



Afterword 2

Peter Stadius

This book explores the ways in which Nordic countries have promoted their position in the international community through public diplomacy and other forms of communicative and collaborative efforts. The present volume brings forward a variety of cases where the acts of propaganda and persuasion have been performed in practice. The methodological focus is on the institutional and organizational frameworks of such activity and the actor agency that rises from the vast empirical material. This is a collection of hands-on case studies of Nordic media connections and propaganda practices. It reveals the multitude of ways in which transnational interaction has paved the way for an understanding of a specific Nordic region with clear features that give it a distinctive profile internationally.

The formative years and age of plenitude of what is commonly referred to as the Nordic Model, roughly from the 1930s to the early 1980s, is viewed here in a light that is different from the canonical narrative. Besides the policy achievements as such, the Nordic Model came to being on the international scene through deliberate propaganda or ongoing mediation. This was crucial in the process of creating the Nordic brand, that is, the

P. Stadius (✉)
University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland
e-mail: peter.stadius@helsinki.fi

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image of a group of countries where progressive social democratic welfare policies laid the base for seemingly prosperous and harmonious societies. The Nordic Region came to be seen as a model in a Cold War context. The mixed economy, high level of education and comprehensive social security stood out in its totality in contrast to both the capitalist and communist models.

This book argues that not only did internal governance make way for this policy, but the communication of this Nordic Model also influenced its internal development and construction. Put more simply, the propaganda and mediation not only shaped the Nordic brand, but it actually also shaped self-perception and, concomitantly, policy-making. The acquired image became an asset in many ways, and especially in international politics the Nordics were able to punch above their weight in a world of tensions. One cannot overestimate the importance of this acquisition of international soft power prestige giving the Nordic countries room to manoeuvre, which also reflected on the Nordic societies in fostering a sense of security and geopolitical agency across social strata. The acknowledgement of these dynamics gives the study of various propaganda and soft power-related actions and channels a meaning that reaches beyond the scope of communicating a Nordic message to the outside world.

One major point made in this volume is that the Nordic region is more often seen as a coherent bigger unit, not as just five separate countries. This is especially the case with the perception of the Nordic countries as stable welfare states with a high standard of living and generally providing good life conditions for their citizens. However, as is clearly shown in this volume, this concordance was not always an uncomplicated reality when examining practical cooperation with empirical evidence at hand. The internal Nordic cooperation in media and propaganda was not always smooth, and what might have appeared as a united and uniform model region viewed from afar was not always a reality within. In the introduction to the book, one such case of media connections is depicted, providing a deep look into the processes of negotiation and discord that surrounded the management of the promotional film *Somethin' about Scandinavia*, produced in Denmark 1956 and aimed at a coordinated Nordic propaganda effort.

This empirically verified example of Nordic cooperation, with its common aim and practical internal discord, is in many ways illustrative of official Nordic cooperation as it developed during the Cold War. Actually, it is a reflection of the dynamics of tension and concord that have marked

Nordic cooperative efforts since the mid-nineteenth century. In all fields of political and cultural cooperation, the dynamics of national interests on the one hand and a historically deeply rooted drive to explore pan-Nordic ways of cooperation on the other hand have been simultaneously present. The actor-focused approach here allows the unpacking of these realities, and contributes to a much-needed understanding of the dynamics of Nordic cooperation beyond the often naively pictured rosy images expressed in celebratory speeches by politicians and other insiders of official Nordic cooperation. This last remark is not to be taken as a critique of Nordic cooperation as such, but rather as affirmative support for the need for research-based knowledge on the history and nature of Nordic cooperation.

The transnational perspective at hand is a fruitful approach in order to unpack the realities of entangled media histories, still often left in the shadows of national narratives. Many of the given examples show how difficult media cooperation has been even between the Nordic countries, often lauded for their deep mutual trust and high degree of cultural affinity. National media are difficult to root in transnational cooperative forms for the greater public.

The concept of propaganda is deliberately used in this volume, and it calls for reflection. Originating from the Catholic counter-reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the notion eventually came to have a mainly negative connotation. During World War I, propaganda became a dominating feature in the media and an important part of that war's cultural and image landscape. The war propaganda was later seen as one of the factors when attempting to understand how that dystopian disaster had happened. Still, the word propaganda was not unanimously seen in a negative light. In the Soviet Union propaganda was a neutral, if not even positive, term hinting at the need to fight the great ideological battle through extensive propaganda campaigns aimed at the great public. Agitation and propaganda, AGITPROP, was a lauded part of the system. Empowerment and persuasion, the latter a component in classic rhetoric, became tools for both domestic and outreach use.

The Nordic concept of *folkbildning* (Fin. *kansansivistys*) is in some sense related to propaganda, and has mostly been seen in a neutral and positive light. The word derives from the German *Bildung*, which has no exact equivalent in the English language, but the meaning is somewhere between education and personal self-development. The prefix *folk-* alludes to its popular and collective dimension, and the notion suggests a clear

educator-educated process. *Folkbildning* is usually seen as a cornerstone of Nordic democracy, and as a theory and method for educating the people to become responsible citizens. The Folk High Schools (Swe. *folkhögskolor*) were originally aimed at the young adults in rural areas, and the study circles, both crucial institutions for cementing a Nordic type of welfare state, are vital components in these processes.

Another central term connected closely to the formative years of the Nordic welfare state is that of “social engineering”. As is the case with “propaganda”, “social engineering” has also been a neutral and celebrated concept symbolizing the active and reforming nature of the early welfare state construction. The social engineers were proud reformers, basing their reform policies on science. From the 1990s onwards, the re-evaluation of the early social engineering policies has contaminated the concept to such a degree that it is no longer used in its original sense. The broader and more neutral concept “agency” has replaced it, and as part of a moral turn in historical research, social engineering has mainly been connected to forced sterilization and the racially motivated discriminatory practices connected to it.

Rightly or wrongly, this example shows the sensitivity connected to conceptual shifts. The editors’ fearless application of propaganda as a concept in this volume indicates a critical stance on the study of the Nordic region and its cooperative culture and practices. Indirectly, the editors ask in the introduction what a Nordic Model of propaganda and persuasion might look like. The totality of the case studies gives an insight into a transnational reality in forging a Nordic cooperative media history, a narrative almost absent in previous English-language presentations for an international audience. The external propaganda practices exposed, often rooted in public diplomacy, are typical examples of so-called white propaganda. It is obvious that the receiver shall know who the transmitter is; that is actually one important part of the process. The fact that the Nordic countries usually have no doubts about engaging in white propaganda is in itself a proof of a strong consciousness and belief in actually providing a model for the rest of the world. There has for a long time been, and apparently also will be in the future, a market and demand for the Nordic region.

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