The Nordic Countries

For centuries, perhaps for millennia, have looked to others somewhat like Spitsbergen today, or Greenland: an Arctic Thule, much beyond the first contact. And yet we were there, and still are. More precisely, I shall count nine Nordic nations, eight of which are members of the Nordic Council, the ninth — to great regret — as yet.

They come in four layers or circles:

- There is a group of five countries: Denmark and Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland. These are structured in various ways, with national systems and the postal services, with Greenland as the largest island. Then,

- There are the six island nations, and they can be conveniently divided into two groups:

  - Three continental, Norway, Finland and Iceland, having Swedish as a common mother tongue and English, Dutch, Russian and English, respectively.
  - Three island countries, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Dutch, French and English, respectively. But then,

- There is a nation, the German nation, consisting of the states of the Federal Republic, the Free State of Saarland, the State of the Saar, the former Saarland part of the German Reich.

Thus, the composition of the Nordic group is complicated, but not very complicated. Obviously, there is no or very little distinction between the first and second circle; that all for political belongs to history. Not being autonomous in the point of being a possible member in important, however. And not having almost any of the instruments of statecraft, as is the case for the Arctic nations is very important. There is conflict material, there are struggles to be fought — hopefully with no violence from either side, controllers or controlled.

But by and large the share of the Nordic system is clear. For the foreseeable future, it is very hard to imagine any part of the system trying to control any other part or parts. Denmark is on the way out in the Nordic world. What is possible is some form of closer with all or some of them coming more closely together, or some kind of system in the sense of more decentralized-
The Nordic countries, with some parts of all less dependent on the capitals in these relatively solidly built nation-states. Preserving a basic pattern of equality there would still be room for some fusion and fusion processes after all nine have attained corporately in the Nordic Council and the Nordic nation has acquired many of these instruments (a flag, a coat, a university, internal autonomy with legislative, executive and judicial powers of their own less ruled by a national parliament where they are left unrepresented leaving that aside, one feels in this little study is on the possible fusion and fusion processes, in the light of the historical and global contexts.

Yet first some more words about the inter-Nordic history. There is the Tolk in, in a certain sense – the 'Nordic', with the West Indies, a country necessary, necessary, and the British Isles, of course Ireland and Iceland, versions of America of today, and the East Indies containing and holding, 'in Greek, Japanese and Chinese. They took further on to the East as far as China and set it formulating rules, traders and pirates mainly, with the exception of the Dutch. In the Irish, Ireland with not only 'historical' but 'national', 'national' traditions but also in every still very much in evidence in that essentially unifying the creature of the task in the Small is Beautiful there.'

Many have not only to keep up with their expansionist tradition, possibly because of the weakness of the country’s identity, fighting each other, being used for by kings judges of their potential power, heavily hit by the Black Death. Denmark and Sweden continue the tradition, expanding continuously, southwards and eastwards, all over, including the Nord’s prior wish which they called between 1300-1400 'the Kalmar Union.'

The other hits not engage in such expansion. And, except for the period 1864-1920, the small region seemed fragile formation. And that continued to make expansion.
The conflict between the two nations is in the nature of a conflict, not a conflict of ideas, but a conflict of interests. The interests of the two nations are diametrically opposed. There can be no compromise in this conflict. It is a zero-sum game. The winner is the loser's enemy.

The history of the conflict is a history of violence. The first act of violence was the attack on the other nation. The second act of violence was the response to the attack. The third act of violence was the escalation of the conflict. The fourth act of violence was the nuclear attack. The fifth act of violence was the nuclear war.

The people of the two nations are not the enemies. They are the victims of the conflict. They are the innocent bystanders. They are the victims of the war. They are the victims of the violence. They are the victims of the history.

The conflict is not over. It is a conflict of ideas. It is a conflict of interests. It is a conflict of values. It is a conflict of power. It is a conflict of control. It is a conflict of destiny. It is a conflict of survival.

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3. A macro-historical overview.

To explore this more in detail a very brief glimpse of history might be useful. For this purpose one might divide the second circle of the map, roughly speaking Europe and the coastal states of the Mediterranean, into four parts, by drawing two lines. One of the lines coincides with the Alps and their continuation in the Carpathians; it might also be continued towards the West, cutting through France, perhaps ending with the Pyrenees. But it may also be argued that Liguria is to the south of the line. The other line runs from north to south, following the linguistic border between the Slavonic and Germanic speaking people, from to the Adriatic, just north of the front line of the Hungarians and the Rumanians, the Albanians and the Greeks and the Turks. That would be drawn, not even in ticked letters. It is not, however, so important to define the lines in very precise terms since the conceptual tools to be used are only rough ideas about a distinction between northern and southern Europe on the one hand, corresponding to the old distinction between cis-alpina and trans-alpina, and anybody's intuitive notion of distinctions between western and eastern Europe. What is important, however, is that this conception of southern Europe, together with the North African coastal states, serves to define the Mediterranean region when we include the Arab states bordering on the Mediterranean and Palestine/Israel. Maybe this leads to something like 25 countries, it is not so important to know. In extension it is not too different from the Roman empire at its heyday except for its northern outposts; enclosing the mare nostrum the Mediterranean sea itself. Obviously, the two circles on this map form the second circle seen from the north, whereas the other is the first circle with the Baltic and even the Irish Sea.

The problem to be discussed can now be phrased using the concept of power-gradient: given the two axes, where are the highs and lows of power in various phases of history? We shall then distinguish between three types of power: political/military power ultimately defined as "who invades whom"; economic power ultimately defined as "who exploits whom" (whether it is through simple robbery or the more intricate practices of investment in capital goods and transfer of surplus characterizing industrial capitalism, or corresponding practices in mercantile capitalism); and cultural power roughly defined as "who forms (shapes) whom". Needless to say, these forms of power are related and have all kinds of spill-over effects from one into the other. They are, in fact, the three classical types of power: the club, the carrot and the sword; coercive, normative and normative power.
There is no doubt that the Roman empire put the center of power in the south. They invaded the north, they exploited the north and they shaped the north - the latter so much so that even in this century the concept of being a person with culture, with Bildung, is related to internalization of southern culture, for instance knowledge of Latin and Greek, in other words southern languages, today not even spoken in the region.

The center was in the west rather than in the east by the mere fact that Rome was located in that part. But that part collapsed in the fifth century. The Middle Ages can perhaps be seen as a period in which the power distribution between the four parts of the region we are discussing became more symmetric, with the exception of the clear cultural power emanating from Rome, now in the form of the Catholic Church. It was only with the advent of Protestantism that a certain symmetry in cultural power was obtained, with strong islands of Protestantism established in the Catholic sea, with almost unchanging order for the last three hundred years or so. The economic counter-part included the Hanseatic League that - of course - started much earlier (15th century).

It may perhaps be said that Protestantism gave a more clear expression to some basic items of western social cosmology inherited from Greek antiquity: a strong accent on individualism and competition, expansion in space and a highly dramatic conception of time. Life was safer, more protected, more collective under Catholicism than it became under Protestantism, although the difference should not be exaggerated. At the same time mercantile capitalism was so successful in the North that large-scale capital accumulation started taking place. Ultimately to the industrial revolution in the north-western corner of the region, probably based on a combination of capital accumulation that used for investment in capital goods, not only for buying merchandise, and the clear expression of western cosmology found in various types of Protestant thinking. Alone neither of these factors would have made it, together they probably account to a large extent for the rise of modern capitalism in that corner.
In short: the power-center shifted towards the North and it shifted towards the West - later on to proceed to the Far West, the United States. And thus it became a highly lopsided region with political/military, economic and cultural gradients running from west to east and from north to south. It was the Swedes, the French and the Germans that invaded the Slavs, not the other way round. It was they who had command over the trade between west and east, not the other way round. And it was they who, particularly since the times of Peter the Great, started shaping the east, not the other way round. And similarly for the north/south gradient: the trade pattern quickly became industrial goods from the north against food-stuffs etc. from the south, after the Hanseatic League had created a balance relative to southern traditional trading superiority that corresponded to the Protestant religious counterbalance to Catholicism, responsible for much of the capital accumulation. Of course, the north also invaded the south, an early example being northern France relative to southern France, later the establishment of the colonies, mainly by the French and the British, on the southern (and eastern) Mediterranean seaboard. The Ottoman empire lasted five hundred years; it was restricted to the south-eastern corner. But after its breakdown its function became more clear: as a bulwark against north-western penetration which immediately took place, politically/militarily, economically, culturally when the Ottoman empire collapsed the Soviet Union and its hegemonial position relative to most of eastern Europe: north-western economic and cultural penetration would probably have been even more pronounced if it had not been for the political/military balance created after the Second World War.

In this paper we are, however, not concerned with the east-west axis: the north-south axis. Thinking about contradictions and conflicts along the east-west gradient is important to start thinking not only in terms of contradictions and conflicts along the west-east gradient, but also along the north-south gradient, pitting northern Europe not only against southern Europe, but against more of the south, the Mediterranean region as such. Thinking should not lag too much behind reality.
Concretely the power-gradient has forms that are well known to any observer of current world affairs. Thus the military political headquarters of the world are in the north: Washington and Moscow to mention the superpowers, NATO (in Brussels) and the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) to mention the alliances. It is they who use the Mediterranean for the deployment of their ships, not the south that uses the northern waters for the deployment of theirs. The block system meets at time in a network of conferences in the north with the superpowers and alliances meeting each other; there is very little contact of politically/militarily meaningful kind between their more peripheral members in the south. Economically the headquarters are all in the north: New York for the American Economy, Brussels for the European Community, Moscow for the CMEA system. This is where decisions are taken regarding the south, not vice versa. The economies of the south are shaped by the demands from the north, not vice versa.

With the integration of Portugal, Spain, and Greece, Turkey, and Egypt into the Mediterranean, the Mediterranean becomes the center of a system which will have an order and coherence.

Then, the third circle. Again, we could do the same exercise and divide the world in four parts, with a first world of rich capitalist countries, a second world of not-so-rich socialist countries, a third world of very poor capitalist countries and then a fourth world, the world of South and East Asian countries headed by Japan. But we do not need that much specificity. Positive to say that the first world is not the world that has acted from the third circle. Japan, already in second with a very good OPEC, to say that there are other countries in the same region following suit. Japan was the first country to practise the present of the new international economy. Order one century before it was conceived—how many will or can follow in its wake remains to be seen.

But the point to be made here is very simple. The third circle is not passive or a dependent variable any longer. There are efforts to co-opt, to tame (Trilateral Commission, OECD, European Community, the US System for that matter, is part). The first world is certainly not a part of it, but is equally certainly moved by the third circle—and feels immensely threatened by non-first circle religions and ideologies. The spiritual/ cultural challenge was seen by all the youth travelling east to escape of winter, and the economic challenge above all in Japan, but also in OPEC and WTO. But the military challenge is not yet there, only in language, otherwise it will come one day.
The Nordic countries

So much for the general context in which the Nordic countries are located. What is the third circle? With some very few exceptions this has been the periphery of Western Civilization, and been exploited by Western civilization as such, both militarily/politically, economically and culturally throughout the last 2500 years or so, particularly the last five hundred. We have accrued to that part of the second circle that has been the center of the West at any time, which means that for the last 200 years or so the first circle, the Northern corner, has benefited from a double process of exploitation, both inside the second circle and in the third circle, and this means that the Nordic countries have moved during the last 200 years or so from being the (indeed!) periphery of the periphery of the center to becoming the periphery of the center of the center. This promotion, however, was not due to our pre-making, but because of what happened to us in our immediate context. In other words: some kind of promotion from being barbarian to becoming semi-barbarians, or semi-beyond semi-barbarians.

This, however, is in the mind of Nordic-Swedes. Sort of, for instance, we actually only promoted from the periphery of the periphery of the center to the periphery of the center of the center, but not from the periphery of the center to the center of the center.

And this may serve to characterize us in a global perspective. On the one hand we are - as mentioned - an unmistakable part of Western Civilization. On the other hand, we have not been very good at understanding or identifying ourselves as such, being much more concerned with our peripheral position inside that complex, and our painstakingly slow, but nevertheless relatively clear moves further towards the center, and the center towards us. We identify ourselves in the European or Western context, not in the global context. We have been concerned with our advantages and disadvantages relative to the continental and transatlantic, more much more than the more recent concern with how we stand relative to the third circle, in which we have instead seen our "peripheral" status as colonial trait or hindrance.

In a sense it might be said that this somewhat mixed identification has been, on the whole, a tremendous blessing to the Nordic countries. The first period, when we were the periphery of the periphery, we were definitely too far out to be worthy of being colonized at all - we were marginalised rather than exploited. The latter phase stopped short of our lands. On the other hand
the distance was short enough to permit considerable diffusion particularly into the more civilized Nordic countries, Denmark and Sweden - there to be converted into forces comprehensible to the Norreri, processes and redistributed for consumption by
the Danish satellite - Norway - and the Swedish - Finland, from the late middle ages into early 19th century. (Giving to
Norway and Finland the character of being, even to a considerable extent, the periphery of the periphery of the periphery of the center for some period).

As the center of the west moved closer to our shores, to the north-westerly industrial belt stretching from the Midlands to the Ruhr (and further into Belgium) it was not as much culture that reached us as the industrial revolution, with a
respectable lag of about one century. It could grow on fertile soil because participation in a common system of mercantile
capitalism (the Hanseatic League) and the sharing of the values
and world views of Protestantism (or at least not "Poplicism") constituted important common factors. But at this point it
becomes more strange that we were not colonized, particularly
taking into consideration that Denmark and Sweden in earlier
periods had made some imperialistic excursions of their own,
towards the south and towards the east - and Norway and Denmark
even towards the west. The explanation might be that the Viking
raids, after all, had been forgotten and that our south and our
east were themselves parts of the periphery, not so much in a
position to retribute. We have already noted some general
flying with the streams. Finally even , having achieved upper class
the greatness to happen in the better stedt of politics, economy
and culture. And in revolution: or if not a revolution,
then of course be a fear that one day they might treat us like
we treated them.

Basically, very little of what happened to our countries
was the result of endogeneous processes, most of it can be
seen as exogenous: processes of development and change, our
countries riding high on diffusionist waves. In Norway one might
even go so far as to postulate a fear of autonomy, a search for
a center, a desire to remain somebody's periphery. In one period
the center was Denmark (or rather Copenhagen), in another period
it was Sweden, then came the anglophile period where the United
Kingdom was the model, then the imposed rule from Germany, then
the long lasting phenomenon, then the effort of the Norwegian establishment to get into the European Community, and at present a period of some bewilderment, but still US-oriented.

Somehow we have been a part of the good company without being in its center, sharing the spoils without playing any major role in the exploitation, benefitting from the Western power centers militarily, economically and culturally without much effort, much creativity on our side. Danish capitalist imperialism, for instance, linked to more distant trading and even to slavery and the creation of plantation colonies were hardly the expressions of any Danish creativity, but rather an expression of the idea that solch ein Ding müssen wir auch haben.

When Norway and Sweden did not participate in it, it was hardly because of any moral objections or political second thought, but rather because we entered too late or were not capable enough. But we certainly sent our missionaries, resp. our "Swedes and Danes" (Norwegians) as a third circle on "Ecstasy" or "Scientific Center". However that may be, in recent times we have become increasingly a part of the system of the first circle, yet at a certain distance, "as countries without a colonial tradition" (a statement highly untrue where Denmark is concerned). This has given to us a particular position as mediators between the Western center and the third circle, to some extent also between the Western center and the second circle - particularly the East, using our "bridge", Finland. The Nordic function has been that of bringing the parties to the negotiation table, of engineering compromises thereby saving the first circle from confrontations, blunting the attacks from the second and third circles because of the presumed legitimacy stemming from our position as peripheries to that center. This figleaves function, the notion of being "Western capitalism with a human face", is a role which makes it possible at the same time to be a part of the system and to reject certain of its characteristics when that is sound opportune. To be in it but not of it, to be of it but not in it - these are roles played more or less skilfully by Finland relative to the Soviet Union, by Denmark relative to the European Community, by Norway and Denmark relative to NATO, and by Sweden relative to everything.

Thus, undoubtedly there is a certain "infect at work in all of this - Hitler'sGermany being the only real carrier the region has had", in addition to the Russian domination and the "Soviet" attack on Finland.
5. The Nordic countries as welfare state models.

It is not strange that the welfare state developed in the Nordic countries: we had all the advantages of being part of a system enriching itself at an increasing rate after post-renaissance mercantilism, and particularly after industrial capitalism became increasingly globalized, while at the same time not having the disadvantages related to a ruthless upper class, bent on exploiting inner and outer peripheries. In very general terms we preferred to let others do the dirty work, the military jobs and the policing functions, sharing the benefits. Norwegian ships penetrated into the third circle after the Western center had conquered it, pacified it and built the harbours and the infrastructures that brought the produce down to them, even into the Norwegian ships themselves. The Danes constructed a network of trading companies. The Swedes imported raw materials, and exported industrial products deep into a third circle increasingly dominated by our Eastern neighbors. It was and is an almost ideal combination, especially since the upper classes were relatively controllable by a social democratic labor movement. They could establish a social contract with less privilege given to the top and more welfare-lower down (including farmers) the contracts permitted to emerge in the center of the center. The net result was the social democratic Nordic welfare state, and its stability, even stable enough to be handed over to bourgeoisie coalitions for some intervals of rule and administration. Much of its stability, it should be added, was and is predicated on the Nordic ethnic homogeneity, with practically speaking no sharp borders lines sub-dividing the population, making some groups exploitable and marginal - the exception being, of course, the numerically superior same-sex minority.

Given this it would not be strange if the idea emerged that the social democratic welfare state would be the Nordic gift to the world, an export product in line with various varieties of Protestant Christianity that was our cultural export product in earlier periods (Norway being one of the countries in the world with the highest number of missionaries per capita).

It is not so obvious that this type of export, facilitated by the vast means put at the disposal of the Nordic countries under
the heading of "development assistance", will be successful. The institutions might be well-meaning, but not the process that led to their emergence in our countries; nor the social costs that accompanied that process. Third circle countries, and particularly the population of these countries in dire need of the benefits of a welfare state, are characterized by much deeper contradictions relative to the first (and to some extent also the second) circles, and relative to their own upper classes than has ever been the case in the Nordic countries. Consequently, a process that could be evolutionary in our countries can hardly take an evolutionary course in host, or almost all of the third circle countries. There are social obstacles of formidable obstinacy to be overcome. Failure to understand this, coupled with a genuine identification with the victims, makes for a specifically Nordic naivete.

Moreover, it may also be that third circle countries are more aware of social costs than we in the Nordic countries are ourselves — some of them perhaps being even still more than our costs. The kinds of things visiting third world scholars, students and workers express in their more open and less polite moments need to refer to such aspects as "excessive individualism", "a set of mutually isolated individuals", "low level of capacity to enjoy life", "no spontaneity, deep frozen emotions, meteorological coldness accompanied by human coldness", "high rates of mental illness, suicide, alcoholism, criminality, divorce" etc. Together with the difference in historical process this may go far to explain why there is such less interest in the Nordic countries in the world as a whole than there is eagerness to benefit from development assistance. The Nordic welfare state as an antiseptic, a-historical and purely beneficial human invention may not be accepted by peoples more sophisticated than the Nordic peoples themselves when it comes to understanding our countries - and processes of development in general. We are less interesting to others than to ourselves.

6. The Nordic countries as carriers of Western cosmology.

The Nordic countries - liberal, Christian, capitalistic - are of course above all Western countries, only secondarily Nordic countries. As Western countries they carry the predominant ethos of Western Civilization, and even in a very pronounced form. The idea of seeing the world as a circle with oneself in the center, and the rest in a periphery eager to be converted by our gospel
is strongly pronounced. The idea of progress is clearly present. The optimistic notion that progress can be obtained through manipulation of a small set of factors is there. The idea that social structures are essentially vertical and individualistic ties in the Nordic countries a soft form—competition, e.g., in sports—more than fight and struggle—but the basic idea is there. And the relationship to nature also has a softer form: perhaps less merciless exploitation of nature for industrial purposes, more use of nature for recreation—but real compassion or togetherness with nature, in a non-instrumental fashion, not using nature for some purpose, is probably not very developed (assuming that it is developed in some parts of the third circle). And our Protestant God is highly universalistic, contrast, jealous—and an old male.

If anything, the Nordic countries may be said to be more Western than most of the West, precisely because of relative homogeneity. Even if women are less Western than men; young and the old more non-Western than the middle aged; the countryside less Western than the cities and so on, the differences are probably smaller than in countries further to the south, among other reasons simply because social diffusion from center to periphery can flow so easily in our countries, there being few real watersheds or discontinuities that may refract the diffusion process. Ethnic minorities may be harbinger of alternative cosmologies; but there is only the endangered secular alternative.

One conclusion would be that it probably is good for the world that the Nordic countries have so few inhabitants. If we had more we might have been dangerous, not only to the third circle and to the second circle, but even to the first circle, self-righteous and missionary, zealous and hard-working as we were. And are?

Another, and more important (because less hypothetical) consequence is also essentially negative: there is less diversity in our westernness than may be found further south. Of course, this phenomenon is masked by the fact that we appear less imperialistic, less expansionist, "centrifugal" because we do not have the power to match our potential aspirations. But if a real confrontation should come between the third circle and the first circle, and the days of Western expansionism are gone, the assumption would be that the Nordic countries would have less to fall back upon in terms of alternative social program, so to speak, than countries ridden by deeper contradictions than ours. There
is little reason to believe that there is more potential for alternative ways of life in the deeper recces of the valleys of Norway, or the vast northern expanses of Sweden and Finland, than in regions of such countries as United Kingdom, France and Spain currently fighting for higher measures of autonomy.

To put it simply: if the pendulum of Western Civilization should turn from its present centrifugal phase towards a more centripetal period, the Nordic countries might have less to draw upon and again come into a period as periphery, having to learn how to become more inward directed, less expansionist, perhaps more like first and second circles countries did during the Middle Ages. On the other hand, having been less expansionist than the big neighbors we would also have less distance to go. So, maybe we would come out about equal.

7. Conclusion: what is the structure of all this?

Let me now try to put these threads together. On the one hand there is a Nordic system with its internal differentiation and history, important to its inhabitants, less to the surrounding world. On the other hand there is a world system, also with its internal differentiation and history, in which the Nordic system is embedded. Partly because of the modest size of the Nordic system, partly because of its peripheral location - less important as a factor in our age of means of transportation/communication - the world system has had considerably more impact on the Nordic system than vice versa (with the possible exception of the Viking period). The statement is not so trivial as it sounds: the assumption is a certain openness to the outside so as to be influenced and shaped, yet not so much that total absorption takes place. The Nordic system still retains a certain specificity - perhaps best observed at one of the peaks in "nordicity", that little speak in the Atlantic known as the Faroe Islands. So there, and return happier, wiser. Very small is very beautiful.

The basic thesis put forward above can now be summarized:

(1) The general policy of the Nordic countries has been to be accepted by the first circle, North-western Europe and North America, sharing most of their (changing) views of the Second and the Third
But what happens when the pig is getting old and/or unhealthy, and/or there are many other pigs, not to mention other animals close to the wood, we should aim to save one of the nearest pigs if possible. It is difficult to determine what the best option is, but these factors are important to consider.

The factors that should be considered are:

1. The pig's health and age.
2. The number of other pigs or animals nearby.
3. The pig's proximity to the nearest pig.

These factors should be considered when deciding which pig to save, as well as the overall situation and the potential outcomes.

The three possible courses of action for the four piglets are:

1. **Saving one pig**
2. **Saving two pigs**
3. **Not saving any pigs**

These options should be considered based on the factors mentioned above and the overall situation.