nordic Social Democrats.

After 1945, the SAMAK conferences paralleled the more official

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57 Nissen 1983.
58 Wium Olesen 1998.
60 Laursen 1994; Borrini Olesen 1994.
Nordic summits. During the first SAMAK conferences in 1945 and 1946, the possibility of closer social political cooperation was discussed, and even thoughts on coordination on future social legislation were put forward. The Swedes (e.g. Gustav Möller) were pressing for an extension of the Nordic collaboration, whereas the Norwegians were once again hesitant. At the following meeting in Copenhagen in January 1946, the participating social democratic politicians only agreed to put their efforts into the creation of a common labor market, whereas ambitions on the field of social policy were expressed as broad declarations of interest.

The politicians were generally hesitant towards taking concrete action immediately after 1945, whereas their public servants were much more enthusiastic. The correspondence between the national state bureaucracies reveals the extent to which a group of social political experts were very positive towards the idea of Norden, and, at the same time, also wanted to use this as a tool in the national work for social reforms. Nordic collaboration set up Nordic standards, which were influential in the internal social policy debates in the Nordic countries. This was obvious in the case of Nordic Social Statistics (see below). It was the experts in the state bureaucracies who more than any other group pushed for concrete action.

**Nordic Social Policy Cooperation 1945-1955**

The Nordic social political meetings were started again in the autumn 1945 and continued subsequently on a regular basis. The Nordic Council was founded 1953 and from then on, the social political talks were formally subordinated the Nordic Council. However, the same public servants continued their work for concrete proposals. The organization and content of the meetings were as before the war, but as the social

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63 Minutes from the SAMAK meeting in Copenhagen, January 1946 in Blidberg 1986, pp. 318-321; Socialdemokratiske Noter, 1945-46, No. 4, 329. These issues were also discussed at a meeting for Nordic national economist & trade unionists in Sweden December 1945.

64 Hovbakke Sørensen 1999 discusses the opinions of the political parties. There were some politicians advocating for a closer Nordic cooperation. For instance the leading Danish social democrat (and later Prime Minister 1947-50) Hans Hedtoft talked about a Nordic social citizenship in the early post-war years. See Wendt 1987, 456.
political legislation expanded so did the content of the talks as still more social policy topics came up for discussion.

The first years after 1945 were a period with intensified Nordic collaboration. Among politicians and politicizing public servants ambitions grew and were changed toward ever more social political mutuality and inter Nordic convergence. In his opening remark to the Nordic Social Political Meeting in Stockholm 1947, Swedish Minister of Social Affairs Gustav Möller, suggested:

"The most important for us is now to start off an intensified work for creating a common social insurance and social service sector, as unified as possible in Norden. I am of course not unaware that this is a long term work as the preconditions being so different in each individual country."

Möller recognized that the different social and economic contexts would mean that the "social political pace" would differ between the Nordic countries, but his opinion was that gradually the direction would be towards making the Nordic social political systems more uniform.

Such ideas on common social political legislation were soon given up in favor of a pragmatic solution of offering and expanding mutuality of social rights for Nordic citizens. A Swede living in Denmark would thus gain the same right to social assistance as Danish citizens and vice versa. The immediate result was a number of mutuality agreements leading towards the Social Safety Convention of 1955.

The first step was taken at the Nordic Social Political Meeting in Oslo 1949, where the participants signed an agreement on mutual old age pensions. The only requirement would be that the person had been

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65 Minutes from the Nordic Social Political Meeting in Stockholm 1947, p. 5 (in Ministry of Social Affairs, Papers of Johan Strom, A7, (National Archives Denmark)).
66 Minutes from the Nordic Social Political Meeting in Stockholm 1947, p. 6 (in Department of Social Affairs, Papers of Johan Strom, A7 (National Archives Denmark)).
67 Minutes from Nordic Social Political Meeting in Oslo 1949, 139 (in Department of Social Affairs Papers of Johan Strom, (National Archives Denmark), A7); Nelson 1953, 489-90; Socialdemokratiske Noter 1948-1949, No. 12, 893-894. At the meeting in 1947, the Norwegians suggested such an initiative, which was generally accepted as a common goal.
living in the country for the previous five years. The meeting further agreed to expand the mutuality to other kinds of social assistance. At further talks in Reykjavik, this assistance was extended to the fields of disability pensions, sickness insurance and family policy.\footnote{Nelson 1953, 486.}

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<th>Table 4 Formal agreements 1945-1955</th>
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<td>1946: Possibility of transfer between unemployment insurance funds (Denmark and Sweden)</td>
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<td>1949: Nordic Convention on Mutual Old Age Pension</td>
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<td>1951: Revision of Nordic Poverty Convention – reimbursement is abandoned and repatriation limited</td>
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<td>1951: Convention on mutual child allowances (all except Denmark)</td>
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<td>1953: Nordic convention on transfer between sickness insurance funds</td>
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<td>1953: Convention on mutual disability pension</td>
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<td>1953: Convention on mutual mothers help</td>
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<td>1955: Nordic Social Safety Convention</td>
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The procedure of expanding Nordic mutuality field by field was not without problems. Despite many similarities, the social security systems of the countries were not entirely similar. Denmark had, for instance, no child allowance (until 1960 this was given as a tax reduction) and could therefore be included in mutuality arrangements on this particular field. In some cases, this separated the sheep from the goats, and pointed the finger towards policy areas where the individual countries did not live up to Nordic standards. Another example of this was the discussion of a common Nordic labour market.

**A Common Nordic Labour Market**

At the Nordic Social Political Meeting in Copenhagen in September 1945, the Ministers of Social Affairs and their public servants discussed
and eventually agreed to establish a common Nordic labour market.\textsuperscript{69} This was an important step in Nordic collaboration, which, when enacted, might lead to spillover effects in other social policy areas. But eventually, the treaty was ratified only by Sweden and Denmark, whereas Norway and Finland chose not to join, fearing national reconstruction would be jeopardized due to labour scarcity.\textsuperscript{70} In order to support the idea of a common labour market, Denmark and Sweden also made a joint agreement for members of the national unemployment insurance funds. The agreement covered more than 90% of all members of these funds, which meant that members could keep the rights they had built up inside the insurance system, even if they moved to the other country and back again. Norway and Finland stood outside this initiative, although the two countries participated in the practical cooperation between the national labor market authorities.\textsuperscript{71} In 1954, a new treaty was set up including all Nordic countries.\textsuperscript{72}

**Internal Competition**

In 1944, the Danish social politician Henning Friis published a feature article entitled “Nordic countries in social competition”.\textsuperscript{73} This title suggests that Nordic social political cooperation was not only about mutual exchange of knowledge, but also included competitive elements. Even today, most Nordic citizens know this immediate feeling when reading any kind of international ranking: ‘How does one own country score compared to the Nordic neighbors?’ Henning Friis’ article illustrates that such a line of thought was not unfamiliar to state bureaucrats for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was a question of national prestige. From the 1930s

\textsuperscript{69} Anderson 1994, 74-75; Johansson & Bergström 1999, 17-18.

\textsuperscript{70} Wendt 1979, 149. The Finnish social democrat Varjonen explained to his Nordic comrades: “The question of an inter-Nordic labor market is for us for the time being theoretical, as we need our labor force. Principally of course we want to join in.” Se Bildberg 1986, 320. Furthermore, the Foreign Departments seem to have disapproved with the agreements both for procedural reasons and because of Soviet discontent with the idea. See minutes from meeting of Nordic Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Utrikåksdepartementets Arkiv (National Archives Sweden).

\textsuperscript{71} Johansson & Bergström 1999.

\textsuperscript{72} Wendt 1979, 149.

\textsuperscript{73} Friis 1944.
social progressiveness had been an international Nordic trademark. Secondly, the Nordic comparison could be used in national political debates and reform work. Pointing out that one’s country lagged behind other Nordic countries could, in itself, serve as a legitimate reason for suggestion new welfare reforms. Thirdly, for the processes of transfer of social knowledge and social political imitation, it is important to evaluate who is leading from the front and which tendencies are pointing forwards.

This element of competition and comparison keeps recurring in the Nordic discussions for instance, in the discussions on which topics were to be discussed at the Nordic Social Policy Meetings. This was connected to feelings of national pride or to avoid exposing laggardness. The most obvious example of the competition, though, must be the construction of common Nordic social statistics in 1946 (see below). One important reason for putting so many resources into securing that statistics are fully comparable was to decide who actually won the competition.

The competitive element was distinct also at the Nordic Social Political Meeting in Stockholm 1947. Discussions showed explicit awareness of the internal Nordic hierarchy, as when Icelandic Minister of Social Affairs (and Prime Minister) Stefánson without hesitation stated, “we have received many impulses from Sweden and have been glad to learn from this country which at the moment is Nr. 1 among the Nordic countries.”74 This was not only a matter of ordinary courtesy.

This internal comparison and ranking illustrated that for Nordic politicians and public servants the natural comparison in the field of social policy was between Nordic countries. This way of thinking was strengthened in the comparisons between Norden and the outside world. Nordic politicians and civil servants contrasted the Nordic model and the world outside on several occasions. Even if the Icelandic Minister of Social Affairs Stefánson in 1947 recognized that Iceland lagged behind the general Nordic social political development, he continued to propose that there should be a working out of “a comprehensive account for the social political development in the Nordic countries, which could be comparative, and from which other countries might benefit. I, for my

74 Minutes from the 1947 meeting, 18, (in Ministry of Social Affairs, Papers of Johan Strøm, A7 (National Archives Denmark)).
part, think the Nordic countries are the highest ranking when it comes to social political legislation.”  Six years later, Stefánsson’s suggestion was realized, as the volume *Freedom and Welfare* was published (see the opening quote).

But the best illustration of this longing for competition was the decision to construct a common *Nordic Social Statistic* in 1946. The closer collaboration in the field of social policy developed a wish for comparable social statistics. At the Nordic Social Policy Meeting in 1939, the participants agreed that

> For the purpose of keeping each other informed on legislative effect in the different countries it would be desirable, if each country could provide an annual statement for social expenditures, so far as possible constructed along the same lines, concerning as well grouping of the expenses in different social political fields, as the financial distribution between state, insured and employers. Taking in account the large problems connected to the construction of such a line of unity in this area, the meeting has decided that the individual countries are going to discuss this question individually and between them for the purpose of solving this at the next social political meeting.

Owing to the Second World War, implementation made slow progress. However, once the meetings started again in 1945, the Danes wanted to establish an expert committee with the agenda of setting up guidelines for such a Nordic statistics. In his own description, Henning Friis points to Denmark and himself as the initiators. The strong Danish wish might be due to the fact that at the time, the Danes could make best use this comparison for domestic political purposes. The Swedish social political leadership was uncontested, Norway and Finland were concentrating on national reconstruction, and as shown in the above, Iceland seemed to accept its position at the bottom of the Nordic hierarchy.

The expert committee, most of whom were being public servants,

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75 Ibid.
76 The idea of developing comparable statistic was not only a Nordic phenomenon but also suggested from e.g. ILO. But the Nordic ambitions seem to have gone even further.
77 Quoted from Friis 1996, 9.
presented its draft at the Nordic Social Political Meeting in Oslo 1949.\textsuperscript{78} The draft contains guidelines for developing a common and comparable social statistic. It was well received and formally accepted by all the participants at the following talk in Helsinki 1951.\textsuperscript{79}

As comparative welfare state researchers are well aware of, comparing data on social legislation is far from easy. This was also the case for the Nordic experts. The first problem was to set up comparable data for social expenditures. The ambition for Nordic Social Statistics was to establish clear categories in cases in which individual countries had decided for different solutions for the same problems.\textsuperscript{80} Need was chosen as the organizing principle and social assistance was divided into “need categories” such as sickness, workers accident, unemployment, age, disability, family and children, social assistance or damages caused by war. The next problem was how to treat differences in financial structures of the national social security systems. The solution was to differentiate between state and local taxes, employer dues and contributions. But the main problem was how to evaluate the quality of the social assistance and services offered. Was high social expenditure due to high ambitions or large-scale social problems? And ought actual cash value of benefits not to be related to differences in price levels?

In the early 1950s, social statisticians were planning to adjust the statistic in relation to national living expenses, but this was soon abandoned in favor of the more manageable solution of relating to Gross National Products.\textsuperscript{81} This kind of comparisons now covers the period from 1947. Furthermore, the statistical accounts on social expenditure were complemented by extensive surveys covering for instance number of persons receiving social assistances and benefit levels in specific fields. But as the countries, despite similarities, showed several technical differences, these accounts were not entirely comparable. But it functioned as important footnotes to the expenditures, explaining if high expenditures were due to ambitions or social problems.

\textsuperscript{78} Minutes from Nordic Social Political Meeting in Oslo, 1949, 139 (in Department of Social Affairs, Papers of Johan Strom, A7 (National Archives Denmark)).
\textsuperscript{79} Priis 1996, 12.
\textsuperscript{80} Samordning af de nordiske landes statistik vedr. den sociale lovgivning. Bemønse afgivet af den af de nordiske socialministre medvægte ekspertkomité, 1. del, 1951.
\textsuperscript{81} Coordinated Statistics of Social Welfare in the Nordic Countries, 1957.
The expert committee, NOSOKO, was developed into a permanent institution subordinated to the Nordic Social Political Meetings. NOSOKO regularly published their comparisons of social expenditures in the Nordic countries and their so-called handbooks complementing with more qualitative data. This can be seen as an institutionalization of the prior tradition of mutual orientation on national social political development, and was important for the creation of an imagination of a Nordic model of welfare.

From Legislation on Poverty to Social Security
Following the general pattern, including for instance the agreement on mutuality in the field of old age pensions, the Nordic Poverty Treaty of 1928 was also renewed in 1951. The new treaty further limited possibilities of repatriation and the abolishing of reimbursement. At the first summit of the newly founded Nordic Council in Copenhagen 1953, it was decided to initiate a totally new convention covering all social political fields – a so-called Nordic Social Security Treaty. The result was signed by the five ministers of social affairs at the Nordic Social Political Meeting in Copenhagen, September 1955. It was a comprehensive treaty:

"This treaty is concerned with benefits offered by the individual countries due to current social legislation in the case of old age, reduced capacity to work, sickness, accidents and occupational diseases, unemployment, pregnancy and birth of children as well as to children, surviving relatives and needy".

This initiative was in line with Nordic Social Democratic parties and the labour movements. In the internal publication of the Danish social democrats, Socialdemokratiske Noter, the new convention was celebrated as "a major Nordic progress, meaning every Nordic citizen moving to another Nordic country will enjoy exactly the same social rights as does

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82 For a list of publications, see Friis 1996, 59-62.
83 From 1956 NOSOKO even started to publish their reports in English.
84 Social Tidsskrift, 1951, Section A, 235-236.
85 Socialdemokratiske Noter 1954-55, No. 11-12, 748.
86 Quoted from Socialdemokratiske Noter 1954-55, No. 11-12, 748.
87 Hovbakke Sørensen 1999.
the countries own citizens." At the same time, it ought to be underlined that by this the cup was full. Some social political experts, public servants and social democratic politicians had immediately after 1945 expressed ambitions to go further, to create actual common social legislation and convergence. But such a development did not find sufficient political support and ran into institutional inertia.

National and Nordic Interests
How was the Nordic line in social policy created? Firstly, if one looks at the discussions at the Nordic Social Political meetings it seems as if policy is created with reference to the past. When similarities had been established they turned into something Nordic. Secondly, this was not always a process of consensus. A closer look at the political processes leading to Nordic mutuality agreements and cooperation often shows practical problems, national interests and political disagreement. As has been shown in the above, this was the case when discussing social political cooperation 1920-1921 and a common labor market in 1945-46. But also other examples exist.

Universalism and very limited degree of needs testing is often emphasized as characteristics of the Nordic welfare state model. But recent historical research has questioned this and pointed out that the concept of universalism has been highly contested and controversial at the same time.89 This was also the case at the Nordic Social Political Meetings, for instance in Stockholm 1947, where the host Gustav Møller argued for abolishing all kinds of needs and income testing.90 He emphasized that this would lead only to a very limited growth in social expenditures, the extra costs for a large part being swallowed up by a progressive tax system, and lead to substantial administrative relieves.91 Møller characterized income testing as a "psychological mistake". Norway and Iceland

88 Socialdemokratiska Noter 1954-55, No. 3-4, 212.
89 See the contribution in this collection by Petersen & Åmark.
90 Minutes from 1947 meeting, p. 7, (in Department of Social Affairs, Papers of Johan Strøm, A7 (National Archives Denmark)).
91 As one of the Danish participants, H.H. Koch, emphasized, Møller’s line of argument was not totally convincing, as Sweden had chosen not to abolish income testing in housing supplements to old age pensions.
had not gone as far as Sweden in abolishing income testing of benefits, but the Ministers of Social Affairs, Stefánsson and Oftedal, agreed with Möllers line of thought. So did the Finnish minister Mannio, who felt obliged to explain why “we in Finland, who usually follow the Scandinavian line, sometimes too mechanically ... cannot follow this line and abolish needs testing in Finnish social policy.” Even if Finland was not able to abandon income testing here and now, its long-term goal was clear — to follow the other countries (Sweden). In this case, Denmark defended a different line. The leading public servant H.H. Koch was very doubtful about Möllers arguments on the limited financial costs of abolishing testing, and believed, no matter what, that it would be very difficult to convince the public opinion, that this was the way to go. For Koch offering the same old age pension to everybody was equivalent to offering lower pensions. Based on Danish experiences he concluded: “I don’t think, we will abolish needs testing, and I can’t see it is so totally wrong to keep it, in the field of old age pensions.” When it came to universalism and flat rate benefits, the talks showed three opinions: Gustav Möllers unreserved pledge to abolish income testing, Oftedal, Stefánsson and Mannio’s principal acceptance in the long run (when they could afford to) and Koch’s dismissal of the idea.

Similar national disagreements can be found in the field of unemployment insurance. In the 1940s and 1950s, Norway defended its system with compulsory insurance, whereas Denmark, Finland and Sweden strongly argued that their voluntary Ghent systems were to prefer.

A final example of the defense of national interests was the unsuccessful idea of a common Nordic institute for social research. In Denmark, in the autumn 1953, the social democratic government decided to comply with the demand from several social political experts to found a national institute for social research. The Danish Ministry of Social Affairs contacted their Swedish and Norwegian counterparts to hear how they

92 Minutes from 1947 meeting, 46 (in Department of Social Affairs, Papers of Johan Strum, A7 (National Archives Denmark)).
93 See also discussions in Kettunen 2001 and Kettunen’s contribution in this book.
94 Minutes from 1947 meeting, 49, (in Department of Social Affairs, Papers of Johan Strum, A7 (National Archives Denmark)).
95 Johansson & Bergström 1999, 26-35.
96 Friis & Petersen 1998, especially 15-17.
had dealt with such matters. The Swedes answered, hesitantly, that they performed social research in several institutions and were not planning any new initiatives. The Norwegians underlined the need for this kind of research and suggested to establish a common Nordic institute for social research. The only problem was that Danish social political experts were not interested in the idea of a Nordic solution; they wanted an institution of their own, emphasizing the very special Danish context to be studied: “... the differences between, for instance, Danish and Norwegian rural areas, mean that any practical Danish use of results from research in Norwegian rural municipalities hardly is possible.” But Danish non-socialist politicians were more sympathetic towards a Nordic institute, not only out of Nordic enthusiasm, but mainly because it would make a more influential and expensive Danish institute superfluous. For this reason, the idea was kept alive in the Danish debate for a couple of years, but was gradually transformed into an idea of informal collaboration, as it had existed for decades. And eventually a Danish National Institute of Social Research was established from 1958 ending all speculations on a Nordic institution.

This shows clearly that such close cooperation was not without problems or limitations. It was not easy to construct Nordic welfare.

Conclusion
The result of the Nordic social political cooperation was not so much to create Nordic uniformity, but to create Nordic mutuality in social rights. During first half of the 20th Century, the Nordic countries entered into agreements on cooperation and mutual social rights. Another result of the collaboration was very strong, formal and informal, ties between social political state administrations in the Nordic countries – from ministers to public servants. This was a decisive factor in driving the Nordic social political collaboration forward. Furthermore, the close relations and the highly institutionalized cooperation were important for the construction