

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Sharing is caring

The official and practical understanding of the concept Nordic added value
in the field of social and health policy

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Abstract:

This thesis examines how the concept of Nordic added value is defined and understood in Nordic social and health policy cooperation. Although the concept serves as an evaluation criterion for funding and a guiding principle in all official Nordic cooperation projects and activities, there is no single, widely accepted view of the meaning of the concept. The goal of the research is thus to investigate and understand the underlying principle of Nordic cooperation, through which the research also supports the practical work of Nordic actors and institutions operating in the social and health sector. In addition, the research supports the implementation of the Nordic Council of Ministers' Vision 2030 action plan, according to which the Nordic region will become the world's most sustainable and integrated region by 2030.

The research is mainly inductive in nature, and its conceptual framework includes an examination of Nordic cooperation narratives, the Nordic epistemic community, and the added value of transnational cooperation. It is a case study that investigates and compares the understanding of the concept of persons working in or with Nordic social and health policy cooperation at two separate levels of formal Nordic cooperation. In addition to survey and interview materials, the research analyses official Nordic cooperation documents using qualitative content analysis. The survey and interview materials were gathered from both the official level, which includes Nordic Welfare

Centre operating under the Nordic Council of Ministers, as well as the practical level, which consists of several networks that Nordic Welfare Centre coordinates.

The results of this study show that there are no significant differences between the understandings of the two levels, but the concept appears to be relatively flexible and ambiguous and dependent on the individuals using it. However, the concept can be understood in both symbolic and practical terms, whereby the former is closely related to the common background and values associated with the Nordic welfare state models, and the latter to the exchange and sharing of knowledge and experiences.

The research shows that the greatest added value in Nordic social and health policy cooperation arises from useful comparisons that lead to learning, inspiration, and ultimately development both in individual countries and in the entire Nordic region. Although the research results suggest that a lot of added value is produced in the Nordic welfare sector, the study also highlights that many factors, such as lack of resources and administrative and language challenges, limit the realisation of the full potential of Nordic added value.

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Tiivistelmä:

Tässä pro gradu -tutkielmassa tarkastellaan, miten pohjoismaisen lisäarvon (Nordic added value) käsite määritellään ja ymmärretään pohjoismaisessa sosiaali- ja terveyspoliittisessa yhteistyössä. Vaikka käsite toimii pohjoismaisen rahoituksen arviointikriteerinä ja ohjaavana periaatteena kaikissa virallisissa pohjoismaisissa yhteistyöhankkeissa ja -toiminnoissa, ei käsitteen merkityksestä ole olemassa yhtä, laajasti hyväksyttyä näkemystä. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on tutkia ja ymmärtää tätä pohjoismaisen yhteistyön taustalla olevaa käsitettä, minkä myötä tutkimus myös tukee pohjoismaisten sosiaali- ja terveysalan toimijoiden ja instituutioiden työtä käytännössä. Lisäksi tutkimus tukee Pohjoismaiden ministerineuvoston Visio 2030 -toimintasuunnitelman toteutusta, jonka mukaan Pohjolasta tulee maailman kestävin ja integroitunein alue vuoteen 2030 mennessä.

Tutkimus on luonteeltaan pääosin induktiivinen, ja sen käsitteellinen viitekehys sisältää pohjoismaisen yhteistyön narratiivien, Pohjoismaiden episteemisen yhteisön ja kansainvälisen yhteistyön lisäarvon tarkastelua. Kyseessä on tapaustutkimus, joka tutkii ja vertailee, miten pohjoismaisessa sosiaali- ja terveyspoliittisessa yhteistyössä tai sen kanssa toimivat henkilöt ymmärtävät tutkittavan käsitteen virallisen pohjoismaisen yhteistyön kahdella erillisellä tasolla. Tutkimuksessa analysoidaan kysely- ja haastatteluaineistojen lisäksi virallisia pohjoismaisia yhteistyöasiakirjoja laadullista sisällönanalyysia käyttäen. Kysely- ja haastatteluaineisto on kerätty

Pohjoismaisen ministerineuvoston alaisuudessa toimivan Pohjoismaisen hyvinvointikeskuksen (virallinen taso) ja sen koordinoimien verkostojen (käytännön taso) piiristä.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että tutkittavan käsitteen ymmärryksessä ei kummallakaan tasolla ole merkittäviä eroja, vaan käsite vaikuttaa olevan varsin joustava, moniselitteinen ja henkilösidonainen. Käsite voidaan kuitenkin ymmärtää sekä symbolisesti että käytännön tasolla, joista edellinen liittyy läheisesti pohjoismaisten hyvinvointivaltiomallien yhteiseen taustaan ja arvoihin, jälkimmäinen tiedon ja kokemusten vaihtoon ja jakamiseen.

Tutkimus osoittaa, että suurin lisäarvo pohjoismaisessa sosiaali- ja terveystaloudellisessa yhteistyössä syntyy hyödyllisistä vertailuista, jotka johtavat oppimiseen, inspiraatioon, ja lopulta kehitykseen sekä yksittäisissä maissa että koko Pohjolan alueella. Vaikka tutkimustulokset viittaavat siihen, että pohjoismaisella hyvinvointisektorilla tuotetaan paljon lisäarvoa, tutkimus myös korostaa, että monet tekijät, kuten resurssien puute sekä hallinnolliset ja kieliin liittyvät haasteet, rajoittavat pohjoismaisen lisäarvon täyden potentiaalin saavuttamista.

Table of contents

List of Abbreviations	i
List of Figures	ii
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Research questions and objectives	3
2 Background and Theoretical Framework	5
2.1 The status and role of Nordic cooperation	5
2.1.1 Nordic exceptionalism: Cooperation as a success story	8
2.1.2 The decline of Nordic cooperation	10
2.1.3 European challenge: Institutional reforms and the future of Nordic cooperation	11
2.2 Nordic epistemic community in welfare sector	14
2.2.1 The Nordic welfare model	17
2.2.2 Contemporary social and health policy cooperation in Norden	21
2.3 Nordic added value and the added value of transnational cooperation	23
2.3.1 Current research and operationalisation of Nordic added value	23
2.3.2 European Added Value	26
3 Research Design and Methods: Two-dimensional perspective with qualitative content analysis	30
3.1 Nordic Welfare Centre as a case study	30
3.1.1 Two-level understanding	32
3.2 Data collection	32
3.2.1 Publications and steering documents	33
3.2.2 Surveys	34
3.2.3 Interviews	35
3.3 Methods of analysing data: Qualitative content analysis	36
4 Analysis	39
4.1 Publications and steering documents	39
4.1.1 The definition and practical use of the concept	39
4.1.2 Factors impacting the achievement of Nordic added value	42

4.2 Survey	43
4.2.1 Definition of the concept	44
4.2.2 The concept and its use in practice	48
4.2.3 Strengths and challenges of Nordic cooperation as factors impacting the achievement of Nordic added value	52
4.2.4 Expectations towards NAV and the development of their prerequisites	57
4.3 Interviews	60
4.3.1 Operationalisation of the concept in theory	61
4.3.2 The concept and its uses in practice	62
4.3.3 Factors supporting and challenging the generation of added value	65
4.3.4 Developing the prerequisites	69
5 Discussion	71
5.1 The results	71
5.2 More symbolism and political desire than economic demand	73
5.3 Limitations	74
6 Conclusion	76
References	78
Appendices	88
Appendix 1 Survey questions	88
Appendix 2 Interview questions	91
Appendix 3 Privacy notice	92

List of Abbreviations

COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
EAV	European Added Value
EEC	European Economic Community
EK-S	The Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Health and Social Affairs
EU	European Union
ILO	International Labour Organization
KV	Nordic Council of Ministers' Department of Knowledge and Welfare
MR-S	The Nordic Council of Ministers of Health and Social Affairs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NAV	Nordic added value
NC	Nordic Council
NCM	Nordic Council of Ministers
NMRS	The Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers
NWC	Nordic Welfare Centre
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
USSR	The Soviet Union
WWI	The First World War
WWII	The Second World War

List of Figures

Figure 1 Distribution between the two levels of the total number of survey respondents	44
Figure 2 Distribution among the official level respondents regarding the familiarity with the concept	45
Figure 3 Distribution among the practical level respondents regarding the familiarity with the concept	45
Figure 4 The process of learning resulting in impact and development	72

1 Introduction

We are good at celebrating important anniversaries, as the recent Nordic Council 70 years, the Helsingfors Treaty 60 years, and the Nordic Council of Ministers 50 years, however, Nordic cooperation cannot be taken for granted; we must also look ahead, the cooperation must be renewed and deepened as a continuous process (Tvinnereim 2022).

This statement presented by Norway's Nordic Cooperation and International Development Minister Anne Beathe Tvinnereim in April 2022 illustrates well the current state of Nordic cooperation. This transnational cooperation, based on the shared Nordic identity deriving from the common culture including similar languages, traditions, religion, political views, and history, has high support among Nordic citizens (Archer 2014; Grøn, Nedergaard, & Wivel 2015; Kharkina 2013). This has been confirmed in several surveys by the Nordic Council (NC) and the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), and according to the most recent survey performed in 2021, 86% of respondents thought that well-developed cooperation between the Nordic countries is important or very important (Nordic Co-operation 2021). However, it appears that Nordic cooperation, as well as the work of Nordic institutions, can be relatively unfamiliar to the general public, resulting often in a situation in which Nordic cooperation is taken for granted. This has been particularly evident with recent global crises such as the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), which has threatened the health and welfare of Nordic citizens as well as challenged the cornerstones and pride of Nordic cooperation, such as open borders and societies. Additionally, COVID-19 has not only revealed the shortcomings in the current cooperation structures but also encouraged the Nordic states in reinforcing their existing cooperation. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also functioned as a reminder of the value and importance of Nordic cooperation and working together. As a result, the Nordic cooperation ministers announced a declaration in June 2022 that in addition to contingency planning and crisis preparedness stressed the importance of a Nordic perspective in all discussions between the Nordic states (Nordic Co-operation 2022). According to the declaration, it is crucial to consider the Nordic perspective before making any national decisions so that all opportunities and challenges can be highlighted, particularly in upcoming crisis situations.

Nordic perspective in this matter derives from the idea of the Nordic region as a distinct community of shared languages, cultures, and values that is closely related to the concept of

Nordic cooperation as “a particularly democratic and ‘popular’ form of transnational cooperation” (Strang 2021: 119). This idea has further served as a crucial component of the legitimacy of the official cooperation institutions of the Nordic countries and as part of the rationale for various cooperation projects and initiatives. However, since the 1990s, there have been doubts about the political significance of institutionalised Nordic cooperation (Opitz & Etzold 2018). Due to the Soviet Union's (USSR) demise in 1991, the political landscape of Northern Europe was also significantly changed by the end of the Cold War (Opitz & Etzold 2018; Strang 2016). This had an impact on changes in Nordic cooperation as well: in 1995, Finland and Sweden joined the European Union (EU) and followed Denmark's lead, while Norway and Iceland remained members of the European Economic Community (EEC). Assumptions about the future of Nordic cooperation were prompted by the altered political environment. On the one hand, some regarded European integration as a threat to further Nordic partnership, while on the other hand, others saw opportunities for distinctive Nordic cooperation within the EU arena (Strang 2016).

As a result of these changes in the globalised world, the governments of the Nordic countries saw the need to change and modify their cooperation structures and policies. Here, it was necessary to reframe benefits and the value of Nordic cooperation, *nordisk nytta*, in respect to European integration (Olesen & Strang 2016). Including various official translations in English, such as Nordic usefulness, Nordic benefit, Nordic advantage, Nordic synergy, and Nordic added value (NAV)¹, the principle has since then worked in the basis of all activities and projects of the NCM and further given political significance to the official Nordic cooperation institutions (Kharkina 2013). However, according to current research, the concept is far from clear and varies between actors and policy fields. In the light of the Nordic Council of Minister's Vision 2030, according to which the Nordic region will become the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030 (Nordic Co-operation 2019a), defining the concept becomes even more important.

¹ The many translations (both in English and in Scandinavian languages) do not necessarily represent the same idea, but rather demonstrate how the translation and understanding of the concept has evolved over time, context, and actors who have used it. The use of different terms is elaborated more in the later sections. Among these various translations, I opted to use the Nordic added value in my thesis since it appears to be the prevailing translation at the moment.

Simultaneously, all Nordic states face several challenges, which are rarely limited within fixed political borders (Conrad 2011). Both internal and external pressures, such as globalisation, and demographic trends along with COVID-19, have put the Nordic welfare states under the pressure. These pressures all have the potential to undermine the Nordic welfare model's principles of universalism and equity. For instance, as seen with the COVID-19, these pressures often put at risk the health and well-being of those who are already vulnerable, such as older adults and those with disabilities (Aartsen & Rothe, 2023). Hence, if the Nordic countries want to ensure, for example, adequate social insurance, care for the elderly, and access to education for all in the future, the Nordic welfare model must be constantly updated. In the meantime, the Nordic countries must consider how to reconcile efficiency and equity with limited resources. As a result, new means of providing welfare services, as well as developing effective and efficient social and health policy for everyone in Norden, are required (Kvist et al. 2012; Mäntyranta 2011). As the Nordic countries must constantly adapt to a new and developing environment, a strong purpose of cooperation and clear cooperation goals can help in achieving this.

1.1 Research questions and objectives

Since the political relevance and legitimacy of official Nordic cooperation institutions have been questioned and debated in the light of EU integration, and there are various global challenges threatening the Nordic welfare states, it is important to examine the underlying principle, Nordic added value, that underpins all Nordic cooperation projects. The focus of this thesis is on social and health policy as it lies in the heart of Nordic societies and has been one of the most important priorities throughout the history of Nordic cooperation. As a case study, this thesis examines Nordic Welfare Centre (NWC), which serves as a common platform and an official institution within the Nordic Council of Ministers' social and health sector. Within the institution operating under formal Nordic cooperation, two different dimensions and their understanding of the concept are examined. These dimensions include the official level, which includes those directly involved in NWC's work, as well as the practical level, which consist of people who participate in the various networks that NWC coordinates within the welfare sector in the Nordic countries.

The primary goal of this research is to understand the meaning and use of the concept Nordic added value in Nordic social and health policy cooperation, while also contributing to the discussion about the future of Nordic social and health policy cooperation. For this purpose, I

have determined two sub questions that may help in answering the primary research question. They are as follows:

1. What are the current official and practical understandings of the concept of Nordic added value in the field of social and health policy?
2. What are the possible similarities, differences, and challenges between the two levels of understanding?

Additionally, by examining the concept NAV in Nordic welfare sector, this study supports the planning and evaluation of NWC's activities and overall work in Nordic social and health policy cooperation as well as strengthens the legitimacy and relevance of Nordic institutions in this matter in the future. By this study, I contribute to the existing knowledge within the field of regional cooperation and in particular Nordic studies. However, this study is not an attempt to provide a chronological account of the history of official Nordic social and health cooperation nor the concept of Nordic added value, but rather to find out the contemporary understanding of the concept in the chosen policy area. The first section provides the background knowledge and theoretical frameworks needed to comprehend the central concepts of Nordic cooperation, particularly as they apply to social and health policy. The research design and methods are presented in the part that follows. This study is a qualitative single case that uses publications and steering documents, survey, and interviews as its data sources. Additionally, a qualitative content analysis (QCA) is presented as the method of data analysis.

2 Background and Theoretical Framework

There is a significant amount of literature on Nordic cooperation, and the section that follows will outline current research with the main findings relevant to the topic of inquiry. For clarity, I have distinguished between theory and method as follows: by theoretical framework, I mean those concepts and framework that enable the specification of a problem and the conceptualisation of the study's subject; and by method, I mean a tool for the analysis of research data and the gathering of necessary information from materials on the subject. I concentrate on three themes to provide a general overview of the literature. This section starts with the first theme, the study and various narratives of Nordic cooperation. Hereafter, Nordic welfare cooperation together with the introduction to the Nordic welfare model are presented, and then the concept added value is operationalised by exploring current literature. By introducing these sections, I aim to demonstrate the significance of the study and how it contributes to the existing literature. Furthermore, it is important to note that this thesis understands regions, identities and concepts through the assumptions deriving from social constructivism, according to which, reality is socially constructed by people, and therefore nothing exists without people and their interactions (Bryman 2016; Halperin & Heath 2017). According to constructivism, reality is shaped by norms, values, assumptions, and social interactions that influence the actors in relation to their identities and interests. Hence, political life is based on interaction, beliefs and interests and might change as the political interactions change (Halperin & Heath 2017).

2.1 The status and role of Nordic cooperation

Among scholars, Norden is often recognised as a distinct historical region and a political construction (Kuhnle 2011; Stie & Trondal 2020; Strang 2016). It is defined as consisting of the five Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the autonomous areas of the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and the Åland Islands. Furthermore, the five Nordic² states are frequently put together in international and European relations, and their position is typically portrayed as different from and better than Europe (Grøn, Nedergaard, & Wivel 2015).

² The concepts Nordic and Scandinavian are relatively flexible and debated concepts that have been and continue to be applied in many ways, often contradicting with each other (Marjanen, Strang & Hilson 2021). Furthermore, they have historically and often been used interchangeably. However, in many contexts the term Scandinavian has only referred to Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, whereas Nordic also tends to include Finland and Iceland (Hemstad 2010; Marjanen, Strang & Hilson 2021).

The Nordic countries share many elements in common, such as strong democratic traditions, relatively high wealth, Lutheran heritage, and low corruption, with all of them being typical features of social democratic welfare states (Grøn, Nedergaard, & Wivel 2015). They are also small states, although perhaps with the exception of Sweden. According to Peinhardt and Sandler (2015), transnational cooperation can be characterised as "two or more countries cooperating to achieve an outcome that is more difficult and, in some instances, impossible to obtain through independent efforts", and it is frequently motivated by advantages that are gained by all cooperating countries. In historical terms, such examples of transnational cooperation can for instance refer to military alliances, such as the Axis and the Allies during the Second World War (WWII) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Furthermore, global health issues such as pandemics or environmental issues like pollution might serve as a foundation for building this type of collective action (Peinhardt & Sandler 2015). This kind of classification suggests that Nordic cooperation falls under the category of transnational cooperation.

Although Nordic cooperation is deeply rooted in politics, economics, and culture, prior to the WWII these spheres of cooperation were more erratic, alternating between times of war and periods of peace and solidarity (Nordic Co-operation n.d.a; Petersen 2011). The meeting of the three Scandinavian kings in Sweden in 1914 served as the symbolic starting point for the new cooperation times that followed the dissolution of the Nordic kingdoms. Following that, a number of organisations started creating regional Nordic collaborations, such as the Nordic Associations, at all levels of civil society as well as at the political and official levels (Hemstad 2010). The official Nordic cooperation was put on hold during the WWII, and the nations found themselves in quite different circumstances: Finland was at war with the USSR when it was supporting Germany, while Denmark was occupied, and Norway was defeated by Germany. Iceland and the Faroe Islands served as bases for British troops, and only Sweden maintained its official neutrality, although the whole concept of neutrality in international relations theory has since been debated (see for instance Agius 2006). The 1950s saw the development of many schemes for Nordic cooperation, such as a Nordic free-trade zone, a common labour market and a Nordic customs union. Furthermore, the establishment of the Nordic Council in 1952 and the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1971 both served to institutionalise Nordic cooperation on a parliamentary level (Hemstad 2010). However, the foundation for the official cooperation was formed only in 1962, when the Nordic countries ratified the Helsinki Treaty (Opitz & Etzold 2018).

Currently, the two official bodies of Nordic cooperation, the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, serve as the forums for both intergovernmental and interparliamentary collaboration, while unofficial Nordic cooperation occurs within society in general and nongovernmental organisations (Kharkina 2013). Olesen and Strang (2016) suggest that Nordic cooperation after 1945 may be broken down into three distinct categories, the first of which is official institutional cooperation, including the activity of the NC and the NCM. Another aspect is informal government cooperation, which frequently entails extremely high levels of Nordic policy coordination both internally and externally, such as in the UN or ILO. Finally, a large part of the cooperation has been made possible by the participation of several private and public transnational networks and organisations. Due to the governments' ambitious plans to considerably strengthen and improve formal Nordic cooperation in the areas of security and economy, it can also be included in this list (Olesen & Strang 2016). Furthermore, according to Stie and Trondal (2020), Nordic cooperation is active in sector-specific and international networks, but still partially overlaps with other regional political-administrative networks. Thus, it can be characterised as “differentiated integration”, in which various institutions and areas of the region work to varying degrees, at different times and speeds, and in various policy areas (Stie & Trondal 2020). In other words, the Nordic countries cooperate and coordinate policies in accordance with their preferences and options available. However, since Nordic cooperation primarily takes place in tangles of administrative networks, coordination amongst different policy areas in the region has proved challenging (Stie & Trondal 2020). Inter-sectoral package agreements are thus uncommon because this cooperation only occasionally occurs through the NC and the NCM. This simultaneously demonstrates that Nordic cooperation can become more resilient if it falters or breaks down in one policy area because not all policy areas collapse at the same time. Furthermore, due to the tight linkages of political and administrative networks to EU institutions and political processes, the Nordic administrative cooperation serves as a link to EU forums (Stie & Trondal 2020).

Overall, the concept of Nordic cooperation has been extensively studied, contested, and reinterpreted in numerous historical contexts (Hemstad 2010). However, the function of the region is widely discussed and debated and depending on whom you ask, Nordic cooperation can have several meanings. For others, the concept may seem insignificant and secondary in comparison to the transatlantic security system and the European economic and political framework, while for some it can evoke positive feelings when referring to the idea of the Nordics as a cultural, linguistic, and historical community (Strang 2021). This is further

supported by the current scholarship that distinguishes Nordic cooperation into two narratives—it can be viewed either as a significant accomplishment in forging an international community or as failures in formalising economic or security policy cooperation. It also appears that Norden plays distinct roles in political discussions. The different experiences and histories of the region have been used by various actors to support their own interests, and for example, nationalist and far-right movements have taken advantage of Norden's accommodating role in pushing their own agenda recently. All these findings indicate that Norden as a region is currently being re-established, according to which, there is an ongoing “Nordic renaissance” in the region (Strang 2016). The next sections elaborate more on these ideas, with the focus on the two traditional narratives as well as on the future of Nordic cooperation.

2.1.1 Nordic exceptionalism: Cooperation as a success story

Often in transnational studies the Nordic region is portrayed as a unique and exceptional case (Kettunen et al. 2016; Petersen 2011; Schouenborg 2012). It appears that the Nordic countries consistently rank at the top of the world rankings in a variety of subject matters and comparisons, including those involving education, public trust, the state of democracy and political rights, low levels of corruption, felt safety, social cohesion, gender equality, income equality, and the Human Development Index (Engelstad & Hagelund 2015; Martela et al. 2020; Strang 2016). Since 2013, for instance, each time the World Happiness Report has released its annual ranking of countries, the five Nordic countries of Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland have consistently been in the top 10, often taking up one or more of the top three positions (Martela et al. 2020). Consequently, the Nordic countries seem to be models with best practices to share in a number of policy sectors (Browning 2007; Strang 2016).

There are several ways to approach this narrative, with the first case focusing on international relations and security perspective. Here, the Nordic region is portrayed as a successful security community (Archer 2014; Browning 2007; Ingebritsen 2006). This perspective is based on Karl Deutsch's well-known concept of “security community”, referring to “a group of people which has become integrated” in which the members will settle all disputes by not fighting each other physically (Deutsch, 1969: 5). Despite the historical heritage of decades of brutal warfare between the Danish and Swedish kingdoms in the region, there have been no major military conflicts between two Nordic countries since 1814 (Strang 2016). The Nordic region is thus recognised for being not just “a region for peace” in the sense that the Nordics contribute to international peace and conflict resolution, but also “a region of peace” (Hagemann & Bramsen

2019: 9), which has a more than 200-year history of peacefully resolving internal disputes, such as the dissolution of the Sweden-Norway kingdom in 1905 and the case of the Åland Islands (Browning 2007; Kharkina 2013). The Nordic states were also important actors in building bridges between the two blocs during the Cold War (Ingebritsen 2006). Furthermore, unlike many other cases such as European and Asian fascist regimes in the 1930s and 1940s, the Nordic countries avoided the use of force and calculation, and instead formed a belief-based international community (Schouenborg 2012). According to current research, this further supports the idea that the three elements—the internal peace of the Nordic countries, the development of the Nordic welfare state and the international role of the Nordic countries as peace builders and strong defenders of international law and international organisations—have a link to each other (Browning 2007; Strang 2016).

Another way to see Nordic cooperation as a success narrative is to focus on other issues than security. Whilst traditional international cooperation focuses either on trade or foreign and security policy, Nordic cooperation tends to have focused on so-called soft areas, including issues such as welfare, culture, and arts (Strang 2016). Examples of achievements in these soft areas include for instance Nordic agreements on a common labour market in 1954, a social convention in 1955, and a passport union between 1952 and 1958. Furthermore, the Nordic countries are frequently cited as an exceptional example of national welfare statism in global society (Schouenborg 2012). Starting from Denmark, Sweden, and Norway in the 1930s, the ideology later spread to Finland and Iceland as part of the ideational construction of a larger Nordic region. In terms of culture, Anna Kharkina (2013), for example, draws a conclusion in her work that Nordic culture has always been significant in the political discourse on Nordic cooperation and that cultural cooperation has been used to legitimise both Nordic identity and the political project of constructing the Nordic region after the WWII.

Finally, the actors involved and the way they work are described as being unique in both formal and informal Nordic cooperation (Stie & Trondal 2020). The emphasis is on the significance of daily activities of cooperation, highlighting its bottom-up nature and the numerous personal relationships formed through informal networking, experience sharing, and coordination by actors themselves, involving a large scale from politicians to employees of the government, specialists, professionals, and ordinary citizens throughout the Nordic region (Strang 2016). This is the opposite to European integration, which has primarily been pursued by European elites in a top-down manner (Stie & Trondal 2020). For instance, Nordic voluntary

organisations have played a vital role in connecting citizens to the state instead of acting as alternatives to the state. The reasons for this unofficial and informal Nordic cooperation are undoubtedly numerous and vary from case to case, but a common and powerful Nordic voice is frequently the goal of the common cooperation in order to expand one's influence in international fora like the United Nations (UN) or the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Strang 2016).

2.1.2 The decline of Nordic cooperation

On the other hand, the narrative of failure is instead based on the notion where current Nordic cooperation is seen as a “poor” substitute compared to what it could be, if all the miscarried attempts to build a more fixed integrated unit had worked out (Strang 2016: 4). The argument behind this notion dates back to common historical and cultural heritages already from the days of Reformation or even the Viking age, which in theory, build a solid and sufficient ground for the formation of some kind of Nordic nation or federation. However, such formation has never occurred, despite the many attempts to create further cooperation in several policy fields or even the United Nordic Federation, as suggested by historian Gunnar Wetterberg (2010). This was for long evident in security and defence policy, in which the Nordics struggled to find a common ground, due to many historical reasons resulting in the fact that three of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Iceland and Norway) were members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) whilst the two others (Finland and Sweden) decided to remain neutrals. However, after the collapse of the USSR the Nordic countries have managed to increase their cooperation in this field, and especially now after the Russian aggression towards Ukraine since 2014 that eventually caused the accession process of Finland and Sweden to join the NATO, the cooperation is only likely to be intensified in the future (Finnish Government 2022).

There are also other policy areas that have not flourished in Nordic cooperation. The Nordic economic cooperation, which has a history of numerous programs that have failed, appears to be one of them (e.g., the so-called NORDEK plan). Furthermore, the biggest ambitions have not yet been realised in the historically traditional successful areas of Nordic cooperation, such as arts and culture (Strang 2016). However, as many of the Nordic plans for further cooperation have been large and ambitious at the beginning, it is easy to view the final outcomes as failures compared to the original proposals. Instead, possibly smaller and more practical initiatives have been sparked by these kinds of failures (the so-called “Phoenix effect” of Nordic cooperation), as demonstrated by the example of the NORDEK plan evolving into the creation of the NCM

in 1971 (Olesen & Strang 2016). Furthermore, the successful nation-building endeavours of the 19th century (Germany and Italy) or the EU and NATO, two of the largest Western European integration programs of the 20th century, are commonly used as comparisons in the latter examples of failure. If compared to these examples, Nordic initiatives seem rather to be a small-scale in their level of cooperation and integration.

While traditional areas of Nordic cooperation have included social issues and the development of the Nordic welfare state model, culture, the environment, and research and education, classic foreign policy, (military) security, and defence policy have been excluded from formal cooperation (Opitz & Etzold 2018). Thus, one can argue that Nordic cooperation has been successful in soft policy areas like welfare, law, and arts and culture but not in hard sectors like security policy or the economy. However, this argument appears to be the exact opposite considering the most recent developments. Although welfare has been in the heart of Nordic cooperation since the very beginning, it appears that Nordic cooperation is waning in traditional cooperation areas, such as welfare, culture, and law, whilst cooperation in economic and defence cooperation flourishes (Stie & Trondal 2020; Strang 2016). Browning (2007), on the other hand, has noted that the three elements of the Nordic exceptionalism brand—Nordics as peaceful societies and bridge-builders, as well as the functions of internationalist solidarism and egalitarian social democracy—are becoming less exceptional in relation to the EU, and thus less Nordic. Furthermore, various problems, such as the substantial travel limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, have the tendency to undermine the foundations of Nordic cooperation, such as open borders and free mobility (Creutz et al. 2021).

2.1.3 European challenge: Institutional reforms and the future of Nordic cooperation

After the EU accession of Finland and Sweden in 1995, no political debate in the Nordic cooperation has taken place without addressing and taking into account the EU context. The official Nordic cooperation has subsequently struggled to deal with European integration, and as a result, it has posed a challenge to Nordic cooperation (Olesen & Strang 2016; Stie & Trondal 2020). According to Strang (2016), the changed political nature in the 1990s led to a failed redefinition and re-establishment project of Norden, and European projects were seen as more exciting opportunities. The Nordic tradition of neutrality and peace became disputed, and the perceived superiority of the Nordic welfare model was also called into question due to the combined influence of popularity of neoliberal ideology and the economic recession that Finland and Sweden in particular experienced. However, as Nygrund (2012) has noted, Norden

as a concept never lost its importance in the Nordic countries but fell on the background when the EU was portrayed as a better and more attractive alternative for further integration. The EU's expansion however made Nordic cooperation a middle layer between the national and European levels as three of the five Nordic countries were now EU members. According to Strang (2016), the growing decision-making power of the EU through the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 has marginalised the Nordic countries politically and legally, which has caused the organisations of official political Nordic cooperation to compete for status and relevance (Olesen & Strang 2016; Strang, 2016). Furthermore, Kuisma and Nygård (2015) have noted that the Nordic states have had rather varied responses to EU integration process, and Denmark and Finland have been more actively involved in the EU than Sweden and undoubtedly Norway. However, Stie and Trondal (2020) also note that it is common for national regulatory bodies frequently coordinate common stances at the Nordic level before any EU meetings.

Since the 1990s, Nordic cooperation has seen a substantial transformation, with an aim to find and re-define the political relevance by renewing the structure of the Nordic Council of Ministers (Opitz & Etzold 2018). As a reaction to discussions and debates concerning the role and relevance of Nordic cooperation, the NC and the NCM introduced a three-pillar approach in which Nordic cooperation is based on, including traditional cooperation within Norden, cooperation in regard to Europe and EU, and finally cooperation in relation to the neighbouring territories (Opitz & Etzold 2018; Olesen & Strang 2016). New committees of the NC based on these geographical elements were established in place of the previous system, which included committees for various sectors such as environment and culture. However, the difficulties with the new system led to the return of the original structure in 2001; it was found to be too unclear, had too many themes under one working committee, and ultimately did not fit well with the topic oriented NCM (Opitz & Etzold 2018). Around the same time, the NCM underwent a variety of institutional modifications with the aim to better coordinate its work, often in relation to the EU. These changes included the establishment of information offices in the Baltic States and St. Petersburg, the reduction of ministerial councils and official committees working under the NCM, the annual rotation of the presidency among member states, and finally the restructuring of the secretariat in 2010 (Opitz & Etzold 2018). Although the close cooperation with the Baltic states has traditionally been important for Nordic cooperation, many researchers seem to agree on that is very unlikely that these states will be included directly in the NCM or the NC in the future. This is because the Nordic states share a core identity that is primarily founded on shared historical, cultural, and linguistic characteristics (Opitz & Etzold 2018).

When the Nordic cooperation ministers announced four future visions of cooperation in February 2014, more reforms began (Opitz & Etzold 2018). While two of these visions were more traditional in their focus on an innovative and borderless Nordic region, the others were more outward-looking. In response to growing international interest in Nordic expertise and solutions, such as the Nordic welfare model, the third vision called for the visibility and branding of the Nordic region. Furthermore, the fourth vision emphasised the need to increase Nordic cooperation on international issues and within international organisations (Opitz & Etzold 2018). Despite the fact that the primary objective of the 2014 reform was to modernise the structure in order to improve cooperation effectiveness, political relevance, and expansion into new fields, the background was the deterioration of relations with Russia following the crisis in Ukraine (the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula), which had an impact on the participation of the NCM in northwest Russia. The EU's legitimacy issue and the significant migration movements that directly impacted all five Nordic countries further intensified the operational pressure on them, and as a result of these developments, the Nordic governments' cooperation as well as broader regional cooperation and integration faced new obstacles as well as opportunities (Opitz & Etzold 2018). Furthermore, the current war of Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022 will likely have an impact on Nordic cooperation as well, although the exact and long-term effects are not yet known.

The Ministers for Nordic Cooperation introduced the most recent action plan for Nordic cooperation, *Our Vision 2030*, in 2019 (Nordic Co-operation 2019a). The plan outlines how the NCM will work to realise the vision's goals through a series of actions focused on the vision's three strategic priorities: a green Nordic Region, a competitive Nordic Region, and a socially sustainable Nordic Region. The NCM's activities for the next four years are governed by the strategic priorities and objectives, and there are 12 objectives linked to the strategic priorities, such as biodiversity, welfare for all, and trust and cohesion in the Nordic region. A variety of development indicators have been created to guarantee that actions related to the Vision 2030 provide the expected results. Furthermore, the action plan aims to promote civil society participation and the integration of three interdisciplinary viewpoints in all NCM activities: sustainable development, gender equality, and children's rights and youth perspectives. Since the action plan's primary objective is to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation within the NCM, the aim is also to improve the quality and effectiveness of cooperation. Nevertheless, there are still numerous obstacles to overcome, such as border constraints brought on by the COVID-19

outbreak, which make it harder to accomplish some objectives and undermine the legitimacy of Nordic cooperation (Opitz & Etzold 2018). Furthermore, Stie and Trondal (2020: 6) note that the NCM has many different weaknesses and limits to cooperation, such as “no majority voting or ‘opting-out’ system, a lack in supranational structures and policies and no common immigration, foreign, security and EU policies”.

2.2 Nordic epistemic community in welfare sector

Welfare, which has been one of the core characteristics of Nordic identity, has worked one of the main policy areas in Nordic cooperation throughout history (Opitz & Etzold 2018). The development of Nordic welfare state and social and health policy cooperation has thus been widely researched among scholars. For instance, according to Klaus Petersen (2011), there are three levels of how to understand the development and construction of Nordic welfare states—national, Nordic, and international. Furthermore, the examined approach has varied from different subjects within the policy field to the construction of the welfare state and the historical, conceptual, and shifting usages and meanings of the terms (see for instance Edling 2018 and Kettunen & Petersen 2011a). For instance, the term welfare state is used to describe modern societies and is a significant and vital aspect of national identities in the Nordic countries (Petersen 2011).

It is commonly agreed that the Nordic countries' cooperation on social and health policies dates to the end of the 19th century (Kettunen et al. 2016). However, it was not until the early 1920s that interest in international collaboration increased, in part because of World War I's (WWI) repercussions and Finland's and Iceland's independence, and this interest gave rise to an establishment of number of transnational institutions and organisations for cooperation, such as national Nordic organisations (*Foreningerne Norden*) and the trans-Nordic cooperation of family and marriage legislation in the 1920s (Kettunen et al. 2016). Furthermore, the Nordic labour movement also had strong ties from the late 19th century onwards, which were institutionalised and strengthened in 1932 with the establishment of the so-called SAMAK conferences (*Arbejderbevaegelsens Nordiske Samarbejdskomite*) (Kettunen et al. 2016; Petersen 2011).

The Nordic Social Political Meetings, which came about as a result of a shared desire among Scandinavian members of government for more and frequent social-political cooperation, were a significant component of the Nordic cooperation in social and health policy (Petersen 2011).

A meeting for politicians, public servants, and experts was convened for the first time in 1919 in Copenhagen, Denmark (Kettunen et al. 2016). These sessions had a dual objective of strengthening the existing tradition for mutual direction on national social policy developments and coordinating national Nordic strategies toward the approaching social-political conference (Kettunen et al. 2016). Since the Nordic countries had different historical experiences, they did not share the same attitudes to tighter collaboration. While Finland and Iceland were more hesitant to forge closer cooperation, Sweden and Denmark were more open to it. Partly due to the concern that Sweden and Denmark may utilise collaboration to imperialist goals, Norway was perhaps the most cautious and sceptical among all (Stadius 2019). Furthermore, different historical developments, such as levels of modernisation, economic and political capacity, institutional history (previous social-political changes), and nation-building processes, differed between nations (Árnason 2018). As a result, this was evident in the stark contrast between the national social institutions in the Nordic countries, such as social security systems. While Finland and Iceland fell behind and were lagging until the 1960s, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway may be called front-runners in this matter (Kettunen et al. 2016; Kvist et al. 2012; Petersen 2011). However, because no Nordic country wanted to be a latecomer in terms of progressive social policies, internal Nordic rivalry and comparison were used in national political debates and to promote and create new welfare reforms.

From the 1930s onwards, the concept of the Nordic model of society served as the foundation for national modernisation processes, helping to shape social political structures and what is considered to belong to the sphere of social politics (Kettunen 2011; Kettunen et al. 2016; Petersen 2011). Through the formulation of the development of shared definitions of social problems and an openness to the thriving market for social policy innovations, Nordic cooperation in social policy resulted in an epistemic community (Kettunen & Petersen 2021; Petersen 2011), a concept introduced by Peter M. Haas (1992). For Haas (1992: 3), an epistemic community is “a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area”, and it may be composed of experts from various backgrounds. What is common for all these experts is that they share normative and principled ideas that provide a value-based explanation for all social actions. Furthermore, based on their practice analysis, these professionals share causal beliefs. Finally, they have intersubjective conceptions of validity, which refer to criteria used to validate information in their sphere of competence, and a common

policy enterprise, referring to a set of shared practices associated to a set of challenges (Haas 1992: 3).

The formation of a Nordic epistemic community in social policy, which had its origins in the 19th century's Scandinavianist movement (Browning 2007), occurred in the early 20th century, when a close and structured Nordic cooperation established international Nordic institutions of cooperation and idea exchange with the objective of developing national legislation more converging (Kettunen et al. 2016). The Nordic Social Political Meetings became a platform for a Nordic social policy epistemic community, and the modernisation processes involved a wide range of actors: politicians, government members, semi-national associations, and socio-political experts and civil servants, the latter two of whom played a particularly key role in these processes (Kettunen & Petersen 2021; Petersen 2011). Furthermore, this transnational epistemic community in welfare and social policy had not only a major impact on national social security systems and overall institutional convergence in Norden but also on the development of the Nordic model as a concept and the direction of the welfare state (Petersen 2011; Strang 2016). There was a lively knowledge and social expertise transfer between Nordic officials, and numerous of new cooperative groups provided forums for experts to discuss social policy (Kettunen et al. 2016), among which the ILO and the League of Nations were one of the most significant ones. The Nordic countries used both organisations as platforms to build and present a Nordic model of national society as well as a Nordic pattern of international cooperation (Kettunen et al. 2016; Kettunen & Petersen 2021).

The Nordic Social Political Meetings were held regularly until the WWII, during which no official meetings were held (Petersen 2011). During the war, however, many Nordic actors maintained personal relationships, and cooperation was by no means interrupted during the war either (Kettunen et al. 2016). From 1953, socio-political cooperation was included in the activities of the newly founded NC, and the agreements in various areas of the common social policy of the Nordic countries began to be implemented. In addition to the NC, there were numerous establishments in the area of social and health policy during the post-WWII period, such as the Social Security Convention in 1955 and the common Nordic Labor Market in 1954 (Kettunen et al. 2016; Petersen 2011). Thus, the 1930s through the 1970s can be considered the golden years for the growth of the Nordic welfare state and Nordic socio-political cooperation, with the 1940s and 1950s being the most significant ones (Kettunen et al. 2016; Petersen 2011). As the Nordic cooperation intensified after the WWII, the Nordics often searched within

themselves for inspiration. The discovery of similarities gave rise to the Nordic social policy, containing characteristics like public responsibility, social rights, universalism, and tax-financing. However, diverging national interests and practical difficulties in political procedures tended to hinder the realisation of mutual Nordic agreements, and the outcome was rarely formed by direct consensus (Petersen 2011). Furthermore, Petersen (2011) argues that the development of Nordic social legislation and national social security systems was strongly influenced by Germany in the 1930s and later the EU.

2.2.1 The Nordic welfare model

The Nordic welfare states have been considered to create a distinct model in comparative welfare state study (Hilson, 2008; Kuisma & Nygård 2015; Nordlund 2003), and one of the most well-known ideas connected to welfare regimes is probably the one introduced by Esping-Andersen (1990). In his theory, there are three ideal welfare states in the Western world: the liberal welfare state, which includes, for example, the USA and the Anglo-Saxon world, and highlights market solutions and selective public policies; the conservative Central European model, which strongly relies on labour market performance and status protection; and finally, the social-democratic or Scandinavian model (the Nordic welfare state model), with main features of tax financing, a strong status of state, and universalism (Esping-Andersen 1990). This division into three systems indicates ideal forms of welfare regimes that could be utilised as analytical tools for comparative research, thus not reflecting reality (Hilson, 2008; Kangas & Palme 2005a; Kettunen & Petersen 2011b). Kuisma and Nygård (2015) have also addressed that it is not always crystal-clear which countries fall under the heading Nordic regarding the welfare state model. While Esping-Andersen's (1990) social democratic welfare world included Denmark, Norway and Sweden from the Nordic countries and Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands from outside the Nordic countries, Finland, on the other hand, was classified under the conservative cluster of welfare states. In contrast, Iceland is frequently still entirely disregarded in most of these classifications (Kuisma & Nygård 2015), despite the fact that neither Iceland nor Finland is any longer considered to be a welfare development latecomer when compared to their Nordic neighbours.

Browning (2007) has also claimed that the Nordic model serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, it signifies Nordic exceptionalism and refers to a specific Nordic way of acting, which has been an important aspect of the Nordic and national identity construction in the Nordic countries. On the other hand, the concept has been described as being imitated and implemented

elsewhere, reflecting development, modernity, and superiority over other models, frequently in the context of the Nordic socioeconomic realm. Furthermore, several academics, including Kautto et al. (2001), Kangas and Palme (2005b), Kuisma and Nygård (2015), and Petersen (2011), have all claimed that there are actually five or six different Nordic models of welfare, instead of one single model. In this regard, the Nordic countries could be compared to "five sisters who each married men of different nationalities", with their houses naturally different but also sharing many similarities (Árnason 2018: 9). Based on Esping-Andersen's ideal typical social democratic model, Kuisma and Nygård (2015) further argue that addressing the Nordic model is in part exaggerated and that the Nordic countries have always been more diverse in social political terms.

Since the end of the World Wars, when no Nordic country wanted to fall behind in adopting progressive welfare policies, a great deal of policy learning has taken place among the Nordics based on the idea of a common Nordic welfare model. As a result, the Nordic states have to some extent copied each other's ideas, which has caused a certain type of path dependence. However, it is important to note that not all learning and exchange of knowledge and experiences is necessarily good and beneficial in the practical level; whereas something might function flawlessly in Sweden, for instance, simultaneously it might not function at all in other parts of the Nordic region, such as in Iceland. Despite having a similar normative and historical institutional legacy and origin, the Nordic countries have also seen a variety of turning points and historically diverse elements, which have been partly influenced by outside factors like globalisation (Kuisma & Nygård 2015). Given this, the Nordic states have also developed in their own directions with somewhat different policy responses to the challenges, supporting the argument that there are various Nordic models. Models can also be understood in two diverse ways: either they relate to a structure under threat from challenges like (economic) globalisation, integration, immigration, or an aging society, or they refer to a model that addresses these problems (Kettunen 2011; Kettunen et al. 2016).

2.2.1.1 The characteristics and uses of the Nordic welfare model

According to Kettunen (2011), the legacy of independent peasant local self-government, the history of strong popular movements, and the system of collective bargaining have all contributed to the development and integration of a strong state. Derived from the combination of the strong state and strong individualism, the main characteristics of the Nordic welfare state model include features such as universalism, redistribution of income, high level of equality,

low poverty rate, tax financing, high employment rate, basic benefits, and extensive social rights (Hilson, 2008; Kettunen 2011; Kettunen & Petersen 2021; Kuisma & Nygård 2015; Mäntyranta 2011). The model is also considered to have characteristics with social corporatism (Kuisma & Nygård 2015) and a robust public sector that offers free or affordable social services (Kvist et al. 2012). This list is by no means exhaustive and there are undoubtedly more qualities that might be added to the list. Here, it is crucial to keep in mind that reality is obviously more complex and that there are differences among the Nordic countries. Marjanen, Strang and Hilson (2021) also point out that Nordic model no longer functions as a synonym for the Swedish welfare state in international discussions, but rather appears as a collection of cherry-picked characters from the various Nordic countries. Furthermore, the model does not necessarily produce only positive images. Although for some, the Nordic model can be an example of a progressive state that successfully combines features such as economic growth, democracy, social and gender equality, and social welfare, for others, it may serve as a paternalistic and homogenous welfare state with excessively high taxes and even xenophobic attitudes toward immigrants, asylum seekers and non-Western ethnic groups, not to mention references to high levels of alcohol use and suicide (Browning 2007; Byrkjeflot, Mordhorst & Petersen 2021; Hilson & Hoctor 2021).

Regarding the uses of the Nordic welfare model, Schouenborg (2012) points out that from the 1930s and especially after the WWII, the welfare state emerged in Nordic rhetoric as a key indicator of legitimacy in global society. While other types of states were undoubtedly valid participants, the real welfare states were seen as having greater inherent legitimacy (Schouenborg, 2012). However, it was not until the Cold War when the Nordic model started to frequently appear in the world of models, and the term was hardly ever used before the 1980s. Here, the Nordic welfare state was portrayed as a third way and consensus between two opposing ideologies of American capitalism and Soviet communism (Browning 2007; Kettunen et al. 2016; Petersen 2011; Schouenborg 2012). Although the welfare state was first viewed as a solution to various problems, the tone of the debate began to shift in the late 1980s. As a result of globalisation and the circulation of other models of welfare (e.g., Japanese model), the Nordic model lost some of its attractiveness and came under scrutiny and criticism—it was portrayed not just as a barrier to economic development, adaptability, and progress but also as an enemy that had a negative impact on people's behaviour (Edling 2018; Kettunen et al. 2016; Petersen 2011). As the criticism from the debates and the changing political environment due to EU accession of Finland and Sweden and the economic depression in the 1990s led to the

crisis of the Nordic model, Nordic Social Democrats were faced with a challenge of re-establishing the model (Kettunen et al. 2016; Kuisma & Nygård 2015; Nordlund 2003). However, the Nordic welfare states showed great resilience and managed to partly regain their status as models, and for instance, the role of third sector organisations became more crucial in providing social welfare for Nordic citizens (Götz, Haggrén & Hilson 2016; Nordlund 2003; Petersen 2011). Additionally, Cox (2004) notes that if one looks at the many reforms carried out in the 1990s, what sets the Nordic model apart from other models is the “stickiness” of its reputation instead of the institutions and policies that comprise the model. This persistent devotion to the model is prone to expand the understanding of the model, which makes policy changes appear to follow.

The Nordic welfare model could be also said to be a well-established brand (Kettunen et al. 2016). The branding was first discovered around the 1930s and 1940s, when various Nordic solutions were advocated in the international social policy debate (Petersen 2011). Since then, the Nordic welfare model has been used for public diplomacy and country branding efforts, although systematic branding with specific branding strategies were not officially introduced until the turn of the millennium. The model was first associated with welfare, labour, and socioeconomics, but it has since spread into other domains such as design and food, demonstrating the evolution of perceptions and concepts of the Nordic region over time (Byrkjeflot, Mordhorst & Petersen 2021). Whether these features are unique to Norden and thus Nordic is of course debatable (Browning 2007; Marjanen, Strang & Hilson 2021). Yet, it appears that the concept of Nordic has been used for branding purposes in this century not only by the NCM, but also by many Nordic politicians who have rediscovered the Nordic brand in order to gain more visibility for the Nordic countries and exploit it in the global sphere and markets (Kharkina 2013; Strang 2021).

Recognising that the Nordic welfare model is built on values is essential (Petersen 2019). However, the definition of Nordic values differs depending on who you ask and is based on diverse perspectives. Petersen also notes that no values, whether they be democratic or welfare principles like democracy or equality, are Nordic in origin; rather, it is the way in which they are treated in the Nordic states that characterises them as Nordic. The Nordic democracy and welfare model have both adopted and institutionalised a number of principles, giving them a solid foundation in both theory and practice. Furthermore, according to Petersen (2019), these principles have a high status in Nordic societies and are frequently taken for granted. The

development of values in the Nordic countries has been influenced by both internal and external understandings, making it a product of circulation. The present-day Nordic values are thus the outcome of a conflicting social and political processes that reflect the clash between opposing views, economic interests, and ambition for power. As a result, Nordic values are not static but rather can be changed and replaced by other values. Although there are variations in national systems among the Nordic countries, the group of Nordic welfare states can be seen as a political construction, creating “a Nordic model of welfare” that other states can possibly aspire to and perhaps learn from (Kuhnle 2011). However, it is important to keep in mind that the Nordic countries have not created perfect societies in terms of social or health policy, and history demonstrates how Nordic values have not always been extended to the entire population (e.g., the assimilation policies of the Sámi people), in which case the implementation of social practices is far from perfectly equal.

2.2.2 Contemporary social and health policy cooperation in Norden

The contemporary social and health policy cooperation between the Nordic countries continues to be built upon the Nordic welfare model, which promotes socioeconomic equality. Despite the fact that the Nordic welfare model has previously demonstrated its relevance and durability, for example, by creating societies that are more equal than most other countries, many new and diverse challenges continue to put pressure on the welfare state model. Demographic issues, such as aging and global economic conditions, for example, require policymakers to re-establish the model and its functions (Árnason 2018; Mäntyranta 2011). Furthermore, other issues such as changes in traditional family patterns, immigration and migration, technological changes, as well as climate and environmental problems continue to challenge the Nordic welfare states (Normann, Rønning & Nørgaard 2014). The future of the Nordic model requires information on its long-term development and change, and the viability of the welfare state's economic sustainability is based not only on financial resources but also on institutional structure (Engelstad & Hagelund 2015). Furthermore, Kettunen et al. (2016) draw the conclusion that while the popularity of the Nordic welfare model has grown, the interest in actual Nordic cooperation in welfare activities has declined. This is further supported by Strang (2016) who notes that although the Nordic governments want to use the Nordic welfare model as part of their nation branding strategy, joint Nordic social initiatives or welfare measures typically receive little attention.

Currently, the institutional framework of Nordic government social and health cooperation falls under the responsibility of the Nordic Council of Ministers of Health and Social Affairs (MR-S). According to the official website of Nordic cooperation, the ministers meet at least once a year to discuss and make common decisions to address and tackle joint challenges, whereas the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Health and Social Affairs (EK-S)—made up of members from all Nordic countries and overseeing the practical work and preparation of Council of Ministers meetings—meets at least five times a year (Nordic Co-operation n.d.b). In addition to these two actors, the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers (NMRS) oversees the daily operations of Nordic intergovernmental cooperation. Here, questions are created by the Department of Knowledge and Welfare (KV) within the Secretariat and submitted to both MR-S and EK-S. Additionally, the Secretariat oversees implementing the decisions taken by the relevant bodies in the social and health sector that help to accomplish the sector's policy goals (Nordic Co-operation n.d.b). MR-S provides also funding to NWC and several other Nordic bodies working in the social and health sector³.

There are two strategic reviews on which the improvement of cooperation is built in order to achieve the necessary modifications in Nordic social and health policy. The reports "Knowledge that Works in Practice: Strengthening Nordic Cooperation in the Social Field" by Arni Páll Árnason (2018) and "The Future Nordic Co-operation on Health" by Bo Könberg (2014) can be said to serve as the "bibles" in the social and health sectors in Norden, in an equivalent way as the Stoltenberg Report published in the security field in 2009 (Nordic Co-operation 2019b). In order to advance the existing state of Nordic cooperation in the area of social and health policy, both reports provide a number of recommendations. Cooperation in social policy promotes long-term and safe welfare for all, whereas closer collaboration in health care maintains and improves general health care systems that provide free and equal access to all, with a focus on reducing health inequalities and dealing with various risk factors impacting public health. Furthermore, the outcomes of these efforts are assessed in order to overcome current challenges and assure the legitimacy of future health decisions (Nordic Council of Ministers 2022a). Although some of the proposals have already been put into practice, the reports along with the Vision 2030 nevertheless continue to function as the basis for the NCM's ongoing and prospective social and health policy programs, such as the newest programme for

³ The Nordic Institute of Dental Materials (NIOM), Nordic Committee on Social Security Statistics (NOSOSCO), Nordic Medico-Statistical Committee (NOMESCO), and the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability.

the Nordic Council of Ministers' Co-operation on Health and Social Affairs 2022–2024 (Nordic Council of Ministers 2022a).

2.3 Nordic added value and the added value of transnational cooperation

As is the case with any other concept, there is no single answer to what the concept Nordic added value means. NAV, like any other concept, is a human creation and has its own history of use with many layers and dimensions (Berenskoetter 2017). Although concept itself is vague, it includes principles of categorisation. In general, concepts possess two elements. On the one hand, they give us the language to formulate the phenomena we want to explain and understand and on the other hand the frameworks we build to explain and understand them. Concepts can be basic, referring to abstract frames helping to generate knowledge about the world (Berenskoetter 2017). This is done through naming, organising, and giving meaning to various characteristics of the world. However, it is important to note that these attempts do not represent the accurate reality of the world, but rather each concept is attached to different contexts and words (Berenskoetter 2017).

2.3.1 Current research and operationalisation of Nordic added value

According to the official website of Nordic cooperation, the cooperation generally concentrates on areas where “a Nordic approach generates added value for the countries and peoples of the Region” (Nordic Co-operation n.d.c). Existing studies in Nordic cooperation conclude that the concept *nordisk nytta* originally emerged in the 1990s, when the changing political environment through the EU accession of Finland and Sweden led to debates of the role and usefulness of Nordic cooperation. In 1995, the NC and the NCM together produced a reform report (Nordic Council & Nordic Council of Ministers, 1995). In the report, they defined *nordisk nytte* as three distinct activity kinds with various functions:

- Activities that otherwise could be undertaken at the national level, but where concretely positive effects are achieved through common Nordic solutions;
- activities that demonstrate and develop Nordic solidarity;
- activities that increase Nordic capabilities and competitiveness (Arnold 2011: 20).

Here, the principle became a basis for Nordic cooperation, according to which all the Nordic activities should meet these basic requirements. In accordance with the report, the concept was

primarily used to assess the necessity of Nordic institutions, which resulted in the closure of many Nordic institutions in the 1990s. Furthermore, in the report NAV was proposed as a standard for assessing and evaluating the projects and activities that the NC and the NCM would fund (Olesen & Strang 2016). This appears still to be the case, as all the Nordic institutions under the NCM that provide funding use it as an assessment criterion to evaluate applications (e.g., see the funding for Nordic cooperation between organisations for people with disabilities or the Nordic Gender Equality Fund).

According to Dang (2022), the idea of NAV was adopted by Nordic official cooperation bodies in order to maintain the political legitimacy, credibility, and significance of Nordic cooperation in light of EU integration. In her paper exploring parallel processes of intra-Nordic and European higher education and research cooperation, Dang describes how these three elements point to an ideological direction for how region-building procedures should be planned and Nordic regionalism should be operationalised. Whereas the first point discusses the impacts of large regional projects, the second point emphasises the importance of community and identity formation. The third principle, on the other hand, gives economic sense and regional competitiveness priority. Furthermore, the fourth dimension—activities that increase Nordic influence abroad, demonstrating an extra regional perspective and the new goal of Nordic regionalism—could be added to the concept in the basis of the early 2000s when the Nordic countries established a Nordic Globalization Forum and a common globalisation policy to meet emerging global issues (Dang 2022). According to this study, NAV aims thus to forge and enhance ties between Nordic countries, as well as to use the Nordic level to promote cooperation within the EU and beyond. This fourth dimension is further supported by Brit Denstad's document (2007) addressing the assessment of Nordic institutions and collaborative bodies in the area of social and health policy, according to which there should be an additional criterion for NAV including that all the business strengthens the Nordics' ability and opportunities to contribute constructively to international social and health policy work, as well as to solve their own tasks in the Nordic countries.

Furthermore, drawing from the combination of different spatial logics, regional integration theories, regional building approach and the concept of Nordic added value, that overlap and intertwine in time and space, Dang (2022) forms a conceptual framework for examining the region-building processes of Nordic higher education institutions. As a conclusion, she argues that NAV is the underlying mechanism of Nordic regionalism and "a floating signifier that

refers to an open and evolving concept with multiple meanings" (2022: 15), which is built by various actors in the region, such as politicians, universities, and scholars. This indicates that the concept does not have a single and clear definition, but rather that it varies across different policy sectors and the actors who use it. For instance, in a policy brief addressing the changing meanings of the concept in relation to research, Arnold (2011) analyses how the idea of added value has been used slightly differently at the Nordic and European levels. While collaboration in research and other areas has significant symbolic importance at the Nordic level and is sometimes sought as an end rather than a means to an end, the EU also uses research cooperation to achieve its political objectives. Furthermore, in contrast to the European level, NAV has an informal element based on trust, experience, shared history, geography, and similar cultures. Finally, whereas European Added Value (EAV) is primarily concerned with nation-building, NAV is more focused with helping individual Nordic countries in positioning themselves in Nordic, European, and global competition and partnerships (Arnold 2011).

But what does this all imply in practice? Although idea of NAV can be understood in many ways, it often refers to the justification for cooperating or acting at the Nordic level, in relation to a specific area or policy field (Arnold 2011). Furthermore, in relation to Nordic research cooperation, Arnold (2011) is addressing the added value of networking. Here, knowledge production and use are strongly linked to networking, being together a social process of interaction between colleagues, rivals and those who share similar interests and in which everyone contributes. Additionally, Arnold also emphasises how the nature of NAV had to shift as a result of joint development with Europe. The concept was formerly seen to be more "obvious" and culturally grounded, but starting in the mid-1990s, it shifted toward being more economic, which also supports the conclusions made by Dang. According to Arnold (2011), the idea in research cooperation evolved into taking advantage of scale and competitiveness while keeping to the subsidiarity principle, meaning of not doing things that could be done better at the national or European level. However, Arnold concludes that NAV has again shifted its focus in this century more in the direction of creating platforms and virtual communities that support and structure the Nordic countries' research and innovation resources.

Furthermore, the concept is often used in the many operational sectors of Nordic cooperation, with its varied definitions. For instance, the concept has been operationalised in Nordic research cooperation (see NordForsk, n.d) and regional cooperation (Hörnström, Olsen, & Van Well 2012). However, it has yet to be extensively researched in the field of social and health policy

in Nordic cooperation, indicating that there is currently no particular research on how the concept is used, operationalised, and understood in the field in question.

2.3.2 European Added Value

In the context of transnational cooperation, added value is often discussed in the cross-border and transnational programmes, and in many cases, the term has been researched in the context of the European Union. Examining this element may also assist in further operationalising the concept and identifying potential contrasts from the Nordic context. Medarova-Bergstrom, Volkery, and Baldock (2012) assert that European Added Value is a multifaceted concept with various connotations for different actors. Furthermore, Mairate (2006) addresses that these perceptions of added value also vary according to various governmental levels, between organisations inside and outside the EU regional policy system, and even between participants in the same program, depending on their positions and interests. Nevertheless, these authors stress the importance of treating added value as a continuous process instead of a static concept.

Many of these studies related to EAV examine the concept in the context of EU budget negotiations or the EU structural and cohesion policy (Becker 2012; Colomb 2007; Rubio 2011; Medarova-Bergstrom, Volkery & Baldock 2012). For instance, Claire Colomb (2007) examines the added value of transnational cooperation for European spatial planning and proposes a five-step evaluation framework for the analysis and conceptualisation of learning processes in transnational cooperation projects. What is common to several of these studies, is that their main starting point to approach the concept is to look at the definitions of EAV by the European Commission. According to these studies, the Commission often defines EAV as a value generated by Community assistance in addition to what would have been achieved by national and regional governments and the private sector (European Commission n.d.; Hörnström, Olsen & Van Well 2012; Mairate 2006). This refers to a situation in which an EU action should clearly outperform measures taken by individual Member States (Medarova-Bergstrom, Volkery & Baldock 2012). Additionally, a study by Eulalia Rubio (2011) finds that various discourses based on the official documents and scholarly literature on the EU budget can be used to identify four distinct ways of the use of added value. According to this study, added value can refer to the advantages of operating at the EU level as opposed to the national level, or to the advantages that result from good management and implementation. Furthermore, added value can be defined as the opportunity costs of spending in one area compared to other areas of intervention. Finally, it can also refer to positive outcomes of public interventions made at the EU level.

The principle of additionality, which denotes the idea that the EU should only act when there are obvious additional benefits from collective efforts compared to actions taken by Member States either alone or in cooperation, is often stressed because these additional benefits can only be produced through transnational cooperation and collective action (Medarova-Bergstrom, Volkery & Baldock 2012). By combining legislation, coordination, and financial resources, common policies established in treaties can provide these additional benefits (Becker 2012). Furthermore, this principle states that financial assistance provided from the EU budget should not take the place of public or other similar expenditures made by the member state (Medarova-Bergstrom, Volkery & Baldock 2012). Therefore, one may suggest that certain situations, where EU intervention is considered necessary, benefit the entire region rather than only single or few Member States (Mairate 2006). However, assessing the added value may be problematic because there are numerous elements impacting it in specific contexts, such as “the scale of interventions, administrative capacities and learning processes” (Mairate 2006: 168).

In the study focusing on the EAV of the EU budget with a case study of climate change, the authors distinguish between the two primary EAV perspectives—economic and political (Medarova-Bergstrom, Volkery & Baldock 2012). The economic approach here reflects further advantages that could be attained through EU support for public goods, such as the realisation of economies of scale, overcoming market failure, and mitigating both positive and negative externalities. Political perspectives instead take into account diverse political viewpoints, the legitimacy of policy decisions, and the interests of European residents. Naturally, both strategies result in various perspectives and priorities in this situation (Medarova-Bergstrom, Volkery & Baldock 2012). This distinction into two perspectives where added value derives from is further supported by other studies as well. These studies argue that added value frequently results from tackling cross-national externalities, achieving economies of scale, or improving alignment with EU policy priorities (Rubio 2011; Medarova-Bergstrom, Volkery & Baldock 2012).

The rationale of producing added value is often connected to the criteria of effectiveness and efficiency, with the latter appearing to be more relevant in discussions of the EU budget (Becker 2012; Rubio 2011). Effectiveness, according to Rubio (2011), refers to the extent of the realisation of the goals achieved by the application of certain political instruments, meaning that the EU program should be as well planned as possible in order to effectively achieve the

goals that have been set for it. Instead, efficiency relates to the number and quality of results generated using financial and administrative resources. This refers to whether the program has been well implemented to produce maximum results. Additionally, Becker (2012) adds the term synergy to the list of criteria the Commission employs to evaluate the added value of particular policies. The same author defines synergy as a collaborative action where pooled resources can generate and complement national actions (Becker 2012). As a result, the concept of added value is frequently used as an evaluation criterion in both ex-ante and ex-post evaluations to assess whether there are even sufficient justifications and rationale for the program's implementation and, subsequently, whether the projects that have already been implemented have produced the greatest possible benefit and outcome (Rubio 2011; European Commission n.d.; Mairate 2006; Medarova-Bergstrom, Volkery & Baldock 2012). Although the objectives of programmes should remain the primary evaluation criteria, Rubio (2011) notes that the side effects should also be considered in the evaluation. Furthermore, it is crucial to keep in mind that these criteria vary between Member States and that adding value at the European level does not necessarily mean increasing the synergy between national and European decision-making; rather, the concept encompasses more than just enhancing efficiency and effectiveness (Becker 2012).

Why is it then important to define added value and use it in policy evaluation? According to existing literature in the EU sphere, there are several benefits of using added value. First, it can help to improve the transparency of decision-making when the process through specific and predetermined criteria is clearer for everyone, simultaneously increasing the level of democracy and trust towards state and governmental institutions (Medarova-Bergstrom, Volkery & Baldock 2012). Related to the economic factor, it can also be used to demand better rationale for expenditures in regard to achieving important EU policy objectives (Mairate 2006). This ensures that the money is carefully allocated with solid justifications. For instance, Becker (2012) states that EAV should be used to support unified European policies and spending at the EU level. The concept is thus frequently associated with economic development, where it serves as a further justification for revising European expenditure policies. Thirdly, it may serve to obstruct long-term EU prospects in favour of immediate national benefits, which is linked to the larger integration in the EU (Medarova-Bergstrom, Volkery & Baldock 2012). Finally, it can convey the importance and relevance of EU's acts to a larger European audience (European Commission n.d.), and it can be used to gain political legitimacy (Becker 2012), which has been an issue for the official Nordic cooperation in particular. The use of added value might also

serve as an instrument for international political compromise since transnational political and economic decisions are rarely formed by consensus.

Following the logic based on the understanding of European Added Value introduced by the existing studies on EAV, NAV could then be seen as an additional benefit compared to actions taken by individual Nordic states or compared to what is achieved in the EU level (Medarova-Bergstrom, Volkery & Baldock 2012). However, it appears that NAV and EAV have been used for slightly different purposes. While EAV appears to follow perhaps the origins of the term added value stemming from neoliberalism with a strong economic tendency and is frequently used in EU budget discussions, the economic factor—through the funding assessment criterion—seems to be only one of the defining components of NAV. In addition to the economic aspect, the current research showcases that NAV has also been symbolic and utilised to enhance Nordic influence overseas as well as to define the identity of the region with the goal of strengthening Nordic solidarity. The use of different purposes is also visible by the different translations of *nordisk nytta* (or the other Swedish term *nordiskt mervärde*) into the already mentioned examples of Nordic usefulness, Nordic benefit, Nordic advantage, Nordic synergy, and Nordic added value. Whereas added value is perhaps purely an economic term, *nytta* refers more to the term utility or benefit, and not only in economic terms. It is also important to note that the different purposes of NAV are intertwined with Nordic values based on common ground and shared history and culture, as discussed in relation to the Nordic welfare model.

As can be seen from the current research, the idea of added value appears to be somewhat ambiguous and confusing, and it frequently depends on the actors and policy domains on which it is applied. Also, after reading the literature discussed in the above review, one can conclude that research and knowledge can be added to this area. Although the existing literature has addressed the concept added value often in relation to specific EU programmes and projects, there is a need for updated research focusing on specific policy area definitions and understandings, and especially in the Nordic region. Furthermore, the objective of introducing EAV in this thesis is to develop a deeper understanding of what added value is and has been, as well as for what purposes it has been used in different situations. As a result, this gives a solid foundation for data analysis if any aspects or concepts emerge that would not have been detectable solely by considering operationalisation from NAV.

3 Research Design and Methods: Two-dimensional perspective with qualitative content analysis

This section introduces the case study as well as data gathering and analysing methods employed in this study that are compatible with the objectives of the project. Furthermore, both internal and external validity as well as the reliability of this study are stressed in this part. While internal validity refers to the certainty that an independent (causal) variable caused the observed effect, external validity describes how broadly research results can be applied (Halperin & Heath 2017). Reliability, on the other hand, emphasises the repeatability or consistency of the results—if other researchers can perform exactly the same steps and achieve the same results, the research design is considered reliable (Halperin & Heath 2017). By being a qualitative and comparative study and focusing on the contemporary understanding of the concept Nordic added value, this thesis combines various methods of data collection together with the introduction of qualitative content analysis.

3.1 Nordic Welfare Centre as a case study

As NWC is an official institution under the Nordic Council of Ministers for Social and Health Affairs and functions as a platform for Nordic cooperation in social and health sector, it was a suitable case study for the purposes of this study. NWC is responsible for social and health collaboration and some cross-sector initiatives, and it has currently two offices: the head office in Stockholm, Sweden and another office in Helsinki, Finland. By gathering and sharing knowledge on welfare issues, the institution offers stronger instruments for policymaking as well as tools for promoting health and well-being of all citizens. The aim of the institution is to contribute to the development of welfare initiatives in the Nordic region, and its knowledge serves as the foundation for political decisions at the national, regional, and local levels in all five Nordic countries and three autonomous areas of Åland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands. Although they address many issues in the welfare sector, their focus areas are public health, disability, integration of refugees and migrants, and some topics under the umbrella of general welfare policy, such as children and youth, older adults, and welfare technology. Through various initiatives and projects in these focus areas, NWC contributes to the Vision 2030's goal of a socially sustainable Nordic region. Furthermore, NWC is also expected to contribute to the implementation of MR-S and EK-S decisions on follow-up on the Nordic cooperation's strategic evaluations by both Árnason and Könberg.

The foundation of the institution lies in the early 2000s, when the official Nordic cooperation in social and health sector was reformed. Here, several Nordic institutions in the social and health sector were evaluated, with the goal of developing ways to improve management and administration and enabling institutions to focus more of their available resources on actual operations. Furthermore, the foundations of the institutions' operation and existence were analysed, and the change was designed to better prepare institutions for future challenges from an administrative and financial standpoint. Based on these assessments, some changes concerning the structures of the organisations and the fields of activities were made. As a result of these changes, NWC was established in 2009 and is currently one of the twelve Nordic institutions operating under the whole NCM⁴.

The recent official reform of Nordic cooperation also included NWC's responsibilities and activities. One of the proposals made by Árnason (2018) in his strategic review was the development of organisational structures for Nordic cooperation in the social and health sector, such as NWC. Even though Árnason concludes that NWC has created important and valuable products and activities through a variety of networks, seminars, and publications, he believes that its potential can be more effectively used in the future. Furthermore, Árnason argues that NWC has played an important influence in both the design of the projects they undertake and the selection of the disciplines in which they operate, and that some topics have received more attention than others for historical reasons. As a result, he advises that countries' possibilities to influence NWC's overall work should be enhanced, and that the institution's work in the design of individual projects would be expanded. This would be accomplished, for example, by clarifying NWC's function and tasks, making NWC's work more efficient and transparent, and developing NWC's products and processes. Together, these would forge a stronger link between national efforts to improve the level of quality of social interventions, national dissemination plans, and social sector communication channels, as well as the priorities of the Nordic states overseen by the MR-S and the EK-S (Árnason 2018).

⁴ The other co-Nordic institutions are the Nordic Institute for Advanced Training in Occupational Health (NIVA), Nordic Innovation, Nordic Energy Research, Nordregio, NordGen, Nordic Culture Point, the Nordic House in Reykjavik (NOREY), Nordic House in the Faroe Islands (NLH), the Nordic Institute in Åland (NIPÅ), the Nordic Institute EK in Greenland (NAPA), and NordForsk. Furthermore, there are three NCM offices in the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania).

3.1.1 Two-level understanding

The understanding of the concept NAV is examined at two levels within NWC, including official and practical dimensions. The two levels are compared to identify any potential similarities, differences, and challenges between the two levels of understanding. The official level refers to those who are either directly employed in the official Nordic institutions or who are directly involved in the activities of NWC, such as deciding on NWC's operation and funding. In other words, these persons are directly involved in NWC's administration, activities, and decision-making processes. At the official level, the actors examined are NWC, the Council of NWC, the EK-S, and the Secretariat of the NCM. The practical dimension, on the other hand, focuses on the various networks and expert groups that NWC coordinates in their various focus areas of public health, dementia, disability, welfare policy, and integration. People from various backgrounds participate in the networks and expert groups, but they are most often experts, officials, researchers, or civil servants at the national level, working in ministries, municipalities, universities, authorities, or other institutions and organisations relevant to the specific focus area. At least one or more networks/expert groups from each NWC focus area were chosen for this study⁵. Consequently, this choice enabled forming a more comprehensive picture of practical understanding in Nordic social and health policy cooperation. Furthermore, collaboration with NWC enabled the collection of research data and the access to the necessary documents required for the purposes of this study.

3.2 Data collection

This study used and combined several data collection methods to comprehend how the concept of NAV is understood and used in the Nordic welfare sector. First, several documents were employed to examine the concept, and then other research material, gathered through survey and interviews, were used to get a more in-depth understanding of the concept. According to Halperin and Heath (2017), several data sources and data collection methods should be combined and used whenever possible, as this enables addressing the study subject from various

⁵ NWC coordinates many networks and experts groups, but for the sake of narrowing down the possible participants, only the following networks and expert groups were included in this study: Nordic network for age-friendly cities and communities; the Nordic Arena for Public Health Issues; the Council of Nordic Cooperation on Disability; Nordic Research Network: Health and Welfare Technology; Nordic Dementia Network; Expert Group for the Nordic Cooperation on Children and Young People's Opportunities for Participation and Development During the Covid-19 Pandemic; Nordic Expert Group on Labour Market Integration; and Nordic Expert Group on Early Interventions for Immigrant Children and Families.

angles. The process of doing so is called triangulation, and it enhances the reliability of both the data and the data collection method. Hence, all these three sources together provided a solid foundation for a thorough examination and comprehension of the concept of NAV in welfare policy as well as from the perspectives of the two different dimensions.

3.2.1 Publications and steering documents

As there is currently no particular research available on the concept of Nordic added value that specifically examine social and health policy, several documents were included in the study material. This choice was made not only to have an overview of the concept in the chosen policy area in Nordic cooperation, but also to increase the sample size beyond what would, for example, be available through interviews or surveys. The documents included the following:

- Strategic Mandate Agreement 2021-2024 of Nordic Welfare Centre (*Strategisk mandat för Nordens Velfärdscenter 2021-2024*);
- Statutes of Nordic Welfare Centre in Sweden and Finland (*Statgar för Nordens Velfärdscenter*);
- Grant Letter 2022 (*Beviljningsbrev 2022*);
- Annual report 2021 of Nordic Welfare Centre (*Årsrapport 2021*);
- Programme for the Nordic Council of Ministers' Co-operation on Health and Social Affairs 2022-2024;
- The Nordic Region—towards being the most sustainable and integrated region in the world: Action Plan for 2021 to 2024; and
- The mid-term evaluation of the Nordic Council of Ministers' action plan for Our Vision 2030 in the period 2021–2024 (*Mot ett hållbart och integrerat Norden: Halvtidsutvärdering av Nordiska ministerrådets handlingsplan för Vår vision 2030 i perioden 2021–2024*).

Apart for the Grant Letter 2022, all of the other documents were publicly available on official Nordic cooperation websites, including the website of Nordic Welfare Centre (<https://nordicwelfare.org/>) and the common publication platform of the Nordic Council of Ministers (<http://norden.diva-portal.org/>).

3.2.2 Surveys

Surveys are a common method of data collecting in the social sciences and frequently employed in political research (Gideon & Barnes-Ceeney 2021; Halperin & Heath 2017). It is a form of unidirectional communication that involves using a tool composed of closed or open-ended questions to gather data from responders who are thought to be representative of a particular group (Gideon & Barnes-Ceeney 2021). There are four stages included in this data collection method: sampling (selecting the people), questionnaire design (converting the research's broad objectives into questions), fieldwork (collecting data), and finally data processing (coding the answers). Surveys may have two purposes: on the hand one, the purpose can be analytical by providing data that “can be used for theory testing or hypothesis testing to try to understand why things happen”, or it can be descriptive by providing factual information about what people think and do in a certain group (Halperin & Heath 2017: 262). This thesis utilises the descriptive purpose of surveys in order to find out how the chosen actors understand and define the concept NAV.

The survey was created through the online form software E-lomake and was available in three languages of English, Finnish, and Swedish, with the option to respond in Norwegian or Danish as well. It was available from November 28, 2022 to December 16, 2022. In addition to the background question distinguishing the practical and official dimensions, the survey consisted of one closed question and seven open-ended questions. In the survey, respondents were asked to answer open-ended questions regarding Nordic added value, including its familiarity, definition, operationalisation, practical experiences, and evaluation. They were also asked to give potential strengths and challenges of Nordic social and health policy cooperation, as well as suggestions for how to develop them (see appendix 1). The survey was directed at all actors in both official and practical level listed in the section 3.1.1. Considering ethics of the survey, all relevant information, such as informing participants of the voluntary participation and the confidentiality of the responses were introduced in the preface of the survey. Furthermore, no unique identifiers were collected.

Much like any other data collection methods, surveys have their own advantages and disadvantages (Gideon & Barnes-Ceeney 2021; Halperin & Heath 2017). One of its biggest strengths is its suitability to examine different topics and its ability to provide broad generalisations about what various societal subgroups or sectors actually believe and act upon,

frequently providing voice to those who might not otherwise be heard. It is also a practical and affordable means of gathering data, and if well designed, it offers a useful tool for learning what people really think about. By using surveys in this study, it allows for a larger sample (different actors) and a broader understanding what the concept means in a larger sense. However, surveys also have challenges, and one of them is related to the truthfulness of people's answers (Halperin & Heath 2017). One cannot be certain that the responses reflect people's genuine or actual views and behaviours because surveys have the possibility of altering people's ideas and behaviours and hence provide false information. Although this error cannot be completely eliminated, it can be diminished with a well-designed survey. However, since there were no sensitive subjects covered by this study (such as political orientation or other personal or ideological preferences), and because survey respondents are representatives of their profession rather than individuals, this issue was expected to be reduced.

The concept's measurement presents yet another issue. According to Halper and Heath (2017), measuring a concept becomes more challenging the harder it is to define. In order to make organising the survey even possible, the concept in question was partly operationalised deductively using previous literature and research in the preceding chapter. Other errors and problems of surveys, often related to the questionnaire design (e.g., question order or wording effects) were reduced by designing the questionnaire and the questions carefully (Gideon & Barnes-Ceeney 2021). Additionally, a potential low response rate is one of the shortcomings of the survey research. If the response rate is low, it indicates a smaller sample size and, as a result, may cause potential biases in the research results. However, despite this issue, the use of multiple methods ensured that there was sufficient data for a thorough analysis.

3.2.3 Interviews

In addition to surveys, this thesis made use of a small number of interviews, which are used as a supplement to surveys. To deepen the survey results, three in-depth interviews were carried out, with two participants from the official level and one from the practical level. Unlike surveys that aim to produce standardised data that can be used in part to make generalisations about what a particular group think about a specific issue, interviewing is more focused on providing detailed and frequently specialised information with the goal of getting accurate knowledge and understanding of the issue from the perspective of a specific person. Furthermore, Halperin and Heath (2017) contend that whereas surveys tend to emphasise reliability, interviews tend to focus more on the validity issue. Interviews were designed as individual online interviews with

a semi-structured format, referring to the use of open-ended questions, without any predefined options for the respondent (Matrakova 2021). This choice enabled asking follow-up questions when needed, which further facilitates gathering a deeper understanding and more detailed knowledge of participants' experiences and ideas of NAV.

The interviews centered on the concept of Nordic added value in terms of its familiarity, definition, operationalisation, practical experiences, and evaluation. Furthermore, the potential strengths and challenges of Nordic social and health policy cooperation, as well as how to develop them, were discussed during the interviews (see appendix 2). Additionally, any ethical considerations regarding this study, such as voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality, were taken into account and carefully explained to the participants through a privacy notice (see appendix 3).

3.3 Methods of analysing data: Qualitative content analysis

A qualitative content analysis (QCA) was used as the method of data analysis in this study. Content analysis provides the tools to conduct a systematic analysis of the research data obtained through different methods (Bass & Semetko 2021). In addition to being systematic, it is an objective and transparent research technique and approach to textual information and can be applied to various kinds of texts and document, regardless of whether the text is printed or online, in written or spoken form (Bass & Semetko 2021; Bryman 2016; Halperin & Heath 2017). It was originally developed to analyse printed texts, but it is possible to apply to distinct material, such as images, speeches, radio, and popular media as well (Bryman 2016). Content analysis can be used to study the source, the message, the receiver, the medium, and the influence of the message—among these topics, this study is mostly interested in the message of the text. Bass and Semetko (2021) also point out that in organisational management, content analysis is often employed to study various texts, such as annual reports, internal company documents, open-ended survey questions, and interviews. With the help of content analysis, texts can be analysed either in a quantitative or qualitative manner (Bass & Semetko 2021; Halperin & Heath 2017). This thesis is purely qualitative in this matter based on the challenging operationalisation of the concept, considering that it would be rather difficult if not impossible to measure the concept in quantitative terms. QCA provides thus a solid tool for this study when analysing a range of research data obtained through documents, surveys, and interviews. Choosing QCA for this study then further supports the analysis of the chosen research data.

There are two main approaches to content analysis: deductive and inductive (Bass & Semetko 2021). While the deductive approach refers to the use of predefined categories and variables based on findings and best practices from prior research, the inductive approach refers to a small sample size with an open view of the content, often based on qualitative approach. Unlike the deductive approach, including a large size sample with pre-tested and valid measures, that is designed for replication, studies based on inductive reasoning can be challenging to replicate. Although there is a somewhat deductive approach in terms of addressing the main characteristics of Nordic welfare policy cooperation and operationalisation of added value by earlier studies, it is rather challenging to define any concrete measures of the concept NAV. Thus, this study is mainly inductive in terms of analysing the research data, in which possible ideas and understandings of the concept emerge from the data. This approach, also known as a grounded theory, involves the organic development of key concepts and ideas from evidence, such as the contributions of interview or survey participants. The middle ground in this sense can therefore be referred to as abduction or retroduction, denoting a combination in which specific occurrences of objects or processes are systematically observed in order to develop the most likely explanations based on both these observations and the existing knowledge from theoretical frameworks (Giese & Schnapp 2021). Furthermore, the same authors contend that it would be nearly impossible to rely only on one reasoning, which further supports the choices made in this study.

Based on this type of reasoning, no automated or computational tools were used, but the data was manually coded to find the understanding of complex concept of NAV. This ensured a thorough and detailed interpretation of the concept, which would not be possible by automated text analysis since it would be rather difficult to determine any quantitative variables to measure the concept (Bass & Semetko 2021). Certainly, one could search for word occurrence in order to discover unknown categories and hereby add the quantitative element and automated analysis—however, this would still require a thorough qualitative analysis to possibly combine and interpret different categories. This is further supported by Grimmer and Stewart (2013) who address the limitations of using automated text analysis. They argue that it is impossible to capture the richness and complexity of language in a statistical representation of text. Furthermore, they note that these tools rarely ever replace close reading of text, which possibly can reveal hidden meanings or understandings of the concept that would otherwise not be visible only by conducting an automated analysis based on pre-determined coding. All these decisions are, however, based on the research questions and how well the tools are used in the

particular study. Based on these notions, the focus of this study lies on the deep qualitative content analysis of the research data. As there are no predetermined categories or variables, this decision may unintentionally contribute to a researcher's biases. However, as the concept was operationalised to some extent in the theoretical background, this issue was to be decreased.

4 Analysis

In this section the findings conducted are presented with the help of qualitative content analysis. As addressed in the previous chapter, the analysed material included documents, survey responses, and interviews. Based on inductive reasoning, according to which possible ideas and understandings of the concept emerge from the data, different themes were identified and sorted from the research data. To ensure the anonymity of the survey and interview participants of this study, all results are reported in the way that no individual respondents can be identified. In practice, this implies that any quotes originating in languages other than English are translated into English and do not include any personal data, whether direct or indirect. Furthermore, if the document was available directly in English, it was analysed. If the English version was not available, the documents were analysed in their original language. As a result, all translations of the research material from languages other than English are mine, unless otherwise noted. This chapter is divided according to the different research data sets, starting with documents, and followed by survey and interviews.

4.1 Publications and steering documents

In total of seven publications and steering documents were examined in order to gain a broad overview of the concept in the field of social and health policy in Nordic cooperation. These documents were all provided by the official Nordic cooperation, with four of them being directly linked to the function and work of NWC. The remaining three documents were instead related to the overall Nordic cooperation, with two of them including also other fields than social and health policy. However, the sections that specifically concerned the social and health sector were the focus of the analysis of those documents that were common to all policy areas.

4.1.1 The definition and practical use of the concept

To begin with the definition of the concept, those documents that were common to several policy sectors (e.g., Vision 2030) highlight the nature and use of the concept in official cooperation without providing any additional explanations of how the concept is observed or experienced in practice. This refers to statements in which NAV was described as a guiding light in all the activities performed under the Nordic cooperation. Many documents, for example, address how joint efforts generate NAV in areas where the Nordic countries can go further together than individually. Furthermore, several documents highlight how all official activities should contribute to the national development work, indicating again that the NAV is

not only for the Nordics as a whole, but also plays a central role in each individual country's national policy development process at different levels:

Within the themes in the area of welfare prioritised by the Nordic Council of Ministers, the institution [NWC] must contribute to the national work of developing efforts in the area of welfare in the countries by facilitating and implementing collaborations that the countries consider to be useful complements to the national activities.⁶

Nordic Welfare Centre works demand-oriented, and the institution's services and supplies must be usable in the national development work in the social and public health area.⁷

In contrast, more practical experiences are provided in the documents and sections that especially addressed social and health policy in the Nordic countries. For example, most documents stress the exchange of experiences as well as the sharing and development of (new) knowledge in various policy areas, resulting in increased knowledge. Furthermore, several documents highlight the spreading of experiences, practices, and examples, as well as their applicability into one's own work. When considering even more practical examples of benefits of Nordic cooperation, several examples are provided in the documents, often in relation to the specific focus areas in social and health policy. These include for instance the implementation of international conventions in the Nordics, for instance in the field of disabilities or children and young people, as well as combining knowledge on small populations, such as people with deafblindness:

⁶ Inom de teman på välfärdsområdet som prioriteras av Nordiska ministerrådet ska institutionen bidra till det nationella arbetet med att utveckla insatserna på välfärdsområdet i länderna genom att facilitera och genomföra samarbeten som länderna anser vara nyttiga komplement till de nationella aktiviteterna (Nordic Welfare Centre, 2020).

⁷ Nordens Velfærdscenter arbejder efterspørgselsorienteret, og institutionens services og leverancer skal være anvendelige i de nationale udviklingsarbejder på social- og folkesundhedsområdet (Nordic Welfare Centre, 2019).

Nordic cooperation on the integration of refugees and migrants leads to Nordic benefit through knowledge development and exchange of experience in the areas of education and the labour market.⁸

The area of deafblindness contributes to increase the knowledge base in the area as the population in each individual country is too small to produce and develop knowledge about the target group; and increase international knowledge of the specific disability as the Nordic region has a strong position within this specific disability.⁹

Additionally, cooperation in social and health policy is mentioned as promoting Nordic cohesion and togetherness by learning from each other and drawing inspiration. Simultaneously, cooperation would support the implementation and realisation of the Vision 2030 when the Nordics would strive to preserve and support the Nordic welfare state models cross-sectorial at different levels. The documents also highlight how the NAV is produced in situations that not only strengthen higher Nordic profile but also increase Nordic influence and competence regionally and internationally:

In the institution's outward-facing activities, the connection between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the institution must therefore be made clear in order to strengthen the Nordic profile.¹⁰

Overall, Nordic Welfare Centre contributes to Nordic benefit through increased knowledge, competence, and competitiveness in the welfare area.¹¹

⁸ Nordisk samverkan om integration av flyktingar och invandrare leder till nordisk nytta genom kunskapsutveckling och erfarenhetsutbyte inom områdena utbildning och arbetsmarknad (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021).

⁹ Dövblindområdet bidrar till att öka kunskapsbasen inom området då populationen i varje enskilt land är för liten för att ta fram och utveckla kunskap kring målgruppen; och öka kunskapen internationellt om den specifika funktionsnedsättningen då Norden har en stark ställning inom den specifika funktionsnedsättningen (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021).

¹⁰ Vid institutionens utåtriktade aktiviteter ska sambandet mellan Nordiska ministerrådet och institutionen därför göras tydligt i syfte att stärka den nordiska profilen (Nordic Welfare Centre, 2020).

¹¹ Sammantaget bidrar Nordens välfärdscenter till nordisk nytta genom ökad kunskap, kompetens och konkurrenskraft inom välfärdsområdet (Nordic Welfare Centre, 2022).

Finally, the documents underline that the target groups for whom Nordic added value is produced are various authorities and relevant institutions in the Nordic countries and the autonomous areas of the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland. This means that the NAV is produced mainly for experts and civil servants working in departments and national authorities (directorates and agencies), along with other relevant actors, such as researchers, practitioners, and civil society. Additionally, several documents also mention how the inhabitants of the Nordic region must perceive Nordic co-operation as being for them and as being beneficial, indicating that ultimately the NAV is produced for the Nordic citizens. It is also worth noting that there are different terms for NAV that are used to describe the effects of Nordic cooperation in the documents. In addition to Nordic added value (*nordiskt mervärde*), it is common that other concepts are also mentioned, such as Nordic benefit (*nordisk nytta*) as well as synergy.

4.1.2 Factors impacting the achievement of Nordic added value

There are several factors mentioned in the documents, which impact the achievement of Nordic added value in social and health policy cooperation. To start with strengths, the same background with shared values is recognised as the most valuable strength in Nordic cooperation. Since each Nordic country has a similar welfare model, they face similar challenges, such as demographic challenges, making it easier to apply practices from one Nordic country to another. Furthermore, the unique sense of community and togetherness in the Nordic region is stressed in the documents, which help in the finding of the best and most sustainable solutions to common challenges:

Nordic Welfare Centre's mission to be a platform for cooperation means that the institution promotes Nordic togetherness by giving experts in different fields the opportunity to learn and draw inspiration from each other.¹²

Disability cooperation generally contributes to strengthening the Nordic community and Nordic values, by putting the Nordics in an international context.¹³

¹² Nordens välfärdscenter uppdrag att vara en plattform för samarbete innebär att institutionen främjar nordisk samhörighet genom att experter på olika områden får möjlighet att lära och hämta inspiration av varandra (Nordic Welfare Centre, 2022).

¹³ Funktionshindarsamarbete generellt bidrar till att stärka den nordiska gemenskapen och de nordiska värderingarna, genom att sätta Norden i en internationell kontext (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021).

On the other hand, the documents demonstrate how there is still potential for improvement. For instance, continuous work evaluation is mentioned as a necessary requirement in order to reach even higher NAV in the future. According to the documents, more prioritising is required because the budget is rather limited. Documents also stress the need to further simplify and focus work, as well as limit the number of projects. Finally, documents also emphasise the importance of clearer coordination and anchoring to ensure that all sectors work toward the vision and that attention is paid to what is done in other areas to ensure synergies and minimise duplication of work:

In the future, it is important to dare to prioritise in order to get the most out of a limited budget. There is a need to further simplify and focus work and reduce the number of projects to achieve powerful results and reduce the risk of fragmentation.¹⁴

There is a need for active monitoring of the environment to identify where the Nordic Council of Ministers can do the most good in relation to the work the countries individually do nationally or internationally.¹⁵

Although the findings of these documents are relatively abstract and limited in scope, they still provide a good foundation for further examination of the concept of Nordic added value through survey responses and interviews.

4.2 Survey

In total, the survey was sent to 176 persons (including 74 at the official level and 102 at the practical level). The total number of responses landed on 27, making the total response rate of 15,3 %¹⁶. Responses were given in all language options that were provided in the survey, which indicates that respondents were from various parts of the Nordic region. The distribution of

¹⁴ Framöver är det viktigt att våga prioritera för att få bäst nytta av en begränsad budget. Det finns behov av att förenkla och fokusera arbetet ytterligare och minska antalet projekt för att nå kraftfulla resultat och minska risken för fragmentering (Nordic Council of Ministers 2022b).

¹⁵ Det finns behov för aktiv omvärldsbevakning för att identifiera var Nordiska ministerrådet kan göra störst nytta i förhållande till det arbete länderna enskilt gör nationellt eller internationellt (Nordic Council of Ministers 2022b).

¹⁶ The overall number of people who received the survey included people who may have been involved in several target groups, meaning that those people could have belonged to more than one of the groups to whom the survey was distributed. This means that the overall response rate could be greater than indicated in the text.

responses between levels was slightly unbalanced, with 16 responses from the official level and 11 responses from the practical level (see Figure 1). Although the number of responses at the official and practical levels were not equal, they were similar enough to ensure that sufficient responses were collected at both levels for a thorough comparison and analysis.

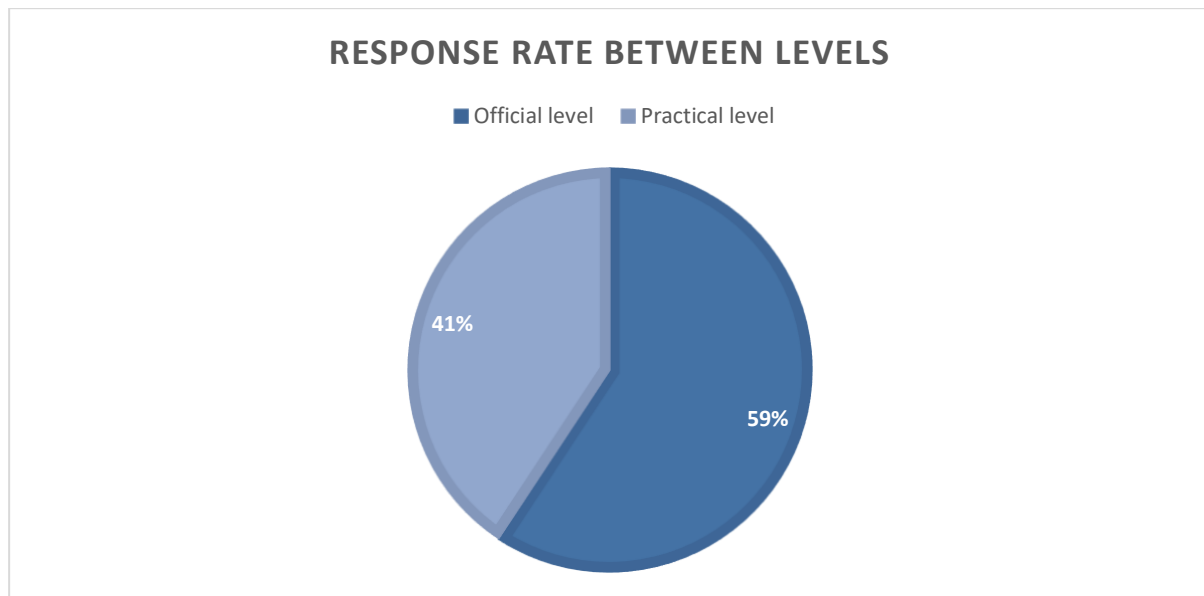


Figure 1 Distribution between the two levels of the total number of survey respondents

4.2.1 Definition of the concept

Among all respondents, around 70% were familiar with the concept, whereas 30% were not. However, within the two distinct levels, the concept was more familiar to the respondents working in an official level than for those working in the practical level. On the official level, nearly all respondents indicated in the form that they are familiar with the concept of Nordic added value, whereas on the practical level, approximately only one-thirds of the respondents were familiar with the concept (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). This finding comes as no surprise, as the concept is frequently employed in official cooperation, such as cooperation programs and other cooperation documents by the NCM.

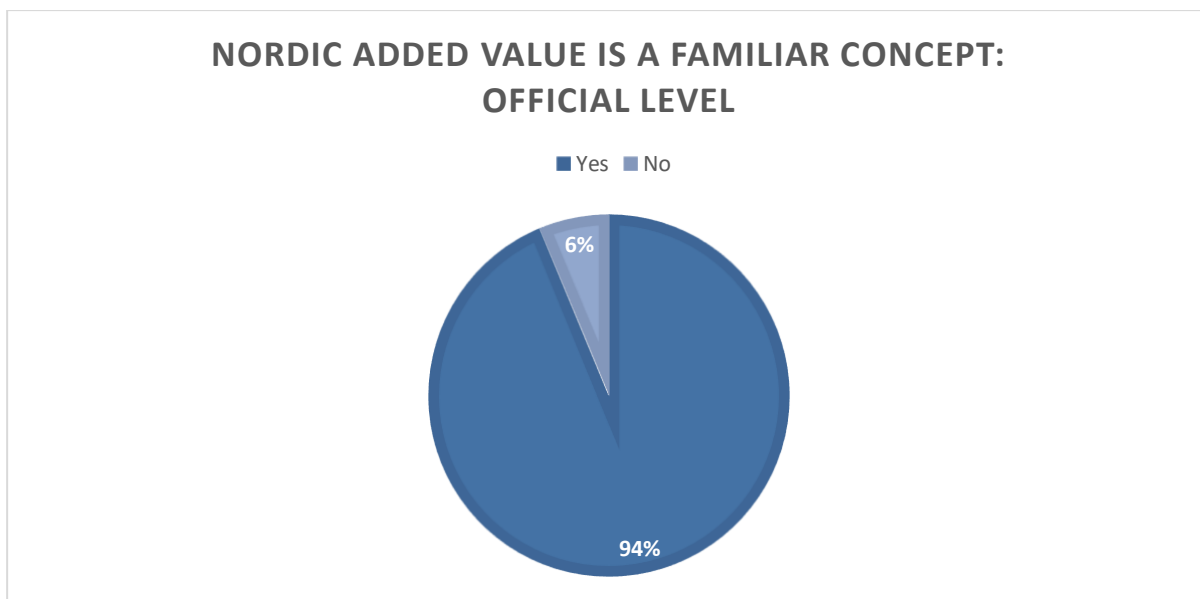


Figure 2 Distribution among the official level respondents regarding the familiarity with the concept

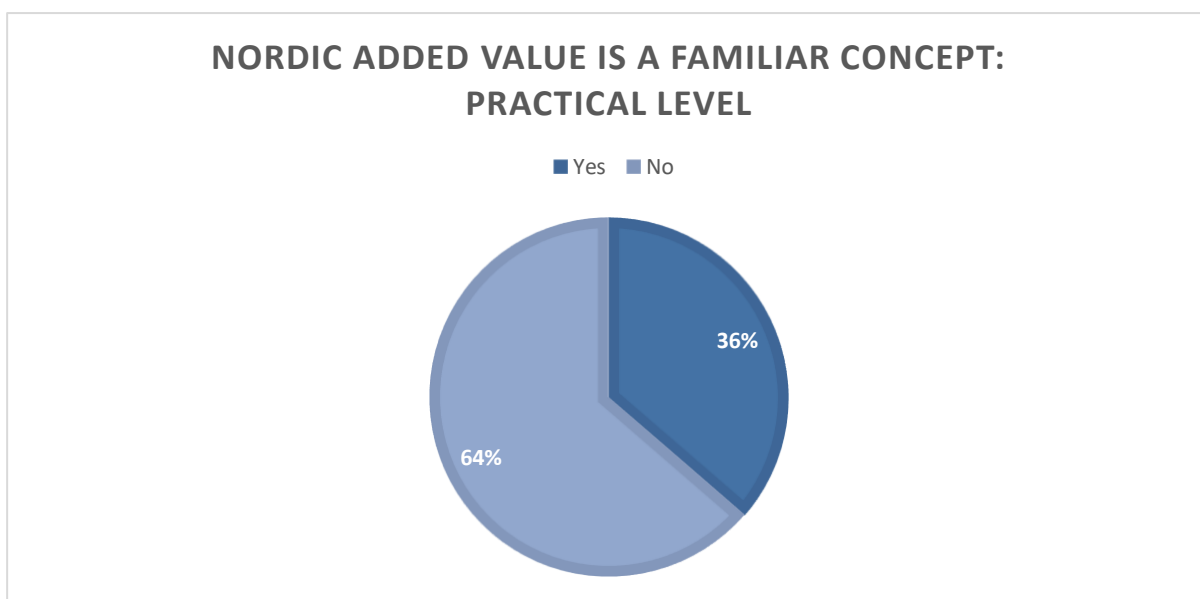


Figure 3 Distribution among the practical level respondents regarding the familiarity with the concept

Despite the fact that there were notable variations in the answers between the levels regarding the familiarity with the concept, the respondents' answers concerning the definition of the concept did not vary significantly across the two distinct levels. This implies that, while many were unfamiliar with the concept, most of them had similar experiences and thoughts about it. Although it was more prevalent in practical level responses, many respondents on both levels associated the concept with the exchange, sharing, and comparison of knowledge, research, ideas, and experiences between Nordic countries, whether they be positive or negative:

One can compare outcomes, different efforts, benefit from experience, learn from mistakes, etc.

When the Nordic countries can learn from each other, for example, by sharing research results, practical experiences, or methods.

I think that Nordic added value in my field means the value that is created by sharing research knowledge and practical experiences between Nordic countries, as well as new research and development ideas that result from this.

Similarly, several respondents noted that when this sharing of practices leads to learning and new knowledge, which further result in the positive development, then NAV is generated. Furthermore, many respondents highlighted that NAV is produced when the development is seen both at the national and Nordic level at the same time. This means that the cooperation should benefit not only individual countries but also the Nordic citizens, community, and region as a whole:

Simultaneously a common and national benefit that would not be achievable without Nordic cooperation.

When knowledge and experience exchange between national experts and stakeholders increases the total body of knowledge in the Nordic region and then plays a role in the national development of welfare in the individual countries.

[Nordic added value is] that Nordic cooperation provides more value both for the individual Nordic countries and for the common Nordic cooperation.

Several respondents also noted that this dual benefit, as one may call it, is as a result of combining resources and knowledge in the Nordic region—if working together, it leads to better results and development. Furthermore, many respondents—especially on the official level—experienced that if issues were handled together through cooperation, it benefits everyone at distinct levels (local, regional, national, and Nordic) and creates a win-win situation, compared to a situation in which the countries handled the issue on their own:

It is about cooperating between the Nordic countries, which means that the issues we work on can be addressed better than if all the countries handled them at home by themselves.

There is added value in elevating a certain issue or cooperation to a Nordic level, because jointly there are more resources and more knowledge than what each country can muster on its own.

I would see Nordic added value realised in my area of work when a joint Nordic initiative or project gains more importance, visibility, and effectiveness than if it was implemented exclusively by one Nordic country.

It is when Nordic cooperation contributes to better development and results than if the relevant country works alone in isolation.

Furthermore, several responses indicated that NAV is not only a practical concept related to exchange and sharing of knowledge and experiences, but also a symbolic and philosophical concept that foster Nordic cohesion and sense of togetherness and community. According to these answers, the symbolic aspect is based on shared history, contexts, and values the Nordic countries share, as demonstrated by the development of similar welfare models, structures, and systems. As many of the respondents felt that there are no major differences between the welfare structures in the Nordic countries, this starting point was perceived as facilitating cooperation:

The Nordic added value also consists in creating something that adds value to the Nordic community, both symbolically and practically.

Exchange of experiences within a common context, which ultimately benefits the citizens.

A certain common ground facilitates cooperation while also building forward that philosophical perspective. In my field of research, a common ground is for instance related to the coverage and importance of public social and health services, as well

as their role in society—when everyone knows and understands it, it is as if one can get started more easily and go further into the topic.

However, because the Nordic welfare models are similar but not identical, the variations across similar systems allow for interesting comparisons. Likewise, some of the respondents also stated that the common framework creates and enables competition between the Nordic countries, as the results are almost directly comparable in similar systems:

There is a Nordic value that we five countries with a similar welfare model “compete” to be the best in various areas. It is difficult to compete against Germany, Great Britain, and Poland—the models are too different. As our models are similar, one can almost copy/paste on what is very good.

Other themes addressed in the responses were networking, relationship building, and the notion that it is easier to contact and interact with colleagues if sharing a mutual understanding of the welfare model and structures. Furthermore, the need of strengthening the Nordic region both within and outside the EU was underlined, as was the importance of that community's support in international affairs. Finally, NAV was characterised as something that is specifically relevant in the Nordics, such as gathering Nordic knowledge about an issue.

4.2.2 The concept and its use in practice

In terms of practical experiences, many of the respondents had positive experiences with collaboration at a Nordic level and could identify numerous examples when they had experienced or observed added value. Only few respondents from the practical level could not identify any concrete examples. Among those respondents who could identify practical experiences, there were several who mentioned specific projects, events, networks, or seminars. Furthermore, some of the responses mentioned sharing current research and publications. There were examples from different focus areas of the welfare sector, all of which had provided some form of NAV for the respondents. For instance, some of the examples given in the various areas of the welfare sector included COVID-19, digitalisation of social and health services, and minority inclusion, among many more:

Another example is where researchers and practitioners share experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic and how the various countries dealt with specific issues.

As seen with this example, often these experiences resulted in the form of discussions about practice and how to work within the other Nordic countries. Hence, NAV was recognised to be produced most of the time when new knowledge and experiences from other parts of the Nordic region were exchanged, shared, and then compared (within the common framework, as discussed in the previous section). Many good and working examples from around the Nordic region were cited by respondents as having provided inspiration and thereby influenced and supported the national development of another country. In this context, the word *inspiration* appeared in several answers:

Countries (experts and officials at authorities and ministries) are inspired by each other's support structures and policies to develop different welfare areas.

When preparing a national strategy, we could get support/inspiration from what other countries and autonomous areas have already done.

Pooling and sharing resources became also evident in several answers, especially when considering the official level responses. As the Nordic countries are relatively small compared to bigger European states, such as Germany or France, many respondents noted that combining resources and knowledge is especially the case when considering minorities or small populations with unusual or rare diagnoses. In these examples, if Nordic countries worked alone, there would be insufficient foundation in a country to build on when, for example, producing support or guidance. However, the entire Nordic region provides a greater basis to work with these issues, and thus the results of cooperation become very valuable for all and can inspire not only within the Nordic region but also elsewhere:

For example, within the area of deafblindness where the population is small, networking is important to strengthen individual practicing individuals or organisations in their daily work.

Nordic added value can consist, for example, in the fact that knowledge about small populations, such as people with deafblindness, can be collected at a Nordic level so that we make use of the knowledge that exists in the Nordics. Despite the fact

that we are small countries, we have managed to produce knowledge in this area that makes the entire world look up to us and be inspired.

Similarly, a few responders highlighted an interesting saying in this context: if some countries have come further in one issue, there is no need to “reinvent the wheel” because another Nordic country can draw on someone else's experiences, good or bad. If the idea is good, it is possible to “copy” it and simply slightly adapt it to fit into the national sphere. This idea is, of course, founded on the Nordic countries' common background, context, and welfare systems. Compared to an international environment, a Nordic setting allows for easier absorption of different experiences, especially if the chance to use languages other than English is available. It was also interesting to note that some of the responses emphasised Norway and its work in various welfare sectors, such as those involving the elderly and children. This demonstrates that knowledge and inspiration spread at least from Norway to neighbouring Nordic countries and autonomous regions.

Other practical examples that were listed in responses included for instance the common Nordic institutions as well as exclusive Nordic social and health services (if compared to the rest of the world). What is important here, as some of the respondents noted, is that many of these examples, no matter if small or big, are all equally important in building trust and may lead to a snowball effect in terms of creating further development and cooperation.

4.2.2.1 Measuring the concept

Many respondents at both levels found the question about measuring the concept in practice difficult and challenging. This was not only reflected directly in the answers but also in the fact that there were more blank answers in this question if compared to other questions—this was particularly evident in terms of practical level answers. While some respondents felt that the question was hard to answer due to the lack of mutual understanding of the concept, some questioned whether it is even possible to measure the concept overall:

It is difficult to answer without having a general definition of the concept.

How to measure the value of networking? Very difficult, but I would like to know.

Even though many respondents found either answering the question or measuring the concept challenging (or both), there were several suggestions for measuring the concept. Both qualitative and quantitative measures were suggested. Qualitative manners were seen as important and perhaps easier, and several respondents suggested that the question could be integrated in the evaluation of projects, to assess the experience of added value from participants. These questions would centre around participants' experiences of gains and effects, as well as whether the new knowledge gained through the project was implemented in one's own practice. In other words, it could be assessed whether and how the knowledge is later spread and used:

Qualitatively, e.g. the experience of added value could be evaluated, as has been done in this survey.

Whether it is possible to see if it [idea, knowledge, experience] is useful on more than a national level.

Furthermore, a few respondents suggested that the concept could be measured by asking participants from which countries knowledge is spreading, i.e. whether some countries or autonomous areas are working as a driving force for others that may lag behind. Some respondents also proposed assessing and comparing various impacts at distinct levels. For example, this may be conducted by comparing the preliminary evaluation of the impacts with the eventual results:

Perhaps the assessment could cover different impacts, such as social, environmental, economic, and cultural impacts (according to the different elements of sustainability). In addition, the assessment could perhaps take into account the different levels, i.e. the individual, community, and societal level, as well as the international level between the Nordic countries and globally.

[NAV could be measured] by comparing the preliminary assessment of the effects and the realisation. Scenarios for change with and without Nordic cooperation.

In addition to qualitative measures, many responses mentioned using statistics or developing common indicators or parameters for quantitative assessments, for instance with the help of

Nordic statisticians of the two committees NOMESCO and NOSOSCO. These indicators could be measured over time and be something practical, such as the number of people who participate in Nordic projects and are represented, or the allocation of research funds. Many respondents also mentioned that the number of various things, such as joint research and development initiatives, could be counted:

Some things can be measured quantitatively, such as how many research projects have participants from more than one Nordic country.

As it became evident from the responses that measuring the concept is challenging and there are no current, concrete, and clear ways to do so, a few official level respondents discussed the meaning of the concept. Although it might be useful to be able to measure the concept effectively, too much measuring can impact the cooperation itself. Simultaneously, a few respondents indicated that the NAV was more important for preserving trust in the region and maintaining strong support for Nordic cooperation among the Nordic citizens, instead of focusing on measuring the impacts of cooperation:

Nordic citizens rate Nordic cooperation highly in citizen surveys. Nordic added value is perhaps often quite difficult to measure concretely, but I would believe that in the end it has the greatest importance for the region's cohesion, self-understanding, and good neighbourly relations.

There is a risk of disturbing the cooperation with too much measuring, but it would be very good if more universities identify Nordic cooperation as a field of research.

This raises the question of whether measuring the concept is even necessary and important for the purpose of Nordic cooperation. This is covered in greater detail in the discussion section.

4.2.3 Strengths and challenges of Nordic cooperation as factors impacting the achievement of Nordic added value

There were many factors, both positive and negative ones, that can possibly impact the achievement of full potential of NAV in social and health policy. To start with the strengths and positive factors, many respondents noted similar welfare systems and the values associated with them, especially if compared to other European countries. In this case, a common context

and framework serve as a facilitator and a good foundation for cooperation, as well as offer comparisons and opportunities to learn from one another. For instance, this has resulted in relatively good political support and a shared understanding of how the Nordic welfare society should look like in the future, which is seen in the form of the Vision 2030. Cooperation with similar Nordic welfare states brings some practical advantages as well: the countries are located relatively close to each other, and the cooperation was felt as informal and low-hierarchical. This also makes it easier to contact someone you met during the cooperation for additional discussions and collaboration:

Similar public institutions and systems that provide opportunities for collaboration around research and broad insights.

The strengths are that we are relatively similar, making it relatively easy to collaborate.

Furthermore, many respondents believed that the common structures and understanding of them contribute to genuine interest and ambition to work with other Nordic countries. Common Nordic projects provide participants with many new and interesting opportunities, as well as access to the most recent expertise. Several practical level responders also noted that regular Nordic network meetings with active members—at least in the core team—are especially beneficial in regularly exchanging experiences. Furthermore, some practical respondents felt that the open and productive atmosphere in Nordic cooperation was a strength, making the cooperation fun and fruitful with great people:

Current strength is that one gets access to state of the art within the field.

My significantly expanded Nordic cooperation has opened up completely new research horizons and opportunities and is also very pleasant.

A few respondents also stated that new Nordic knowledge and solutions are highly needed and demanded in social and health policy, as welfare states face various challenges, such as demographic changes or a lack of personnel working in the social and health field. Common structures typically result in common or similar challenges and difficulties in the welfare sector, which is thus prone to increase collaboration. This makes Nordic cooperation highly beneficial.

The work of NWC was also mentioned in several answers on the practical level. According to these respondents, NWC's work as a coordinator or link between the Nordic countries is very important and useful. The respondents in question also indicated that the cooperation would not work or survive without the assignment and anchoring work of NWC:

A strength is that NWC coordinates the Nordic network for WHO's "Age-friendly cities...". Without that coordination, I do not see that the cooperation would survive on its own—for coordination and logistics reasons.

A coordinator from Nordic Welfare Centre is a strength. Without convening it would not work.

One of the other strengths that were mentioned in the responses was the rotation of presidency in Nordic cooperation. Furthermore, the responses emphasised the value of Nordic cooperation and how it has been recognised particularly during crises (e.g. COVID-19 and the war between Ukraine and Russia). Furthermore, some respondents stated that the fact that the concept of NAV is not fully undefined is a strength of the Nordic cooperation, and thus guides the cooperation forward.

In terms of challenges and limitations limiting NAV's full potential, the most prevalent one highlighted in most responses at both levels was a lack of resources. Despite the will and ambition, almost all respondents thought that there was not enough time or funding available for efficient and effective cooperation. As a result, non-funded activities, such as working time, are typically done voluntarily in Nordic cooperation. Furthermore, some respondents indicated that it was challenging to get funding for common projects, and that those that were available and obtained were for purposes other than working (e.g. travelling in the Nordic region). Because certain countries and autonomous areas are not as close as others (for example, Iceland and Greenland), traveling from and to these places requires more time and results in more travel expenses. A few respondents also remarked how it is rather paradoxical that welfare issues are relatively unimportant in Nordic cooperation whilst each country spends a significant proportion of its national budget on welfare. Due to limited resources, cooperation and projects may be limited to the short term:

Ambition is there, but time and resources are limited.

The weaknesses are that cooperation does not last over time. The work is ad hoc. Cooperation and networking must be given sufficient predictability and funding to last.

The scarcity of resources can be explained in part by European cooperation, which takes up a lot of time in many Nordic countries, possibly channelling resources away from Nordic cooperation. Unlike Nordic cooperation, which is primarily interest driven and thus voluntary, European partnership can be considered binding, which explains why resources must be committed in it. This European challenge was cited in several official responses:

The challenges that exist are above all the competition with European cooperation, and one sometimes see strong groups that choose that cooperation rather than a Nordic one. That challenge will remain but has not become as great as was feared when three of the countries joined the EU.

For instance, one challenge is that European cooperation can take over the time of the authorities.

Although many respondents agreed that the overall common structure of the Nordic welfare states facilitated cooperation, this was not always the case. Many respondents stated that there are differences in the national organisation and structure of the welfare state that sometimes make it challenging to draw useful comparisons. Furthermore, different regulations in Nordic countries can function as a barrier to applying the knowledge to practice from one country to another:

A strength is that all countries have an equivalent starting point (in that we have equivalent welfare systems in the Nordic countries), but a challenge is that the various countries are nevertheless organised in very different ways, making the available statistics not always comparable.

In my opinion, the challenge is that the systems are so different that not everything can be directly applied in the different Nordic countries.

It is also worth noting that several respondents at the official level mentioned that times of crisis are a challenge, and that Nordic cooperation should continue despite possible variations in political opinions and strategies for dealing with crises. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic posed numerous challenges to both official and practical level Nordic cooperation, resulting in the Action Plan (Vision 2030) not moving as quickly and dynamically as anticipated:

The challenges are, as with the COVID-19 outbreak, being able to cooperate despite different political positions.

One challenge is to continue the work even in the event of crises such as pandemics.

Furthermore, the issue of language was identified as one of the problems and barriers to cooperation. Because official cooperation takes place in Scandinavian languages, smooth communication may be hampered. This is especially relevant for Finland and Iceland, as their dominant languages are not Scandinavian ones. As a result, several of the responses also addressed the role of English:

Language question is a challenge (Danish/Norwegian/Swedish vs. Icelandic and Finnish) for flexible communication.

Language can also be a challenge for Finns and Icelanders.

Language: English or Scandinavian as common language? And what happens to the Finnish?

Some respondents also mentioned that, while a lot of important and useful knowledge is produced in the Nordic region, no information regarding how the information is used is available. Likewise, it might be challenging to communicate and spread the results within and beyond the Nordics. For example, decision makers at various levels can be difficult to reach, reducing the value of the results if they are not implemented:

The challenges are to reach out and communicate the many times very valuable and useful results we have from our activities and projects.

[It is] a bit difficult to reach out, to reach decision makers locally, regionally, nationally and at the Nordic level... We need to talk about our existence and how we can contribute.

Other issues raised in the responses were related to the management, dynamics, and the practicality of cooperation. Some respondents indicated that there is an overestimation of what Nordic cooperation can accomplish. Other respondents also believed that cooperation might be slightly binding, and that Nordic control and measurement could potentially undermine autonomy in practical cooperation, such as network operation. Group dynamics were also mentioned: those Nordic countries with a lot of resources may become the dominating voices in meetings, seminars, and events, thereby possibly overshadowing the other Nordic countries and their experiences. Furthermore, NAV without clear measurable goals is likely to make the work of Nordic cooperation more challenging. Although many respondents felt that recent crises and Vision 2030 had raised interest in Nordic cooperation in the Nordic countries, some felt that political support is still inadequate. Finally, some practical respondents thought that there are not enough leading and active individuals in the networks who could take the cooperation to the next level.

4.2.4 Expectations towards NAV and the development of their prerequisites

Many respondents at both levels wished to continue receiving similar added value as they do now, demonstrating that many respondents already thought that Nordic cooperation in social and health policy provided lots of added value. For instance, these included continuous and mutual learning and inspiration from each other, which leads to even more and better knowledge, insights, and understanding of neighbouring countries and their models, methods, and policies, whether good or bad. These wishes were typically tied to specific areas and issues in which some or all the Nordics did not yet have as much knowledge, but also to areas in which the Nordics could already be considered as “pioneers” on a worldwide scale:

I hope for new knowledge and sharing of best practices.

Knowledge of areas where we are not as far ahead today compared to other countries and self-governing areas.

Regardless of the level, many respondents stated that greater and strengthened cooperation in the form of learning and experience exchange is essential for trust in the Nordic region. Several respondents also noted how important it would be to strive to find and focus on the similarities between the Nordic countries, as they serve as a uniting factor for the Nordics and strengthen the feeling of belonging. Furthermore, joint development and consensus from a Nordic perspective would make the Nordics stronger together internationally, implying that they would have a stronger voice, for example, in the EU:

More of the countries learning from each other and finding what unites them rather than differences.

In addition, the Nordic cooperation is important for trust—we have a Nordic cooperation to promote knowledge of each other and thereby increase the feeling of belonging.

The Nordic family in an international environment and organisations.

Moreover, some respondents at both levels indicated how added value should be distributed across all levels to improve and support decision making. Here, networks become important at all levels, which often result in more networks, i.e. snowball-effect of Nordic cooperation. This would also then enable setting more Nordic meeting places for knowledge exchange. Overall, many hoped that the added value would support in the preservation, maintenance, and development of the Nordic welfare model, making the region more egalitarian, inclusive, and socially sustainable in the future.:

That the Nordic welfare systems are protected for the future and become more effective in reaching those who need them most, in order to better equalise differences in quality of life and health and living standards in the individual Nordic countries.

I hope that the Nordic cooperation will be stronger in the future so that we can protect the Nordic welfare model where everyone should participate, and no one should be left out.

Although several respondents stated that the current modes of cooperation work reasonably well and that they already observe and receive NAV from the cooperation, other respondents believed that the conditions for cooperation could be enhanced in order to generate even more NAV in the future. Although some of the respondents felt that the unification and harmonisation of legislative bases, regulations, and social security systems as well as the reduction of border barriers would support in getting more NAV, some of the respondents did not fully share this idea but also suggested of finding alternative solutions for more effective cooperation. For instance, this could be done by identifying equivalent indicators in each country, which would eventually result in better and more effective comparisons between the Nordic countries. Furthermore, most of these wishes were connected to a lack of resources. More time, funds and people working with Nordic cooperation were thus hoped for in order to reach decisionmakers at all levels:

Funding for joint research projects in the field of health and welfare technology would of course be one of the key things in order to continue the operation more systematically.

Furthermore, many respondents, particularly at the official level, believed that future cooperation should focus on sectors that provide the most benefit and added value to the Nordics and are genuinely interest driven. According to several of these comments, there are many different and smaller ongoing projects under Nordic cooperation, which are only planned to be short-term. As a result, many respondents hoped that NMRS would provide less fragmented projects in the future, as well as better control, anchoring, and clear governance. This would also enable countries with broader possibilities to establish long-term priorities if the communication was more strategic. Several respondents also suggested that continuous development and evaluation of practices also require acceptance and open attitude to achieve the greatest possible benefit and NAV:

I think the keys are the continuity and frequency of collaboration, as well as collaborating on issues that “organically” engage everyone involved.

Less fragmented projects—more coherent knowledge development where the countries learn from each other. This means that there needs to be more clear governance from NMRS—not like today where the different countries constantly

come up with new ideas. The countries should be allowed to set priorities that would last for several years. Today, NMRS has over 700 projects under management. So, more control and less “let all the flowers bloom”.

I would like us to prioritise between what we cooperate on and try to invest further in the efforts and areas where Nordic cooperation can have the greatest effect. It is about helping each other to solve common societal challenges within social and health projects. We need to be open to change and reconsider everything we do to achieve the greatest possible Nordic benefit.

Other factors that respondents regarded as enhancing Nordic cooperation included choosing a common language or using interpreters. This would also provide easier communication and thereby access to each other in the Nordics. Furthermore, as an area of 26 million people, the Nordics have the same number of people's experience in international context, which should be utilised more. Finally, a few respondents hoped for database interoperability, increased political support, and physical meetings in networks. It was also interesting to observe how different terms for Nordic added value were used by respondents in different languages—this was evident in many different parts of the responses, not only concerning the development of Nordic cooperation. For example, in the Scandinavian languages, many respondents used *nordisk nytta/nytte* instead of *nordiskt mervärde*, indicating the various uses of the concept, as discussed in section 2.3.2.

4.3 Interviews

In total, three expert interviews were conducted, with two of the experts from the official level and one from the practical level. However, all of them were differently connected to Nordic cooperation. The interviews were conducted after gathering research data with the survey, and the interviewees had also taken part in the survey. After the survey, they had voluntarily and separately provided their contact information for further discussions about the topic. Due to the limited number of interviews, the findings of these interviews were contrasted with the documents and survey results, in order to gain more in-depth understanding of the concept, its uses, and the factors impacting the achievement of the concept in Nordic cooperation.

4.3.1 Operationalisation of the concept in theory

All interviewees were familiar with the concept as they were all involved in Nordic cooperation, either directly or indirectly, through their daily work tasks or specific projects and networks. However, all the participants had a similar experience concerning the operationalisation of the concept—they all felt that the concept is not clear but rather somewhat ambiguous and profound in its nature, and thus difficult to operationalise. They highlighted how the concept stretches quite far and can thus be applied relatively loosely. As the concept can include many alternative definitions, everyone can define it how they want to or choose the definition they prefer to, indicating that the concept stays easily on the abstract level. Hence, the concept can mean different things to every person. The practical level interviewee also felt that the concept is so abstract, or at least not so often repeated, that it was even hard to remember the official operationalisation provided by the NCM. To better comprehend underlying implications of the concept and how it is understood, participants were also asked whether they could think of any alternative words that might be used instead of Nordic added value. Here, the concepts of synergy and Nordic community were raised, although the participants addressed the importance of the context:

The first thing that comes to mind is of course synergies. When we work on something and somebody else might work on the same thing, you get synergy, you get this thing—you and I can both learn from each other, and you get more and a bigger impact.

Although all the interviewees agreed that defining the concept was a challenging task, they all provided some operationalisation and practical experiences of the concept from their own perspective. To start with, each participant addressed the common ground of the Nordic countries, i.e. all Nordic countries as social democratic welfare states. The similar starting point from which the Nordics work enables for the finding of similarities, thus allowing for useful comparisons between the countries. Within this framework, all participants provided slightly different definitions of the concept, albeit these interpretations were not mutually exclusive. The practical level respondent saw the concept in two levels, being both a philosophical and practical concept simultaneously. The philosophical understanding refers to the common and shared ground and values that make the Nordic welfare states and their systems unique on a global scale. Strongly linked to this, the practical understanding of the concept refers to the

organisation of services, operations, and other activities in practice, based on the common ground and values enable the organisation of all of these in each Nordic country in a somewhat similar way. This also facilitates collaboration in general:

It [Nordic added value] is a common ground and foundation for the work, research, operation, and services. And then, on the other hand, also concrete common ground.

The similarities and the differences make it easy, I think, for scientists and government officials to learn from each other.

Furthermore, while one official respondent approached the concept from the perspective of the additionality principle and Nordic togetherness, which implies that when carrying out some activities or projects, the Nordic countries achieve more by working together than they would by acting alone or bilaterally with another country, the other official respondent discussed how added value is related to policy interdisciplinarity. In other words, this means that welfare issues are linked to many different sectors at the same time, and for instance, when addressing specific groups, such as vulnerable people, their issues are frequently interdisciplinary, requiring the collaboration of experts from several disciplines and sectors to set goals, make decisions, and share resources and responsibilities. The common starting point in the Nordic countries help in these challenging situations as the countries are able effectively discuss and deal with these situations with one another, allowing them to develop their own national structures and processes.

4.3.2 The concept and its uses in practice

When asked how the interviewees needed to take the concept into account in their work, it was clear that if working directly with Nordic cooperation, the need to take the concept into account was larger and continuous, compared to the practical level, where the “need” was only occasional and dependent on the situation, as is often the case with Nordic projects funding applications. Although the practical level participant noted that there is no equivalent necessity as on the official level, there is still a voluntary will to take the concept into account more frequently, especially as the number of common Nordic projects and contacts has increased over time. One of the official level interviewees mentioned how the concept is often used in Nordic speeches and fine phrases, but perhaps without any deeper content of what it implies in

practice. The same interviewee also mentioned that it is quite common for one Nordic country to begin promoting and driving something they see as important at the national level, indicating that projects are initiated due to national added value and may later extend to Nordic added value that benefits everyone involved in the project.

When considering more specific practical uses and examples of the concept, it turned out that the interviewees had several interesting examples and had observed NAV in many different situations. In general, the interviewees' examples followed each other and aligned the findings of the survey. However, the interviewees listed slightly different practical examples compared to each other. While the practical level interviewee referred to the working environment that gives added value by the way that it is easier to work with people of common background, one of the official level interviewees mentioned how the NAV can be related to combining resources and knowledge of some rarer issues, for instance security of supply and preparedness and the treatment of patients with severely burn injuries. In such cases, combining resources is beneficial for all the Nordic countries, as it allows for better care and welfare for Nordic citizens. Furthermore, the same official level interviewee mentioned how the NAV can sometimes be very clear, i.e. when all the Nordic countries recognise the added value of cooperation. However, the cooperation might not happen or can be interrupted due to various reasons, such as differing and competing economic interests or differing national processes related to position formations and policy preparation procedures, despite the acknowledged added value. This indicates that although the added value of Nordic cooperation is understood by all the actors involved, it might not automatically lead to any further projects or results.

Even if we often feel that something might generate a lot of Nordic added value, nevertheless, for some reason, the Nordic countries do not necessarily always reach a consensus, and the project and cooperation ceases.

Furthermore, the other official level interviewee mentioned how NAV can be considered not only as a product output, such as reports, meetings, and conferences, but also as a process of people getting to know people and how they do their everyday work. This is not to say that the product output is not important and do not produce any added value as such, but rather that it has another audience and another meaning. Instead, the same interviewee felt that the process of learning in meetings and events is where the real synergy happens, when the participants talk together and learn from each other, i.e. when people exchange information, discuss, and listen

to each other. Thus, the process can be said to be more on the personal level, with a real motivation to cooperate and a real interest in the issue and how to solve it together and nationally, in order to help the development of individual Nordic countries and the whole region. In the light of common background, it makes sense for the Nordic countries to discuss common issues and mirror their own activities against others, so that they can see that something that has been done is possible and working well. This can then lead to spillover effect, leading the participants of other Nordic countries to have impact on their minds as well as willingness to make change in their own national environment. The same interviewee also mentioned that the impact can lead to competition and a process of benchmarking between the countries, as they all strive to the highest development as possible. This also circles back to the frequent need and will for meeting people, talking about welfare issues, and learning from each other.

Sometimes I think that in all the meetings between government officials [...] is where the real synergy actually happens, when they talk together and learn from each other.

If considering the personal level added value that the interviewees had experienced through Nordic cooperation, all interviewees felt that the Nordic cooperation has given a lot for them. By this, they referred to the character of cooperation—they all felt that there are many good colleagues in Nordic cooperation, which makes the work fulfilling, interesting, and rewarding. This is of course again based on common values and background that the Nordics share. All interviewees also mentioned how working with Nordic cooperation has provided them with lots of contacts, enabling more effective and efficient cooperation in the future, as they have contact with other key experts in their field. The official level respondents also mentioned that they have got more overall knowledge on the Nordic countries as well as their cultures and people from different parts of the Nordics. This includes for instance learning on how the countries cooperate, how their structures work, how different national institutions are managed, and international conventions implemented:

I think I have got a lot of Nordic contacts that will be important for me working in this area for the rest of my life. It is so much easier for me now to find key experts in the Nordic region. That is one of the greatest things I am bringing with me, not only into my work experience, but the fact that I can share it. And that is back to

the Nordic added value. My portfolio has now a whole new compartment, with Nordic contacts, institutions, science, and society, everything really. It is so much larger and richer than I anticipated.

Regarding to whom added value is produced, the interviewees mentioned several different target groups. These include, among other groups, researchers, civil servants, decision makers, and professionals at several levels (structural, organisational and network level) in each Nordic country. The interviewees at the official level especially emphasised the citizens in this context, meaning that added value is produced primarily for the citizens of the Nordic countries and to improve their lives and welfare. The practical level respondent, on the other hand, felt that the added value can be useful not only for the above-mentioned examples but also for the third sector and various organisations. All these answers suggest that added value is produced for many different target groups in the Nordic countries, who benefit extensively from Nordic cooperation. Thus, Nordic cooperation serves both the national and Nordic levels, supporting everyone in situations where, for example, one country is ahead of others in development:

Ultimately, it is important that this work benefits the [Nordic] citizens.

I see that it [Nordic added value] is mainly for professionals in the field at the organisational or network level, or more broadly at the system level. And for decision makers, but of course, it can also be useful for the third sector and various organisations, for example some patient organisations.

4.3.3 Factors supporting and challenging the generation of added value

The interviews revealed similar strengths supporting the generation of NAV, as was the case with the survey responses. The main strength was seen to be easy, close, and informal relationships between the Nordic countries, resulting in the fact that Nordic countries can be seen as a family, based on common foundation, values, and background philosophy. All interviewees indicated that a common basis greatly facilitates and smooths cooperation in practical work as the Nordic countries are on the same page, meaning that professionals talk about the same thing and thus get deeper into the subject, when, for example, there are no major differences between the countries' service systems. In other words, since the Nordic countries do not have to get to know each other and their respective structures from the very beginning, they can instead begin talking directly about the issue and how to overcome potential problems

and challenges. This also results in closer relationships between the Nordics, with a lower threshold to contact other Nordic colleagues. In addition, the interviewee at the practical level saw Nordic institutions and networks as good, important, and active, as well as strengthening the achievement of added value in Nordic cooperation:

Nordic cooperation differs from EU cooperation in the way that you get to know your colleagues very well. These circles are small, and the meetings are often such that there is also time for social interaction.

Such [Nordic] networks, as well as all these Nordic organisations, are, of course, very important in bringing out the Nordic added value.

In addition, one of the interviewees at the official level mentioned that the geographic proximity of the Nordic countries also facilitates cooperation, and thus brings added value to cooperation. Because all Nordic countries face similar acute problems and challenges, similar democracies enable the Nordic countries to learn a lot from the structure of each other's work. This has been notably evident in recent crises like COVID-19, although the crisis in question first hampered Nordic cooperation before strengthening it. The practical level interviewee also believed that dealing with common challenges allows for peer support from other Nordic countries, resulting in togetherness, despite the fact that how countries resolve challenges at the national level may differ with each other. The same respondent also felt that similar societies make it possible for the Nordic countries to be on the same starting line in terms of development, resulting in the similar interest in different issues, regarding, for example, the use of technology in social and health services.

In summary, it can be stated that all these factors distinguish Nordic cooperation from other international cooperation, such as European cooperation. For example, the EU is already much larger in structure and operates slightly differently than Nordic cooperation, which tends to make cooperation a little more formal. In addition, one of the official level interviewees emphasised that there may be cultural and behavioural differences in global cooperation (regarding, for example, gender equality and the status of women), compared to the Nordic countries, which are very similar in terms of culture and fundamental values. The other official interviewee also mentioned that when the Nordic countries work together as a region, there is

an opportunity to learn from people who are more similar to those in Europe, meaning that the diversity of social systems in European countries is greater compared to the Nordic countries.

In terms of challenges, the findings from the interviews imitated the responses of the survey. First of all, the lack of resources was mentioned as main challenges in the current Nordic social and health policy cooperation. One of the official level interviewees mentioned that even though a Nordic country would feel that the project would be very useful for them and that they should be involved in it, sometimes the country does not have the human resources to put into that project. This can be due to several factors, but the interviewee mentioned that the nature of Nordic cooperation can have an impact on that, as the Nordic cooperation is largely carried out alongside one's own paid work, meaning that the work input is not compensated separately. In practical terms, this indicates that there can be situations in which the Nordic countries do not have experts or officials to join a project, even if all the Nordic countries feel that it might be a very useful and good project, thus generating NAV. The same principle applies to all activities and the exchange of information between the participants of Nordic cooperation—according to the interviewees, many wishes they had more time to exchange knowledge. This lack of time and hence human resources can be partly related to the EU cooperation that might take resources from Nordic cooperation, at least in those Nordic countries that are members of the EU. Furthermore, the practical level interviewee felt that Nordic research funding is small or relatively small, especially if compared to the European level. Here, the current Nordic funding possibilities do not provide enough funding for the work itself:

If you would like to do research specifically with other Nordic countries, it is challenging to get funding for that—at least a sufficient amount—as the existing financial instruments do not really serve that kind of cooperation.

Participants at both levels indicated that Nordic cooperation is relatively unknown, not only among citizens but also among researchers. The practical level participant mentioned the example of Nordic researchers who often focus on other regions, such as the EU, rather than the Nordic countries. Of course, there could be a variety of reasons for this, but possibly language and more adequate financial opportunities elsewhere can be one of them. Furthermore, as Nordics are neighbours and thus already relatively familiar with one another, some researchers may shift their focus and interest elsewhere in order to extend their perspective on welfare issues:

When surveys are conducted for [Nordic] citizens, the citizens in those surveys usually value Nordic cooperation very much, more than EU cooperation, and it is perceived as closer. However, many people do not know the Nordic Council of Ministers and do not know what it is, nor do they know the difference between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council, if asking ordinary citizens on the street. In that sense, the structures of such Nordic cooperation are quite unfamiliar to many ordinary citizens.

Considering the operationalisation of the concept, especially the official level participants addressed that it can be a weakness from time to time, as it is not a very scientific concept nor something that can be easily measured. This can create challenges in cooperation, as the concept works as a basic foundation and principle in all the official Nordic cooperation activities. Furthermore, as the concept could be regarded as something that is generated over time (as being a process), it can be sometimes relatively difficult for new people working with Nordic cooperation to understand what it means, as it often takes time to grasp the small and the large differences, but also to find the similarities and the synergies in how they can learn from each other. This, again, leads to the question of how the concept is challenging to measure as the added value could be considered as networking and cooperation itself, meaning the process of getting to know each other and learning about the similarities and differences between the countries:

But when we report on results, it is difficult to show what this networking and this cooperation actually means for each individual who works with this topic area.

Additionally, the language question was mentioned by all the interviewees as being a possible barrier to cooperation. The practical level interviewee addressed that if one does not possess the knowledge of one of the Scandinavian languages, the language can work as a hindering element in cooperation. Furthermore, one of the official level participants felt that English can never fully be as natural as Scandinavian languages, as the language is perhaps one of the factors keeping the close and informal relations between the Nordics:

Language is quite an essential thing, and you notice it when you sit at lunches, dinners and in conversations in the corridor—it always shifts to the Scandinavian

languages, as people want to use them in informal communication at least. I would therefore believe that English can never be quite as natural in those contacts. But this does not only concern the social and health sector, it is also a common phenomenon in Nordic cooperation.

4.3.4 Developing the prerequisites

In order to achieve more NAV in the future, the participants stated that more resources are needed, especially more funding and time for the work itself that is targeted to Nordic cooperation. This would simultaneously ensure more and long-term cooperation in welfare and therefore deepen the cooperation that supports the achievement of the Vision 2030 as well as helps to maintain and develop the Nordic welfare model. The other official level interviewee stressed that this would be crucial in the future, as improving welfare for and reaching equality are issues that are not going disappear globally. Hence, deepened cooperation would not only support in achieving the Vision 2030, but also to help the Nordic countries to stand more together internationally, thus supporting the global welfare development also outside the Nordic region. Related to this, the other official level respondent also mentioned that it is important for the Nordic countries to maintain their role model status and show their values on a global level—this impacts global sustainable development, when other countries located outside the Nordic countries and their residents see how the welfare model works not only in individual countries but also in a wider area.

The funding should be in such a way that there would be such financial instruments that would enable larger and longer-lasting projects, in which many countries could be involved. Nordic funding opportunities currently include funding that does not actually provide money for the work itself, but may be used to finance, for example, organising workshops and travelling.

Furthermore, interviewees from both levels addressed how it would be necessary to highlight the importance of Nordic cooperation and increase knowledge on the Nordics for all. In the future, Nordic cooperation should be more visible and the opportunities that exist within it should be promoted more actively, in order to also tell everyone about the importance and what benefits result from cooperation. Furthermore, increasing the knowledge of Scandinavian languages in the Nordics was seen also to be a positive factor in supporting the promotion of Nordic cooperation and thus resulting in more NAV. All interviewees also stressed the need of

keeping the NAV concept in mind during collaboration. However, as it became evident in all the interviews, the respondents agreed that the concept's operationalisation should be improved, although it should not restrict the cooperation too much. However, a better and clearer operationalisation of the concept would help, for example, in better resource use and practical work when considering, for example, project funding applications. Likewise, better operationalisation would support in promoting the benefits of Nordic cooperation to all Nordic citizens instead of being only fine words in speeches:

Well, of course, informing is highly important, to make Nordic cooperation and the opportunities within it more visible to researchers. And perhaps also from the point of view of what benefits one can get from it, or what is the added value of it, as not everyone considers it.

In my opinion, we should become better at defining the concept of “nordisk nytta”. Maybe if some good indicators could be developed for it, then we could also measure the results better.

In terms of structure and management of Nordic cooperation, one of the official level interviewees hoped that there would be better prioritisation in cooperation, meaning that all five countries and three autonomous areas would agree on what is the most important in order to make the most benefit. Better prioritisation would also enable more sustainable and long-term cooperation through greater understanding, competence, and trust within and between the countries. Although there is a place for short-term projects, long-term cooperation, such as common Nordic institutions with a long institutional memory, is useful and can help in achieving more NAV and supporting with the goals listed under the Vision 2030. Furthermore, the other official level interviewee addressed that it would be necessary to be more realistic when following international conventions, i.e. what does the implementation of a particular convention mean in practice in both individual Nordic countries and the region as a whole.

5 Discussion

Nordic added value is a concept that is extensively used in Nordic cooperation. It is utilised not only in official documents and project funding applications, but the entire Nordic cooperation is built on the principle according to which all official Nordic activities and projects should produce NAV. As the Nordic region strives to become the most integrated region in the world, it is important to further understand the underlying principle. This not only helps the work of the NCM's but also supports to achieve the Vision 2030. As a result, the purpose of this study was to examine and understand the concept's meaning in the Nordic social and health policy cooperation, as prior research indicated that it is an open signifier with no shared and agreed-upon meaning.

5.1 The results

After analysing three separate research data sets, one can conclude that the findings of the various research data align with each other. According to these findings, the concept of NAV appears to be relatively elastic and ambiguous, which corresponds to the existing research on the concept (Dang, 2022). The concept might imply different things to different people, as seen by the diversity in responses, despite the fact that there were often many parallels in the understandings. The meaning and comprehension of the concept, however, is relatively dependant on the context and who you ask—everyone's personal background and current position, of course, influences the understanding of it. As a result, it is difficult, if not impossible, to operationalise and define the concept in a single way, indicating that there is no one common definition that applies to every case, not even within one policy field—which in this case was Nordic social and health policy. However, it was also interesting to note that the understanding of the concept by those participants who were unfamiliar with it was not drastically different or inconsistent with the others. This implies that persons involved in or engaged with the Nordic cooperation may not think about the concept frequently or recognise that the added value is constantly being produced.

Overall, the findings can be used to draw some overall implications and trends. It appears that the concept can be understood in two ways in the Nordic social and health policy cooperation. On the one hand, it can be understood as a symbolic and philosophical concept, firmly linked to the shared background and values associated with Nordic welfare state models. These shared values support Nordic cohesion and togetherness, build trust in the community, and strengthen

the “Nordic family” and its influence internationally. On the other hand, the concept can be understood in practical terms as the common ground allows for the exchange and sharing of examples, practices, and experiences, whether positive or negative. Due to learning and inspiration that occurs from the exchange, the Nordic countries may draw useful comparisons that can be utilised and applied in national contexts to develop both individual countries and the Nordics as a whole. Therefore, it can be argued that NAV is created primarily when the Nordic countries share information and experiences with each other. According to the findings of the research data, learning does not happen overnight, but rather is a process that takes time, due to various reasons. As a result, the process may have a positive spillover effect, in which the impacts of the learning process spread throughout the Nordic region. Simultaneously, this may result in a positive competition between the Nordic countries and, as a result, more useful cooperation and comparisons, creating a continuous cycle (see Figure 4).

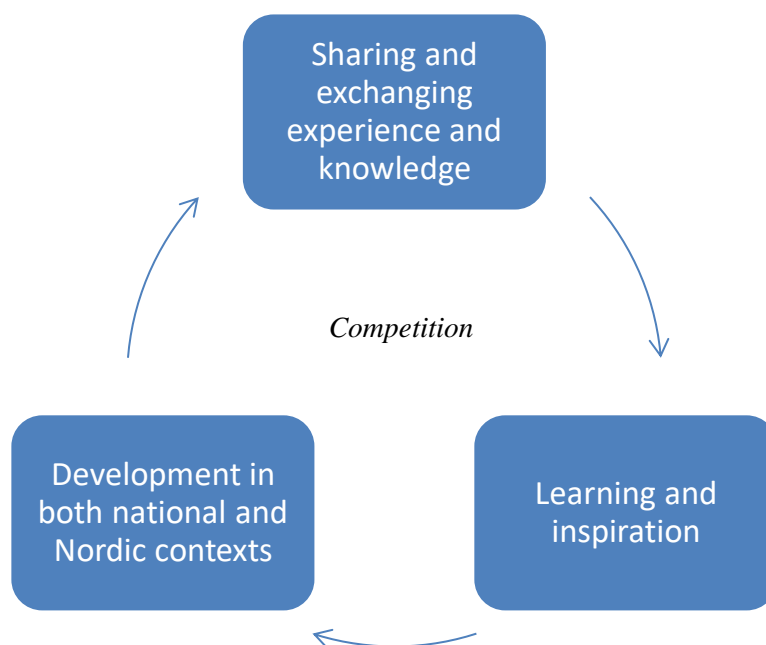


Figure 4 The process of learning resulting in impact and development

According to many respondents, whether they be in official or practical level, there is either a lot of NAV produced in social and health policy cooperation or a lot of potential to achieve more NAV. This is based on the common values and similar welfare system, model, and structures, that all facilitate the cooperation between the Nordic countries. As the similarities between the Nordic countries are so large, there is also a strong will and interest to cooperate within the welfare sector. If considering the differences between the two levels, the results

demonstrate that there were no larger differences in understandings. Rather, there were differences also within the levels, which suggests that the understanding and use of the concept is more dependent on the individual than on the level. However, few differences could be identified between the levels. While the official level perhaps understood the concept in broader terms by focusing more on the symbolic aspect, the practical level emphasised experience exchange and knowledge sharing in specific focus areas. The underlying principle in each of these is, of course, the common ground and similar structures that lead to mutual understanding and easier cooperation.

However, as became relatively clear from the responses, various challenges tend to hinder the achievement of full potential of NAV. While the practical level participants emphasised the lack of resources, the official level participants wished for clearer governance and better prioritisation in the future. Instead of ending up in situations where there are no experts or officials available to join a Nordic project—despite the fact that it would be very useful and generate a lot of NAV for each Nordic country—providing more funding and better governance would both ensure more long-term cooperation, thus supporting the Vision 2030. Along with limited resources, language appears to be one of the factors that continue to challenge Nordic cooperation. The chosen cooperation language can work both as an inclusive and exclusive factor at the same time—it can facilitate cooperation between those who can and thus increase understanding, resulting in more cohesion and the feeling of togetherness, but also to exclude those who do not speak Scandinavian languages. This is often linked to Finland and Iceland, but it can also exclude other groups and minorities in all Nordic societies, such as refugees and migrants, which is crucial to keep in mind.

5.2 More symbolism and political desire than economic demand

According to the results, it appears that NAV is understood more from a political than an economic point of view in the Nordic social and health policy cooperation. Although resource pooling was mentioned in the research material, it was not primarily related to economies of scale, but rather to the fact that pooling resources and expertise makes sense due to the relatively small size of the Nordic population, such as in the case of people with deafblindness or other rare conditions and diseases. According to the findings of this study, this idea is also supported by the fact that Nordic cooperation is interest driven, in which NAV is produced for the common benefit and for every Nordic citizen. This further supports the idea that the Nordic countries

can still be considered as an epistemic community with professionals and networks of shared interests and practices based on common values.

Although cooperation is motivated by shared interests and benefits not only individual countries and autonomous areas, but also the entire region, it appears that NAV is not always produced, even though the added value of cooperation would be recognised by all Nordic countries. This can be explained in part by a lack of resources or competing economic interests, but it may also be due to the fact that not all countries believe that cooperation or a specific initiative would benefit them. In addition, Nordic projects do not need to have the support of all Nordic countries in order to receive funding—only three are needed—which means that some countries may opt out of cooperation, for one reason or another. As was also mentioned in the interviews, often one of the Nordic countries starts to promote an issue that they consider to be nationally important, meaning that promoting the issue fundamentally and primarily brings national added value for the country that started the initiative. Of course, other Nordic countries can agree on the realisation of added value at their own national level, in which case the promotion of the issue will also receive support from the other Nordic countries. As a result, Nordic cooperation is often asymmetric in nature, as not all Nordic countries are necessarily required for a particular cooperation to be considered Nordic. Furthermore, while it was evident from the research data that NAV should be beneficial for both national and Nordic development at the same time, it remains unclear whether the added value should be the same for each country. For instance, the added value obtained from the cooperation of each actor can vary, for example, being an economic benefit for one country and a political one for another. On the other hand, there are also situations in which all Nordic countries can obtain a similar benefit (for example, in the pooling of resources regarding small populations), suggesting that the added value is common type for all the countries.

5.3 Limitations

There are few limitations to this study that should be considered. One noteworthy limitation in carrying out this research was the stakeholders' various roles and experience in Nordic cooperation. For instance, some of the official-level respondents who received the survey may have felt unable to participate given that they work in fields other than policy formation and coordination (such as administration or communication, with this challenge being mainly for employees of NWC). Same applies to newer employees or those who have not previously worked in or with Nordic cooperation as they may have found it more difficult to contribute

and express opinions on the matter. Furthermore, a relatively low response rate of the survey can be a result of different factors, but it can also demonstrate the difficulty of the topic, i.e. that the participants found the concept difficult, abstract, and challenging, and hence refrained from answering—this was evident in the answers, both directly in the content of the answers and indirectly with blank answers. Finally, as the study is qualitative in nature and focused on a specific perspective of the topic—exploring and comparing understandings between two distinct levels in formal Nordic cooperation—drawing generalisations is challenging, and thus the applicability of the results is rather limited.

6 Conclusion

This study has sought to explore how the concept of Nordic added value is currently defined and understood in the Nordic social and health policy cooperation. This was done by analysing three different data sets, gathered through documents, survey, and in-depth interviews. More specifically, the thesis focused on two-level understanding, including both official and practical perspectives of the topic. With the help of content analysis with a mainly inductive approach, all material was analysed, and the levels compared in order to find similarities, differences, and challenges between them.

Despite the fact that there appears to be a lot of NAV created in the welfare sector, the results reveal that the conditions that support the accomplishment of NAV's full potential should be enhanced in the future. The many barriers to collaboration should be reduced if Nordic cooperation is to improve and become more efficient in the future. Furthermore, it appears that EU integration still constitutes a challenge to Nordic integration, as EU integration diverts resources away from Nordic cooperation. Yet, since the Vision 2030's goals are rather ambitious, more resources should be allocated to Nordic cooperation, especially when there is a strong will and desire to cooperate among the Nordic countries. This contradicts the current state of funding for the welfare sector, which is the backbone of Nordic countries and has great potential to achieve even more NAV. Consequently, only a persistent prioritisation of financial efforts for a socially sustainable Nordic region will ensure the optimal development of Nordic welfare states, thereby ensuring the overall success of the Vision 2030.

Given that the NAV is the guiding light in Nordic cooperation, and all activities should serve that purpose, understanding what it means in practice is essential. Yet too much measuring and focus on the concept can easily restrict Nordic cooperation, which has long been established on the principle of "letting all the flowers to bloom". Also, because Nordic cooperation is interest driven, measuring the concept may be less relevant than in European cooperation, where the diversity is considerably greater, implying that the countries' political viewpoints are likely to differ more with each other than within the Nordic countries. However, as it appears that some improvements are required to improve Nordic cooperation in order to meet the Vision 2030 goals, it would be beneficial to review the concept and explore its operationalisation in all Nordic cooperation projects and initiatives. As a result, it would be useful for the NCM to include a question on Nordic added value in feedback and evaluations of various projects,

events, and workshops. A qualitative or quantitative evaluation of NAV would then support in policy making, better and clearer governance, and the implementation of the Vision 2030. This would simultaneously help in communicating the benefits of Nordic cooperation, not only for experts but also for citizens, so that everyone in the Nordics would understand the added value of Nordic cooperation.

Overall, this study has added knowledge to the field by supporting the previous research with a comparative and qualitative content analysis of the official and practical level understanding of the concept of Nordic added value in social and health policy. Since the research data demonstrates that the sharing and spreading of knowledge and experiences are the key factors in producing Nordic added value, the findings of this study correlate with the previous research. The concept itself is relatively uninvestigated, which became evident already during the gathering of research data. Thus, further research about Nordic added value is needed and even desirable, especially in terms of further developing Nordic cooperation and its structures in the future. Due to the limited scope of this study, this thesis has no doubt excluded some aspects of the topic. Therefore, the future research could focus on several different aspects and comparisons within the concept, such as how the understandings between different focus areas within the policy sector compare with each other (for instance integration and disability issues in welfare sector), or how the concept is understood in and between different policy sectors (for instance environment and climate policy or legislation and justice). In addition to the aforementioned frameworks, future studies could also conduct a more in-depth study of the conceptual history of NAV, i.e. how the concept has changed over time within the welfare or other sectors in Nordic cooperation. Future research could also focus on differences in perceptions depending on countries/autonomous areas, age, working years, nationality, or gender, among other criteria that were not included or examined in this study. Finally, to gain a broader understanding of the concept and its development, it would be beneficial to look into how Nordic politicians perceive and understand the concept of Nordic added value, as well as examine possible variations across political parties.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Survey questions

IN ENGLISH

Please choose the option that applies to you (*if both options apply to you, please choose one and answer from that perspective*):

Official level = Member/employee of one or several of the following Nordic cooperation bodies: Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Health and Social Affairs (EK-S); Nordic Welfare Centre (NWC); The Council of the Nordic Welfare Centre; Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers

Practical level = Member of one or several of the following Nordic networks/expert groups: Nordic network for age-friendly cities and communities; the Nordic Arena for Public Health Issues; the Council of Nordic Cooperation on Disability; Nordic Research Network: Health and Welfare Technology; Nordic Dementia Network; Expert Group for the Nordic Cooperation on Children and Young People's Opportunities for Participation and Development During the Covid-19 Pandemic; Nordic Expert Group on Labour Market Integration; Nordic Expert Group on Early Interventions for Immigrant Children and Families

1. Are you familiar with the concept "Nordic added value"? (yes/no)
2. How would you define Nordic added value from your point of view and in your area of work? (open-ended)
3. What is your practical experience with Nordic added value? Can you think of any concrete examples when you observed/experienced Nordic added value? (open-ended)
4. What kind of added value do you hope to gain from Nordic cooperation? (open-ended)
5. How could Nordic added value be evaluated or measured? (open-ended)
6. What do you think are the current strengths and challenges of Nordic cooperation in your area of work? (open-ended)
7. How would you like to develop Nordic cooperation in your area of work, and do you have any suggestions or ideas on how to resolve possible challenges? (open-ended)
8. Do you have any additional comments or thoughts you would like to share? (open-ended)

IN SWEDISH

Välj det alternativ som passar dig (*om båda alternativen passar dig, välj ett och svara utifrån det perspektivet*):

Officiell nivå = Medlem/anställd i ett eller flera av följande nordiska samarbetsorgan: Nordiska ämbetsmannakommittén för social- och hälsopolitik (ÄK-S); Nordens välfärdscenter (NVC); Nordens välfärdscenters råd; Nordiska ministerrådets sekretariat

Praktisk nivå = Medlem i ett eller flera av följande nordiska nätverk/expertgrupper: Nordiskt nätverk för åldersvänliga städer och samhällen; Nordisk folkhälsoarena; Rådet för nordiskt samarbete om funktionshinder; Nordic Research Network: Health and Welfare Technology; Nordiskt demensnätverk; Det nordiska expertnätverket om arbetsmarknadsinsatser inom integrationsområdet; Det nordiska expertnätverket om tidiga insatser till nyanlända barn, unga och familjer inom integrationsområdet; Expertgruppen för projektet nordiskt samarbete om barn och ungas möjligheter till deltagande och utveckling efter covid-19 pandemin

1. Är du bekant med begreppet "nordiskt mervärde" (*Nordic added value*)? (ja/nej)
2. Hur skulle du definiera nordiskt mervärde ur din synvinkel och inom ditt arbetsområde? (öppen fråga)
3. Vad är din praktiska erfarenhet av nordiskt mervärde? Kan du komma på några konkreta exempel när du observerat/upplevt nordiskt mervärde? (öppen fråga)
4. Vilket mervärde hoppas du få av det nordiska samarbetet? (öppen fråga)
5. Hur skulle det nordiska mervärdet kunna utvärderas eller mätas? (öppen fråga)
6. Vilka tror du är de nuvarande styrkorna och utmaningarna med nordiskt samarbete inom ditt arbetsområde? (öppen fråga)
7. Hur skulle du vilja utveckla det nordiska samarbetet inom ditt eget arbetsområde, och har du några förslag eller idéer om hur man kan lösa eventuella utmaningar? (öppen fråga)
8. Har du några ytterligare kommentarer eller tankar som du vill dela med dig av? (öppen fråga)

IN FINNISH

Valitse seuraavista itseäsi koskeva vaihtoehto (*mikäli molemmat vaihtoehdot koskevat sinua, valitse vain toinen ja vastaa kyseisestä näkökulmasta*):

Virallinen taso = Jäsen/työntekijä yhdessä tai useammassa seuraavista pohjoismaisista yhteistyöelimistä: Pohjoismaiden sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden virkamieskomitea (ÄK-S); Pohjoismainen hyvinvointikeskus (NVC); Pohjoismaisen hyvinvointikeskuksen neuvosto; Pohjoismaiden ministerineuvoston sihteeristö

Käytännön taso = Jäsen yhdessä tai useammassa seuraavista pohjoismaisista verkostoista/asiantuntijaryhmistä: Pohjoismainen ikäystävällisten kaupunkien ja yhteiskuntien verkosto; Pohjoismainen kansanterveysfoorumi; Vammaisalan pohjoismainen yhteistyöneuvosto; Nordic Research Network: Health and Welfare Technology; Pohjoismainen dementia verkosto; Expert Group for the Nordic Cooperation on Children and Young People's Opportunities for Participation and Development During the Covid-19 Pandemic; Nordic Expert Group on Labour Market Integration; Nordic Expert Group on Early Interventions for Immigrant Children and Families

1. Onko käsite "pohjoismainen lisäarvo" (*Nordic added value*) sinulle tuttu? (kyllä/ei)
2. Miten määrittelisit pohjoismaisen lisäarvon omasta näkökulmastasi ja omalla toimialallasi? (avoin kysymys)
3. Millaisia käytännön kokemuksia sinulla on pohjoismaisesta lisäarvosta? Tuleeko sinulle mieleen konkreettisia esimerkkejä, jolloin havaitsit/koit pohjoismaista lisäarvoa? (avoin kysymys)
4. Millaista lisäarvoa toivoisit saavasi pohjoismaisesta yhteistyöstä? (avoin kysymys)
5. Miten pohjoismaista lisäarvoa voitaisiin arvioida tai mitata? (avoin kysymys)
6. Mitkä ovat mielestäsi pohjoismaisen yhteistyön tämänhetkiset vahvuudet ja haasteet omalla toimialallasi? (avoin kysymys)
7. Miten haluaisit kehittää pohjoismaista yhteistyötä omalla toimialallasi ja onko sinulla ehdotuksia tai ideoita mahdollisten haasteiden ratkaisemiseksi? (avoin kysymys)
8. Onko sinulla muita kommentteja tai ajatuksia, jotka haluaisit jakaa? (avoin kysymys)

Appendix 2 Interview questions

1. What is your current role/position on national level in terms of social and health policy?
What kind of work do you do in practice?
2. Is the concept “Nordic added value” familiar to you? How would you define it in your own words and in your area of work?
3. Do you need to take the concept Nordic added value in consideration in your work, and if so, how?
4. Have you encountered any challenges or problems with the concept of Nordic added value and its current use? If yes, what kind? (E.g. how the concept is defined, operationalised, evaluated, or measured in Nordic cooperation)
5. What kind of “added value” should Nordic social and health policy cooperation produce and for whom?
6. What kind of added value have you gained both professionally and personally from participating in Nordic social and health policy cooperation? Do you have any practical examples of this kind of added value?
7. What do you see as the added value in working at the Nordic level compared to the national or European/global level?
8. What do you think are the current strengths of Nordic cooperation in your area of work?
9. What do you think are the current challenges and weaknesses of Nordic cooperation in your area of work? How would you resolve the possible challenges?
10. Do you have any additional comments, questions, or concerns you would like to share?

Appendix 3 Privacy notice

DATA PROTECTION NOTICE FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH General Data Protection Regulation of the EU Articles 12–14 Date: January 23, 2023

Information on the processing of personal data in the research project entitled *Nordic Added Value: The official and practical understanding of the concept in the field of social and health policy*

The research project entitled *Nordic Added Value: The official and practical understanding of the concept in the field of social and health policy* involves processing of personal data. The purpose of this data protection notice is to provide information on the personal data to be processed, from where they are obtained and how they are used. Detailed information on the rights of data subjects will be provided at the end of this notice.

Your participation in the research project and provision of personal data are voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in the project or you wish to withdraw from it, you can do so without negative consequences.

1. Data Controller

University of Helsinki
Address: PO Box (Fabianinkatu 33), 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland

2. Contact person and principal investigator

Contact person in matters concerning the research project:
Name: Emilia Berg
Faculty/department/unit: Faculty of Social Sciences
Address: Unioninkatu 37, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland
Phone: [information removed]
Email: [information removed]

3. Contact details of the data protection officer

You can contact the University of Helsinki data protection officer via email at tietosuoja@helsinki.fi.

4. Description of the research project and the purpose of processing personal data

The research project "Nordic Added Value: Official and practical understanding of the concept in the field of social and health policy" (2022-2023) investigates how the concept of Nordic added value is defined and understood in Nordic social and health policy cooperation. The project aims at a comprehensive examination of the concept by examining and comparing the current understanding on an official and practical level. The research project is part of the larger project "Nordic Added Value in Concept and Practice", conducted by the Centre for Nordic Studies (CENS) at the University of Helsinki.

In order to better understand the present-day understanding of the concept in the chosen field, different stakeholders who work with and participate in official Nordic social and health cooperation are consulted as part of the project through 1) a survey and 2) expert interviews. The selection of target stakeholders has been done in collaboration with Nordic Welfare Centre.

Personal data is processed as part of master's thesis at the University of Helsinki. The student is responsible for the practical management of the data, such as the minimization of the data to be processed, the accuracy and the determination of storage periods and the use of appropriate systems/applications. The risks related to the treatment are assessed in cooperation with the supervisor. The University guides and supports the processing of personal data from planning to the publication of the final work and provides the necessary infrastructure and tools to carry out the research.

5. Personal data included in the research data

The data collected and stored from the survey (1) will include no direct identifiers since the data collection is conducted anonymously. However, while the collected data cannot be linked to an identified person, it may include information of the research subjects' nationality, organization/institution they represent and their role within the organizations. In those cases, special attention is paid to the process of reporting of the results, ensuring that the identity of the respondents cannot be deduced from the responses.

The collected and stored data from the interviews (2) will include the following direct identifiers: name, contact details. In addition, the data may also include information about the organization/institution that the research subjects represent as well as their role in their respective organizations. The individual answers are anonymized in the analysis, ensuring that the identity of an individual person cannot be deduced from individual answers.

Further information on personal data and identification can be found on the website of the Finnish Social Science Data Archive:

<https://www.fsd.tuni.fi/aineistohallinta/en/anonymisation-and-identifiers.html>.

6. Sources of personal data

The data will be obtained through a survey and interviews. The invitation to participate in the survey is made in collaboration with Nordic Welfare Centre, which works according to its own data protection policy. The contact information of those invited to the interviews is provided by the participants voluntarily by leaving their contact information separately after the survey. This contact information cannot be connected or traced to the responses of the survey.

7. Sensitive personal data

No special categories of personal data (i.e., sensitive data), as defined in Article 9 of the GDPR, will be processed in this research.

8. Lawful basis for processing personal data

Personal data are processed on the following basis (Article 6(1) of the GDPR):

- Task carried out in the public interest:
- Scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes
- Archiving of research material and cultural heritage material
- Consent by the research subject
- Compliance with a legal obligation to which the controller is subject
- Legitimate interests pursued by the controller or by a third party

Specify the legitimate interest:

If the processing of personal data is based on the research subject's consent, he or she can withdraw that consent at any time. The withdrawal of consent does not affect the lawfulness of processing based on consent before its withdrawal.

9. Recipients of data

Personal data collected within this project will not be transferred or disclosed to anyone outside the research project.

10. Transfer of data to countries outside the European Economic Area

Data will not be transferred to countries outside the European Economic Area, they are processed only within the EEA.

11. Automated decision-making

The research project involves no automated decision-making that has a significant effect on data subjects.

12. Protection of personal data

Personal data included in the research dataset will be processed and kept protected so that only those who need the data can access them.

The data processed in data systems will be protected using the following:

- Username and password
- Registration/log of use
- Access control
- Encryption
- Two-factor identification
- Other, please specify:

Physical material (e.g., data in paper form or other tangible form) will be protected using the following: data stored in a locked facility that can be accessed by authorised people alone.

Processing direct identifiers:

- The controller collects the personal data without direct identifiers.
- Direct identifiers will be removed during the analysis stage and kept separate from the analysed research data.
- The data will be analysed using direct identifiers, because (give grounds for preserving the direct identifiers):

13. Duration of the processing of personal data in this research project:

The duration of the processing of personal data is the length of the research project from April 2022 to March 2023.

14. Processing of personal data when the research project ends

- The research data will be deleted
- The research data will be kept for the purposes of validating or replicating the results of this research project:
 without identifiers identifiers included
- The research data will be kept for later, compatible scientific research in accordance with the requirements of the GDPR:
 without identifiers identifiers included

The storage of the research data is based on Article 5(1)(b) and (e) of the GDPR. Data subjects will receive a new data protection notice on the new use of the research data, unless the controller can no longer identify the subjects from the data.

In addition, the data subjects will not be informed of the new research if delivering this information to them is impossible or involves a disproportionate effort or renders impossible or seriously impairs the achievement of the research objectives (Article 14(5)(b) of the GDPR).

Where and for how long will the data be stored: In an encrypted folder on the researcher's personal device, until March 2028.

15. Rights of data subjects and derogations from those rights

The contact person in matters related to research subjects' rights is the contact person stated in section 1 of this notice.

Rights of data subjects

Under the General Data Protection Regulation, data subjects have the following rights:

- Right of access to their own data
- Right to rectification of their data
- Right to the erasure of their data and to be forgotten
- Right to the restriction of processing of their data
- Right to data portability from one controller to another
- Right to object to the processing of their data
- Right not to be subject to automated decision-making

However, data subjects cannot exercise all their rights in all circumstances. The circumstances are affected by, for example, the legal basis for processing personal data.

Further information on the rights of data subjects in various circumstances can be found on the website of the Data Protection Ombudsman: <https://tietosuoja.fi/en/what-rights-do-data-subjects-have-in-different-situations>.

Derogations from rights

The General Data Protection Regulation and the Finnish Data Protection Act enable derogations from certain rights of data subjects if personal data are processed for the purposes of scientific research and the rights are likely to render impossible or

seriously impair the achievement of the research purposes.

The need for derogations from the rights of data subjects will always be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Right to appeal

If you consider that the processing of your personal data has been carried out in breach of data protection laws, you have the right to appeal to the Office of the Data Protection Ombudsman.

Contact details:

Office of the Data Protection Ombudsman
Street address: Ratapihantie 9, 6th floor, 00520 Helsinki
Postal address: PO Box 800, 00521 Helsinki
Phone (switchboard): 029 56 66700
Fax: 029 56 66735
Email: tietosuoja(at)om.fi