



Nordic Added Value in Inter-ministerial Nordic Co-operation

Past and Present Perspectives



Nordic Council
of Ministers

Nordic Added Value in Inter-ministerial Nordic Co-operation

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Executive summary

Background and aim

The concept of Nordic added value has increasingly come to serve as a guiding principle of inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation and its related institutions. However, there is an enduring sense among stakeholders in Nordic co-operation that the exact meaning of the concept of "Nordic added value" is unclear, along with uncertainty around how the concept can be operationalised in practice. Interpretations of the concept and its significance vary from sector to sector of Nordic co-operation as well as from person to person, making Nordic added value a fluid and multi-dimensional concept.

This report therefore seeks to provide a more holistic understanding of Nordic added value and clarify the concept's differing interpretations in order to fertilise a comparative discussion of its operationalisation in different Nordic institutions. The aim is to help guide the various sectors of Nordic co-operation, both today and tomorrow, towards common goals, and to do so in a way that does not lose sight of the fact that these sectors differ in terms of the potential value they can add to Nordic co-operation and that they operate according to different logics.

To this end, the report first offers a historical outline of Nordic added value's rise to prominence among the concepts used to legitimise Nordic co-operation, before going on to look in more detail at the historical and contemporary uses and meanings of Nordic added value in the specific sectors and institutions of official inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation.

Methods and materials

The report takes a qualitative and comparative approach to the interpretations and operationalisations of Nordic added value in a broad – albeit not exhaustive – array of the institutions of Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation, and to how they relate to the legitimacy of joint Nordic efforts as perceived in the individual institutions and on a broader, more strategic level. This includes the strategic objectives of Nordic co-operation which are currently outlined in the Vision 2030 agenda for Nordic co-operation, adopted by the Nordic prime ministers in 2019.

The report builds on a review of relevant aspects of the research literature available on Nordic co-operation and Nordic added value, as well as on a qualitative analysis of institutional documents and interviews with central stakeholders who hold or have held relevant positions in the institutions of Nordic co-operation. The report's

analysis is inspired by methods from the field of research known as conceptual history although methodological reflections are kept to a minimum.

The institutional documents analysed for the report have been selected by the research group based on an informed understanding of their relevance in outlining the visions, practices, and results of the different branches of official inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation.

Main findings

- Nordic added value operates across and obtains divergent meanings from **different key domains of Nordic co-operation**, typologised in this report as **"culture and identity"**, **"society and welfare"**, **"economy and innovation"**, and **"sustainability and climate"**. Left unacknowledged, the co-existence of these domains of Nordic added value might give rise to tensions in the definition and operationalisation of the concept.
- There are significant inter-sectoral and inter-institutional differences in interpretations of Nordic added value, reflecting different institutional histories and sector-specific outlooks. This has resulted in two different – if often co-existing – understandings of Nordic added value as both an **internal driving force** for individual institutions and their employees, and as **an external steering principle** tying individual efforts to joint priorities.
- The **instability in terminology** that characterises the use of Scandinavian and English-language terms to legitimise joint Nordic efforts adds to the enigmatic character and ambiguous interpretations of the principle of Nordic added value.
- The **evaluation of Nordic added value** remains a complex issue and subject to interpretation, reflecting the evolving nature of regional collaboration and the diverse priorities of the sectors involved.
- The Nordic prime ministers' Vision 2030 declaration has impacted the aims of Nordic co-operation, facilitating a shift towards an understanding of **Nordic added value as a tool rather than a vision** for Nordic co-operation.

Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1: Create institution-specific working definitions of Nordic added value:**
Outlining working definitions of what constitutes Nordic added value within each individual Nordic institution and for project funding – while allowing for flexibility and adaptation – would make it possible to acknowledge that different dimensions of the multi-dimensional concept of Nordic added value are relevant to pursue and operationalise within institutions that operate across different sectors.

- Recommendation 2: Attach value to the preconditions for impactful Nordic co-operation:**

The operationalisation of Nordic added value risks rewarding measurable short-term outcomes at the expense of the difficult-to-measure long-term efforts, which have been essential in the creation of the Nordic regional identity that facilitates present-day co-operation on, for example, aspects such as branding, innovation, climate, defence, and security. By attaching value to the less immediately tangible results of joint efforts, the strengthening of a Nordic regional identity can regain a central place in the efforts of the Nordic institutions in the face of geopolitical instability, and the preconditions for successful Nordic co-operation can be sustained.
- Recommendation 3: Clarify the relationship between Nordic added value and Vision 2030:**

Articulating how and if Nordic added value relates to the strategic objectives of Vision 2030 – most notably whether Nordic added value is the most suitable steering principle for pursuing those objectives – would help align the visions for and practices of Nordic co-operation.
- Recommendation 4: Further examine tensions regarding the legitimacy of Nordic co-operation:**

Further efforts to examine how the legitimacy of Nordic co-operation is viewed in the parts of Nordic co-operation not under the institutional umbrella of the Nordic Council of Ministers would likely reveal quite different interpretations. Given the significance of Nordic inter-parliamentary co-operation and Nordic civil society organisations for Nordic co-operation as a whole, constructive dialogue with such actors on what constitutes the added value of joint Nordic efforts would be necessary for creating a more robust basis for ambitious, meaningful, and forward-looking Nordic co-operation in the future.
- Recommendation 5: Broaden the perspectives on regional co-operation:**

Approaching the legitimisation of joint regional efforts from broader and comparative perspectives might allow for more meaningful co-operation with non-Nordic partners, with the potential for learning from other models of regional co-operation.
- Recommendation 6: Standardise translation practices:**

Creating and implementing standardised translation practices across and within the institutions of official Nordic co-operation for terms like *nordisk nytta*, *nordiskt mervärde*, Nordic added value, Nordic synergies, Nordic benefits, etc. would help avoid conceptual confusion within and across the sectors and organisations of Nordic co-operation.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Frederik Forrai Ørskov

The concept of Nordic added value has increasingly come to serve as a guiding principle of inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation and its related institutions since the mid-2000s. Whether as a description of the rationale behind Nordic co-operation as a whole, a justification for the significant amounts of taxpayer money invested in institutions operating at a Nordic level, or an assertion of the continued significance of Nordic co-operation in the face of increasing European integration and global challenges, Nordic added value has become the English-language concept of choice.

In addition to its frequent appearance as a celebratory shorthand in official speeches, there have been significant attempts to operationalise the principle of Nordic added value and have it serve as a focal point in efforts to reform Nordic co-operation, prioritise the allocation of funding, and align efforts in the various branches and institutions of Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation and associated political goals. As a result, the institutions, projects, and actors involved in Nordic co-operation have increasingly been tasked with accounting for the Nordic added value in their work.

In short, Nordic added value is generally perceived as a description of the effect of joint Nordic efforts that could not be obtained if those same efforts were carried out at a different level than the Nordic. With reference to an oft-invoked slogan, Nordic added value is meant to identify areas where the Nordics are stronger (when working) together and describes the outcome of joint efforts in those areas.

However, despite its frequent usage, appearing in “almost all Nordic cooperation programmes,”^[1] there is an enduring sense among stakeholders in Nordic co-operation that the exact meaning of the concept of “Nordic added value” is unclear, and there is uncertainty around how the concept can be operationalised in practice. In fact, even those who find the term easy to comprehend often understand it in different ways. The concept itself is ambiguous, leaving much room for interpretation regarding its conceptual meaning. Consequently, interpretations of the concept and its significance vary from sector to sector of Nordic co-operation as well as from person to person, making Nordic added value a fluid and multi-dimensional concept.^[2]

The Nordic Council of Ministers consists of the ministers for Nordic Co-operation, **10 ministerial councils** covering different sectors and **one ad hoc Council of Ministers** for Digitalisation. They are supported by **16 committees** of senior officials and a high-level group (digitalisation).



The **Secretary General** is responsible for the day-to-day running of the intergovernmental co-operation.

12 Nordic institutions and the three Baltic offices

The Nordic Council of Ministers

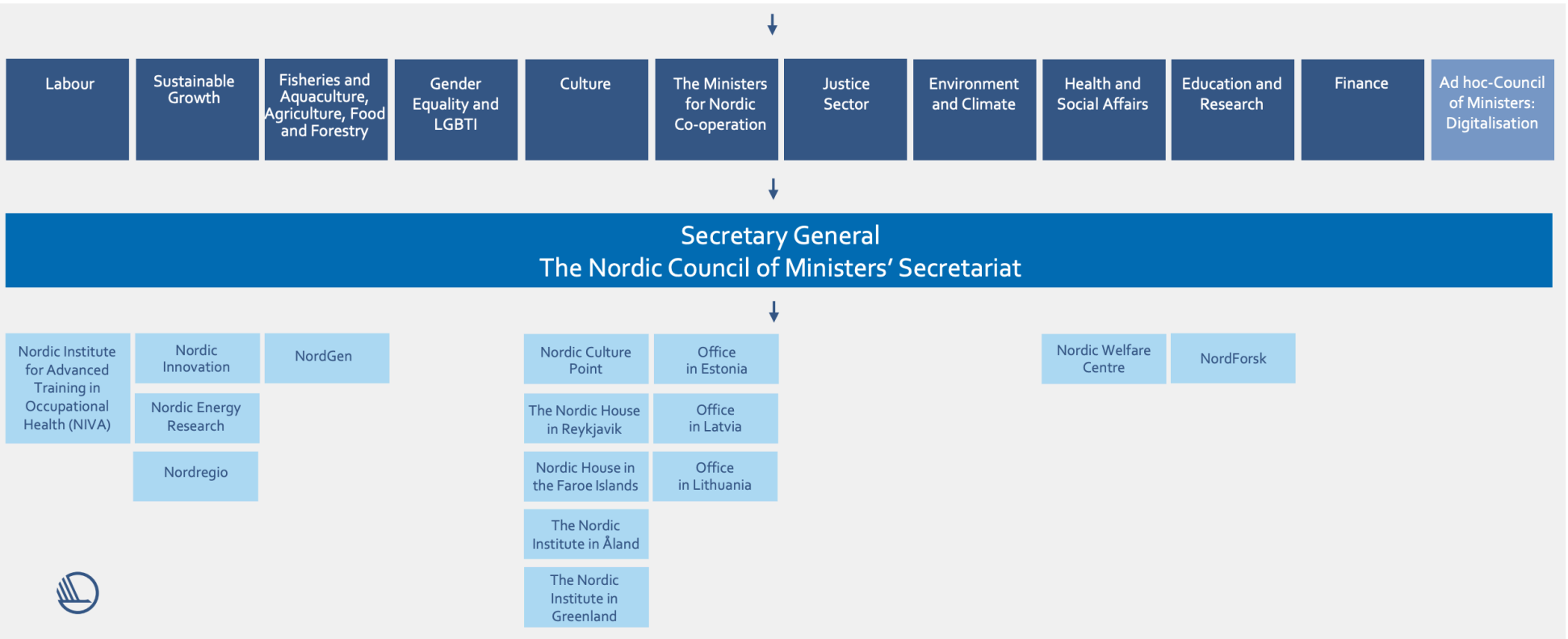


Figure 1 Organisational diagram for the Nordic Council of Ministers. Reproduced from: <https://www.norden.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/Organisationsdiagram.pdf>

In assessing the prominence of Nordic added value in Nordic co-operation practices today, the fluidity and multi-dimensionality of the concept is both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength because it has contributed to the concept's broad circulation and continuous re-application within the different sectors of Nordic co-operation, where different actors and audiences can simultaneously find things to treasure in (their interpretations of) the concept.^[3] It gives the concept a flexibility that makes it possible to conceptualise the legitimacy of Nordic co-operation in ways that relate to the *raison d'être*s of its different branches and reflect the rather holistic nature of Nordic co-operation as a whole. However, the fluidity and multi-dimensionality is also a weakness because the multitude of possible interpretations foster differing practical applications of the principle, which risks causing confusion and amplifying inter-sectorial barriers within and between the different institutions.^[4]

Given the close association frequently drawn between Nordic added value and the very legitimacy of Nordic co-operation, a clearer understanding of the concept will help to clarify the sense of purpose within the institutions of Nordic co-operation – but if the baby is not to be lost with the bathwater, this understanding must reflect the holistic and changeable nature of Nordic co-operation.

Starting points

The 2023 NordForsk-report *Nordic added value in Nordic research co-operation: Concept and practice*, written by Tuire Liimatainen, recommended that efforts be made to promote "a holistic understanding of the concept and its various interpretations," not just in Nordic research co-operation but also as part of "a broader discussion of the objectives of Nordic co-operation" that should preferably involve "a comparative discussion of the operationalisation of Nordic added value in different joint institutions."^[5] This report acts on that recommendation and is both as a follow-up to and an extension of the Liimatainen report. It takes a qualitative and comparative approach to the interpretations and operationalisations of Nordic added value in a broad – albeit not exhaustive – array of the institutions of Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation, and to how they relate to the legitimacy of joint Nordic efforts as perceived in the individual institutions and on a broader, more strategic level.

Currently, the strategic objectives of Nordic co-operation are largely outlined in the Vision 2030 agenda for Nordic co-operation, adopted by the Nordic prime ministers in 2019. The high priority accorded to the implementation of Vision 2030 across all sectors of Nordic co-operation prompts an exploration of the meanings and uses of Nordic added value in relation to the ambitions outlined in the vision, and of the appropriate role of the concept in the pursuit of these ambitions. According to the Vision 2030, the institutions of Nordic co-operation must work towards making the Nordic region the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030 by pursuing three strategic priorities:

1. A green Nordic region, prioritising efforts to promote the green transition of the Nordic societies and a shift towards carbon neutrality and a sustainable economy.
2. A competitive Nordic region, prioritising efforts to promote green growth in the Nordic region through knowledge, innovation, mobility, and digital integration.
3. A socially sustainable Nordic region, prioritising efforts to promote inclusivity, equality, and interconnectedness in the Nordic region through shared values, cultural exchange, and welfare.^[6]

These priorities presuppose significant efforts in all sectors of Nordic societies. Is the principle of Nordic added value geared to stand at the centre of such a wide-ranging, multi-sectorial process, encompassing all branches of Nordic co-operation and, by extension, Nordic societies? And does it exacerbate or help resolve the tensions that can arise from efforts to address the substantially different ambitions and priorities outlined in Vision 2030? That is, most obviously, potential tensions between the aim of stronger regional integration that has traditionally been at the heart of Nordic co-operation on the one hand, and the much newer goal of leveraging the framework of Nordic co-operation as a driver of sustainability on the other.

Notably, Nordic added value is not explicitly mentioned in the Vision 2030 document. If Vision 2030 set out the overall direction for Nordic co-operation, there is a need to consider if and in what form Nordic added value – as a central operational concept as well as an institutionalised way of articulating the legitimacy of Nordic co-operation – relates to the priorities outlined in Vision 2030.

The challenges of Nordic added value

Liimatainen's report explored how Nordic added value has been conceptualised and practiced in the Nordic research co-operation facilitated by NordForsk. It found that, at policy level, the contemporary meaning of Nordic added value can be defined as:

”

The positive effects of joint Nordic efforts that strengthen the Nordic region as a cultural and historical community, and as a locally and globally competitive and sustainable welfare society.^[7]

However, the report also found that the operationalisation of the concept Nordic added value presented several challenges relating to its pragmatic use in Nordic co-operation.^[8] In an amended form, the challenges identified by Liimatainen include:

- Nordic added value is a *value-based concept*, articulating cultural, social, and economic value-systems. This presents challenges when the concept is operationalised because:
 - Value-based concepts tend to be prone to ambiguity, vagueness, and abstraction, not least because the notion of "value(s)" warrants both concrete/material and abstract/immaterial interpretations.^[9]
 - Value-based concepts are difficult to differentiate from supposedly contrasting value-based concepts (how, for example, do Nordic values exactly differ from supposedly European or Western values?).^[10]
 - Value-based concepts contain an inherent tension in the process of translating between policy and practice, meaning that different interpretative possibilities are available when the overall aim of creating Nordic added value is transformed into goals for target-oriented action among different organisations and stakeholders.^[11]
- Uses and interpretations of Nordic added value (as well as other concepts articulating the legitimacy and outcomes of Nordic co-operation) are *highly context-dependent*, meaning that they tend to depend on and change according to:
 - disciplinary and institutional differences across the inter-sectoral framework of Nordic co-operation and the many policy areas it spans;
 - historical, cultural, political, and geo-political circumstances;
 - the levels (regional, European, or global) at which Nordic efforts address issues or are perceived to generate added value; and
 - the individuals interpreting Nordic added value and their personal and professional backgrounds.

An additional challenge can be found in the fact that Nordic added value is one – by now arguably the most prevalent – concept among many that articulates the foundations and outcome of Nordic co-operation, potentially making it difficult for stakeholders to communicate with reference to the different concepts. The saturation of concepts is even greater when taking into account the many Nordic institutions that do not primarily use English as their primary working language.^[12] In Table 1, some of these concepts are listed in both their English and Swedish-language versions. For the sake of clarity, this report generally refers to the Swedish-language versions when discussing the Scandinavian-language concepts in general terms, except when citing specific Norwegian or Danish-language documents.

Table 1 Examples of concepts articulating legitimacy and outcomes of joint Nordic efforts

English language concepts:	Scandinavian-language concepts (here Swedish)
Nordic benefit/Nordic advantage/Nordic usefulness	<i>nordisk nytta</i>
Nordic added value/Nordic synergy	<i>nordiskt mervärde/nordisk synergi</i>
Nordic dimension	<i>nordisk dimension</i>
Nordic affinity	<i>nordisk samhörighet</i>
Nordic level	<i>nordisk nivå</i>
Nordic competence	<i>nordisk kompetens</i>
Nordic strength	<i>nordisk styrka</i>
(Nordic values)	<i>(nordiska värderingar)</i>

To this end, relatively divergent understandings of Nordic added value exist across and within the individual institutions for Nordic co-operation, as do relatively broad or relatively simplified, and therefore more immediately operational, interpretations.^[13] However, it should be noted that while decision-makers, evaluators, and practitioners often look for clearly defined targets in target-oriented management, less well-defined objectives might also facilitate flexibility and creativity in operational practices.^[14] Indeed, it could be considered a strength rather than a challenge that value-based concepts allow for different interpretations in different contexts, since the value of Nordic co-operation cannot stand apart from the different institutional, political, and geographical contexts in which Nordic co-operation takes place.

Translating Nordic added value in a multilingual framework of co-operation

As noted above, the conceptual field of Nordic co-operation increases in complexity when taking translation into account in the multilingual institutional framework of co-operation. While Nordic co-operation traditionally drew upon the high level of mutual comprehension among speakers of the Scandinavian languages, this has been changing in recent decades. English has grown in prominence both in official communication and within the institutions of Nordic co-operation. While a controversial issue and regarded as a threat to the core identity of Nordic co-operation by some, others highlight that this development levels the playing field, potentially leading to increased inclusivity within Nordic co-operation where native speakers of Finnish, Icelandic, Faroese, Greenlandic, and the Sami languages, as well as newcomers to the Nordic region, are not at risk of being regarded as

“second-tier Nordic citizens” through linguistic exclusion.^[15] Moreover, the greater presence of English can be seen as a consequence of the increasing internationalisation of the areas in which the institutions of Nordic co-operation operate, particularly evident in institutions such as NordForsk, Nordic Energy Research, and Nordregio, which are involved in the production and exchange of knowledge, and where English is used as the official primary working language.

The rising prominence of English adds to the conceptual confusion primarily because there is no standardisation of how the concepts articulating legitimacy and outcomes of joint Nordic efforts are translated between English and the other working languages of Nordic co-operation. In practice, Nordic added value is used as the English-language equivalent for both *nordiskt mervärde* and *nordisk nytta*, disguising the subtle differences that exist between them.^[16] *Nordiskt mervärde* and *nordisk nytta* have, in turn, occasionally been translated into English as Nordic value-added, Nordic benefit, Nordic synergy, and other terms. Differences in translations might boil down to the preferences of individual translators of official documents and the lack of an official style guide for Nordic co-operation, but also reflect different usages across historical and institutional settings.

This report deals with translation issues in the following way:

- When discussing historical debates or other issues where the usage of specific Scandinavian-language terms is significant, these are retained in the text.
- Where official translations into English exist, these are used in the report as well, but with the original Scandinavian-language term added in brackets when relevant and available.
- In other cases, the currently most common practice of translating both *nordiskt mervärde* and *nordisk nytta* (as well as their other Scandinavian and Finnish-language equivalents) as “Nordic added value” is used.

Aims and objectives

This report examines the interpretations and uses of Nordic added value across the institutional framework of official inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation by posing the following question:

- How is (and has) Nordic added value (been) conceptualised within the Nordic Council of Ministers and its different subsidiary institutions?

The report provides a qualitative analysis of Nordic co-operation practices and of different justifications for Nordic co-operation in order to contribute to discussions of how (and whether) Nordic added value can serve as a tool in the formulation of goals and activities that will allow the institutions of Nordic co-operation to:

- meet the ambitions for Nordic co-operation set out in Vision 2030;
- steer economic decisions in alignment with those ambitions;
- consolidate the political legitimacy of Nordic co-operation;
- safeguard and further develop the cultural identity, regional inter-connectedness, and shared values that make up the foundations of successful Nordic co-operation; and
- assert the relevance of Nordic co-operation in relation to politics, civil society, and the wider public in the individual Nordic countries, as well as in relation to the EU and other international and inter-regional forms of co-operation.

To this end, the report first offers a historical outline of Nordic added value's rise to prominence among the concepts used to legitimise Nordic co-operation, before going on to look in more detail at the historical and contemporary uses and meanings of Nordic added value in the specific sectors and institutions of official inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation.

The report does not aim to look at every institution at every level of official Nordic co-operation. Most notably, the report is limited to inter-ministerial co-operation. To this end, the report does not outline how Nordic added value is and has been used and conceptualised in the inter-parliamentarian Nordic co-operation that takes place in the Nordic Council and related venues, or in the joint Nordic efforts that take place in civic society organisations outside the realm of official Nordic co-operation.

The institutions surveyed in the report, on the other hand, have been chosen so as to offer comparative perspectives on the histories, uses, and understandings of Nordic added value across the widely differing branches of Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation (see Figure 1).

It must be emphasised that the goal is not to evaluate how "well" or "poorly" the individual institutions operationalise or have operationalised Nordic added value, or what that would even mean. Being a qualitative study, the report instead aims to unpack the various dimensions that the concept has obtained or been accorded across the different sectors and institutions of inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation. The aim is to help clarify the different interpretations of the concept in an effort to guide the various sectors of Nordic co-operation, both today and tomorrow, towards common goals, and to do so in a way that does not lose sight of the fact that these sectors differ in terms of the potential value they can add to Nordic co-operation and that they operate according to different logics.

Materials and methods

The report builds on a review of relevant aspects of the research literature available on Nordic co-operation and Nordic added value, as well as on a qualitative analysis of institutional documents and interviews with central stakeholders who hold or have held relevant positions in the institutions of Nordic co-operation. The report's analysis is inspired by methods from the field of research known as conceptual history – although methodological reflections are kept to a minimum.

The institutional documents analysed for the report have been selected by the research group based on an informed understanding of their relevance in outlining the visions, practices, and results of the different branches of official inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation. Current or former officials from the following institutions have been interviewed: the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Nordic Council, the Nordic House in Reykjavik, Nordic Culture Point, the Nordic offices in Riga, Vilnius and Saint Petersburg, the Nordic House on the Faroe Islands, the Nordic Institute in Greenland, the Nordic Institute on Åland, the Nordic Council's office in Brussels, the Nordic Welfare Centre, Nordregio, NordForsk, Nordic Energy Research, and Nordic Innovation. All interviews apart from one (with a former Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers) have been anonymised to ensure that the answers were as candid as possible.

The report has been co-authored by a team of researchers. Emilia Berg has written on the Nordic Welfare Centre, Essi Turva on the Nordic House in Reykjavik and Nordic Culture Point in Helsinki, and Hasan Akintug on the Nordic Council of Ministers' offices in the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland. Tuire Liimatainen has written on NordForsk, Nordic Energy Research, and Nordic Innovation. Frederik Forrai Ørskov and Tuire Liimatainen have co-authored the historical outline chapter and the comparative analysis and findings sub-chapter, while Frederik Forrai Ørskov has been the main editor of the report and the author of its remaining parts.

Chapter 2: Conceptual characteristics of Nordic added value

Frederik Forrai Ørskov

Before tracing the development of concepts articulating the relevance of Nordic co-operation, it is worth noting three features relating to the conceptual characteristics of Nordic added value:

- Nordic added value is a contested concept.
- Nordic added value is a composite concept.
- Nordic added value contains multiple temporal layers.

These three conceptual characteristics and their relation to the concept of Nordic added value will be discussed in the following.

Nordic added value as a contested concept

Nordic added value is an essentially contested concept and, like other such concepts, is accorded meaning by those who use and debate it. The meanings of essentially contested concepts are not given, settled, or agreed upon and they are highly context-dependent.^[17] Indeed, the concept of Nordic added value has been described, with reference to the political scientist and philosopher Ernesto Laclau, as a "floating signifier" – an "open and evolving concept with multiple meanings" defined in the process of being used. From this point of view, the act of defining Nordic added value can, in turn, be perceived as an act of "expressing ideas and refining meanings that construct a Nordic region."^[18]

Nordic added value as a composite concept

Nordic added value is a composite concept consisting of multiple other concepts. While composite concepts take on meanings of their own, they also relate to their constituent concepts, which have meanings of their own that might be equally contested and ambiguous.^[19] This is also the case when it comes to "Nordic" and "added value," the constituent concepts of Nordic added value:

What constitutes "Norden" or "Nordic" is itself a question subject to constant negotiation, both from a contemporary point of view and historically.^[20] What constitutes the Nordic can be approached with reference to the term's geographical, cultural, and political dimensions, none of which are subject to given understandings and all of which have been contested historically.^[21] While notions related to social progress, democratic values, cultural and linguistic affinity, and deep historical ties feature among the most common connotations of the term Nordic, they are by no means universally accepted.^[22] Indeed, it has been argued that the notion of the Nordic is attractive for political use exactly because disagreements exist about its exact definition even if there is, or is perceived to be, a general agreement about its overall frame of reference.^[23]

"Added value" (*mervärde*) is itself a composite concept, and one with multiple meanings. As mentioned in the introduction, value-based concepts reflect the ambiguity of the notion of "value," a word that, it has been noted, a banker would understand in a very different way than a bishop.^[24] The concept of "added value" has been employed in relation to branding and marketing from the 1990s onwards, where some have used it to mark the difference between a brand and a product, making it a core requirement for any brand.^[25] However, it has been argued that added value in this understanding is a multidimensional construct with both a functional and emotional dimension, and that the term suffers from a vagueness that poses questions of its usefulness within the marketing sector as well.^[26] Added value entered the field of policy amidst a broader "value-turn" in governance that gathered pace by the mid-1990s and was spurred on by the so-called New Public Management reform movement that sought to apply management principles from the private sphere to the public sector.^[27]

"Value added" (sometimes referred to as "surplus value") – a close conceptual relative of added value that has also occasionally been used in the language of Nordic co-operation – is an economic term denoting the difference between a product's production costs and its market price which, among other things, came to hold a central place in Marxist economic thinking.^[28]

For reasons that will be discussed below, the term *nordisk nytta* is often used as the preferred Scandinavian-language equivalent to Nordic added value, even if *nordisk mervärde* is a more obvious equivalent. It therefore makes sense to regard the concept "*nytta*" as one of the composites making up the Nordic added value concept, but one that offers a different set of connotations. "*Nytta*" is customarily translated as "benefit," "usefulness," or "utility." The term utility in particular is strongly associated with the ethical theory of utilitarianism. In the philosopher Jeremy Bentham's (1748-1832) classic definition, utility refers to the "property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness."^[29] Therefore, Bentham and other classic utilitarians argued that the actions of individuals and governments ought to be prioritised according to the degree to which they maximise utility.^[30] As the term has since been used in

economic theory, its meaning has changed slightly, so that it now usually refers to the benefit, advantage, etc. that is produced, rather than the property that facilitates such production.^[31] In that formulation, the utilitarian roots and understanding of *nytt* are certainly worth keeping in mind when assessing how *nordisk nytt* is used and understood today – since it puts the stress on (measurable) outcomes when determining what it is worth (or right) doing.

Nordic added value as a temporally multi-layered concept

Nordic added value can also be regarded as a concept having what the German conceptual historian Reinhart Koselleck has called an “internal temporal structure” that is “multilayered” and “complex.”^[32] Simply put, this means that the use of concepts such as Nordic added value in the present is entangled with historical experience (how the concept has been used in the past) as well as the future expectations it helps to formulate. A consequence of this is that the past meanings and usages of a concept might potentially affect its current usage and understandings in complex and often unacknowledged ways. In the case of Nordic added value, it is notable that once the concept entered the lingo of Nordic co-operation, it was retroactively equated with the concept of *nordisk nytt* as it had been used since the early-to-mid 1990s. Consequently, the meanings attached to *nordisk nytt* some decades earlier offered a layer of meaning which actors in Nordic co-operation could draw upon when interpreting and operationalising the meanings of Nordic added value as well. The following chapter therefore begins with an analysis of the conceptualisation of *nordisk nytt* in the 1990s.

Summary

In this chapter, it has been highlighted that Nordic added value is a contested concept, comprising both various other concepts and different temporal layers. Understanding these associated features is crucial for comprehending the historical evolution and the contemporary usage of Nordic added value in a nuanced manner. As the remainder of the report investigates the historical origins and development of the concept of Nordic added value as well as its contemporary operationalisation within official Nordic co-operation, this chapter has highlighted that the concept of Nordic added value has acquired and continues to acquire meanings based on who uses and debates it. Additionally, it has been argued that language and translations constitute an important analytical perspective when seeking to understand the operationalisation of the principle of Nordic added value in the multilingual framework of Nordic co-operation. Furthermore, the meanings that Nordic added value has acquired do not emerge out of nowhere but are influenced by the multiple other terms contained within the concept with their unique histories, contexts, and associated meanings, as well as the various temporal layers that have been ingrained in the concept in its present form through its uses in the past.

Chapter 3: Nordic added value: An historical outline

Frederik Forrai Ørskov and Tuire Liimatainen

The English-language concept Nordic added value did not enter the vocabulary of Nordic co-operation until the early 2010s.^[33] Yet its emergence and use form part of a longer history of seeking, articulating, and operationalising the relevance of Nordic co-operation in changing social, political, domestic, and international contexts. This history is as long as the history of Nordic co-operation, preceding the creation of the Nordic Council in 1952 by more than a century.^[34] It is a history that is deeply intertwined with an equally long-running discussion of what constitutes “the Nordic region” geographically, culturally, and politically.^[35]

While always subject to debate, the legitimacy of Nordic co-operation was not seriously challenged through the creation of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1971 and until what has been characterised as “the third track change” of Nordic co-operation in the early-to-mid 1990s.^[36] The idea that common values, democratic traditions, societal institutions, and strong linguistic ties have provided Nordic co-operation with a natural foundation and legitimacy is built on a long historical tradition. By the 1980s, this ideational foundation was still prevalent if often unspoken.^[37] However, the end of the Cold War and the EU membership debates that eventually led to Sweden’s and Finland’s joining in 1995 caused a major rethink of the purpose of and organisation of Nordic co-operation.^[38]

With a view to understanding the emergence of Nordic added value as the quintessential concept for articulating the relevance of Nordic co-operation and the meanings currently attached to it, this chapter therefore outlines how this relevance has been conceptualised from the early 1990s onwards. How this conceptualisation has played out at and, at times, been facilitated by the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers – a central actor in the process – is further elaborated on in [Chapter 4](#).

***Nordisk nytta*: the “Need to have” of Nordic co-operation**

In the 1990s, Nordic co-operation came up for revision. Denmark had been a member of the European Economic Community since 1973, but with Finland and Sweden’s joint accession to what was now the European Union in 1995, the Nordic region faced a new situation, even if Norway and Iceland did not join the EU but

remained members of the European Economic Area (EEA). Along with Finland and Sweden joining the EU, the very establishment of the EU with the 1993 Maastricht Treaty and the intensification of European integration that this represented placed Nordic co-operation in a new political context. At the same time, the geopolitical changes and possible new arenas for co-operation that emerged with the fall of the Soviet Union, the independence of the Baltic countries, and the hopes invested in a democratic Russia caused a shift in the priorities of national governments and at the Nordic level.^[39]

In light of these developments, former narratives situating Nordic co-operation as representing an "other" Europe between East and West no longer held much appeal.^[40] This gave rise to heated debate on the significance and future of Nordic co-operation vis-à-vis the EU and the democratising post-Warszawa block states, the Baltic countries being the most prominent. The debate also came to revolve around the effect of the activities of the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers,^[41] not least because the existing framework for Nordic co-operation was regarded as incapable of renewal and flexibility in a challenging international context.^[42]

The idea of *nordisk nytta* ("Nordic benefit/advantage/usefulness") was first introduced as a guiding principle for Nordic co-operation in this context. It was first offered as a central operational concept in the report *Nordiskt samarbete i en ny tid* [Nordic Co-operation in a New Era],^[43] which was tabled for discussion at the 46th Session of the Nordic Council on 28 February 1995 and signed off by a high-profile joint working group of the Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers. The report had been commissioned at a joint meeting of the Nordic prime ministers and the Nordic Council's Presidium in November 1994, but largely followed a direction already outlined by the Nordic prime ministers in the 1992 Bornholm declaration. Still, the working group's mandate was explicitly linked to the EU membership referenda taking place in October and November 1994 in Finland, Norway, and Sweden.^[44] The report was clearly positioned as a response to a perceived need to renew, modernise, and rationalise Nordic co-operation.^[45]

The 1995 report defined *nordisk nytta* as the outcome of activities that:

- could otherwise be undertaken at the national level, but where concretely positive effects are generated through common Nordic solutions;
- manifest and develop a sense of Nordic community; and
- increase Nordic competence and competitiveness.^[46]

By the definition given in the 1995 reform report, the principle of *nordisk nytta* was defined as the positive accumulative effect of Nordic co-operation.^[47] The success of any activity executed at an official Nordic level would be assessed by how it fulfilled the three predetermined goals of Nordic solutions, Nordic community, and Nordic competence. The three predetermined effects of joint Nordic effort reflected

both socio-cultural values (sense of Nordic community, competence) and economic values (competence, competitiveness).^[48] In this regard, it is also worth noting that the report described the Nordic region as “a genuine value community,” suggesting that shared values were the foundation of any further discussion about added value.^[49]

Still, the report and the introduction of *nordisk nytta* can be understood in the context of wider political debates about Nordic co-operation, which came to focus on efficiency and outcomes, as well as an incentive to prioritise the limited resources available for Nordic co-operation.^[50] This became a particularly pressing issue when the Swedish government decided to cut its funding for Nordic co-operation significantly in 1995 in a move that was perceived by many to reflect that European integration had led to a deprioritisation of the Nordic level, even if the then Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson denied that this was the case.^[51] While the budget cuts were controversial, the discussion around them revealed a relatively broad consensus that “Nordic money must be used purposefully and in such a way that they cause the greatest benefit [*nytt*],” in the words of the then Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland.^[52]

Indeed, *nordisk nytta* was first applied as an instrument to implement the budgetary cuts of the mid-1990s. Based on a recommendation in the report *Nordiskt samarbete i en ny tid*, a joint Nordic working group was commissioned to evaluate the more than 40 individual institutions operating under the umbrella of Nordic co-operation. This evaluation was laid out in October 1995 in a report titled *Nordisk nytte*, which ranked the *nordisk nytta* of each institution on a low-medium-high scale.^[53] In that process, the authors of *Nordisk nytte* noted, a precise application of the principle for *nordisk nytta* as outlined in the earlier report, could have the effect that the reports' evaluations might at times be at odds with “more common evaluations of Nordic co-operation and other value perceptions of utility [*værdiopfattelser af nytte*].”^[54] The report thus narrowed down the prevalent understandings of what was seen as beneficial in Nordic co-operation. It did so according to a hierarchically structured three-dimensional operationalisation of the definition of *nordisk nytta* provided in the *Nordiskt samarbete i en ny tid* report, evaluating each activity according to the following order:

1. Its geographical area of impact or interest/whether an activity can be regarded as Nordic.
2. The degree of cost effectiveness and use of competencies involved in the joint efforts/whether the joint efforts lead to measurable effects through cost effectiveness or outcomes.
3. The quality of the results evaluated in terms of visibility of demand, efficiency, and impact/to which degree an activity facilitates the development of Nordic community, competence, and competitiveness.^[55]

The joint working group's application of the *nordisk nytta* concept led to the closure of 13 Nordic institutions, which later came under scrutiny due to its reliance on economic thinking. Criticism was raised by the Nordic culture ministers, for example, for the fact that the report "unequivocally" favoured quantitative evaluation methods over qualitative ones. Moreover, it was noted that the constitution of the working group secured an over-representation of the finance ministries, further underpinning its economic outlook.^[56] Also, parliamentarians in the Nordic Council criticised the evaluation of *nordisk nytta* as one that had not taken "so-called soft values" into account, especially regarding institutions dealing with culture, the Nordic languages, and research, and was therefore out of touch with what the Nordic populations regarded as "useful."^[57]

The operationalisation of *nordisk nytta* in Nordic co-operation thus emerged in a context of budget cuts and the question of *nordisk nytta* became a question of institutional survival in many of the Nordic institutions. The term came to signify the essential core of Nordic co-operation, the "need-to-have" rather than the "nice-to-have" of Nordic co-operation. According to one official who worked in the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers in the late 1990s, this was indeed a commonly articulated understanding of *nordisk nytta* in the secretariat at the time.^[58] This is hardly surprising, given that the then head of the *Nordisk nytte* working group, Søren Christensen, had become the Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1996.

Nordiskt mervärde: An alternative or extension to nordisk nytta?

Following the criticism of the *Nordisk nytte* report, its conceptualisation of the *nordisk nytta* concept, and the ways this conceptualisation was applied to evaluate the institutional framework of official Nordic co-operation, *nordiskt mervärde* [literally, Nordic added value] emerged as a new concept in official handbooks and documents from late 1996 onwards.^[59] Seemingly, *nordiskt mervärde* was initially preferred to *nordisk nytta* in institutions engaged in cultural co-operation, where the operationalisation of *nordisk nytta* had come up against the greatest resistance, and it appeared in the guidelines for the Nordic Culture Fund from 1997 onwards.^[60] Yet, if *nordiskt mervärde* could initially be imagined as an alternative to *nordisk nytta*, for example in the cultural institutions that had fared poorly in the *Nordisk nytte* report, it quickly came to be incorporated alongside *nordisk nytta* as part of the *raison d'être* of Nordic co-operation. In 1999, both concepts appeared in the Nordic Council of Ministers' *Handbook for Institutions* and in the standard statutes for Nordic institutions, where it was stipulated that the institutions of official Nordic co-operation ought to contribute to



creating a high Nordic profile and contribute to *den nordiska nyttan* so that the enterprise creates a *nordiskt mervärde* beyond the purely sector-specific [*fackliga*] cooperation results.^[61]

While the distinction between *nytta* and *mervärde* in the 1999 statutes is not entirely clear, *mervärde* seems to be conceptualised as an additional outcome of efforts that pursue the here undefined guiding principle of *nordisk nytta*. It is also worth noting that this outcome is defined as something that goes beyond the concrete results achieved from practical collaboration within the given sectors. Although the nature of this something extra was not expanded upon in the standard statutes, it has been noted that *nordiskt mervärde* can be seen as containing references to "Nordic values," the values on which Nordic societies are claimed to be based.^[62] *Nytta*, with its allusion to the utilitarian, does not offer the same connotations.

The literal translation of the term *nordiskt mervärde* into English is "Nordic added value," yet when it first entered the vocabulary of Nordic co-operation, it was mostly referred to as "Nordic synergy,"^[63] although translations between the Scandinavian and English terms never seem to have been standardised. Nordic synergy became a central concept in the self-representation of official Nordic co-operation in the early 2000s. In *Co-operation for Strength*, an English-language informational brochure published by the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2005, "Nordic synergy" is defined as the idea that "Nordic co-operation is designed to offer participants more than individual countries can accomplish on their own" with references to ambitions to:

- improve conditions for living, working, and doing business in the Nordic countries,
- make the small Nordic countries stronger,
- strengthen the international impact of Nordic values,
- preserve Nordic languages, history, and traditions in an increasingly globalised world, and
- adopt joint positions on issues to be debated in international forums.^[64]

In addition to the above-mentioned link to "Nordic values," a clear international dimension now manifested itself in the conceptualisation of "Nordic synergy." This dimension reflected a strong contemporary orientation towards international arenas and challenges of globalisation in official Nordic co-operation. This was laid out, for example, in the Nordic prime ministers' globalisation declaration from 2007,

61. Nordic Council of Ministers and Nordic Council, *Nordisk statutsamling 1990-1999. Del 1-2*, 220; see also Lennartsson and Nolin, "Nordiska kulturfonden," 119.

the so-called Punkaharju declaration.^[65] Nordic synergy was very clearly conceptualised in this context, reflecting the notion that the Nordic countries were stronger when acting together in international fora as well as in the face of global challenges. The next section takes a closer look at how *nordisk nytta*, *nordiskt mervärde*, and eventually also the English-language term Nordic added value developed in relation to the perhaps most important of those fora, the European Union.

Nordic added value and the Europeanisation of Nordic co-operation

The story of the rise to prominence of the principle and concept of Nordic added value in Nordic co-operation is entangled with the increasingly important role that the EU has played in all the Nordic countries, whether EU members or not, and the ways in which this has affected official Nordic co-operation. A Europeanisation of the Nordic region has taken place following the European Community's efforts from 1986 onwards to pursue a fully-fledged Inner Market.^[66] Indeed, it has been argued that Nordic co-operation has become more regional, European, and international since the early 1990s in particular, and that interactions at the European level have become a central element of official Nordic co-operation during that period.^[67] This has led to "a gradual Europeanisation of Nordic co-operation."^[68]

At the Nordic Council's February-March session in 1995, the then Danish Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen reassured the Nordic parliamentarians that the need for Nordic co-operation could not be questioned and that "no matter our different paths within European co-operation, the Nordic countries have never had as close and coinciding interests in relation to the European development [as now]."^[69] Yet, as we have seen, the fact that three of the five Nordic countries were now members of the EU gave rise to a debate that ultimately impacted the reorientation of how Nordic region-building should be planned and operationalised.^[70] Indeed, the Nordic prime ministers promoted organisational reform of the Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers with a view to make co-ordination and initiatives on the European level essential elements of Nordic co-operation. In 1996, the Nordic Council was reorganised according to a new pillarized structure that was supposed to focus its work around three geographically defined areas:

- traditional inter-Nordic co-operation,
- co-operation with "adjacent areas" (the Baltics, Northwestern Russia), and
- co-operation within the EU and Europe more broadly.^[71]

As described above, it was largely within this context of the "Europeanisation" of Nordic co-operation that *nordisk nytta* was adopted as the principle of official

Nordic co-operation in early 1995 it has been noted that “the added value of Nordic cooperation needed to be redefined in relation to European integration.”^[72]

When the English-language formulation Nordic added value became a settled concept in the vocabulary of Nordic co-operation in the late 2000s, it happened in close interaction with developments at the European level as well. Formulations such as “added value”, “value-added,” and the notion that specific programmes and initiatives “add value” to Nordic co-operation appeared occasionally throughout the 2000s, such as in the programmes for the presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2007 and 2010.^[73]

Yet, it was in the *NordForsk* commissioned policy brief *Rethinking Nordic Added Value in Research* that Nordic Added Value (all in capital letters) was first introduced as a concept in its own right.^[74] As will be discussed in further detail in the section on *NordForsk* in this report, the policy brief – authored by Erik Arnold from the consultancy firm Technopolis – was tied directly to efforts to evaluate Nordic research co-operation in relation to European research co-operation as institutionalised through the so-called European Research Area since 2000. Nordic added value was thus coined as a specific English-language concept in Nordic co-operation through efforts to Europeanise Nordic research co-operation.

In introducing Nordic Added Value, the policy brief explicitly referred to the guiding principle of research co-operation in the European Research Area, “European Added Value” (often abbreviated as EAV). Increasingly used across the European Union’s policy areas, the concept European added value had its origins in EU discussions around the emerging European single market and as a counterpoint to the growing euro-scepticism that emerged during the low growth and high unemployment experienced in European economies in the 1980s. In recent definitions, European added value has been described as “the *raison d’être* of the European Union” and “the essence of what the European Union stands for,” that is:

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that the sum of the actions taken together will lead to better overall results for the participants than their individual actions can yield, and the belief that stronger collective action and shared sovereignty will therefore be beneficial for the Member States and their citizens.^[75]

The European added value concept developed in close interaction with the notion of there being a “cost of non-Europe,” that is, an economic benefit that would have been lost without the European common market.^[76] Later, European Added Value became linked to the legal foundations of the EU as well, being commonly referred

75. Gaston Moonen, “Editorial: Why There Has to Be European Added Value,” *ECA Journal*, no. 3 (2020): 6; Gabriele Cipriani, “Adding Value, the Raison D’être of the European Union,” *ECA Journal*, no. 3 (2020): 85–88.

to in the context of the introduction of the subsidiarity principle introduced through the 1992 Maastricht Treaty the principle that decisions should be made at the most immediate or local level.^[77] With regard to European cohesion policies, added value has been defined as "something which has been enabled or which would not have been done without [European] Community assistance," while different types of added value have been identified: cohesion added value, political added value, policy added value, operational added value, learning added value,^[78] and, with specific reference to Nordic efforts, territorial added value.^[79] In the field of research, science, and technology, European Added Value was developed in a number of framework programmes, justifying action by the European community in the field. While developing over time, those selection criteria generally revolved around questions of cohesion, scale, financial benefits, complementarity, and unification (of the European research field, i.e., through the development of uniform rules and standards).^[80]

Yet while European Added Value has been described by multiple commentators as enigmatic, lacking a clear or uniform definition, and offering different meanings to different EU stakeholders,^[81] fiscal understandings generally came to prevail over juridical ones from the 2000s onwards. From 2011, a "European Added Value Unit" has existed under the European Parliament Research Service, which, according to one description, "seeks to identify and quantify the potential economic gain from policy initiatives favoured by the Parliament in wide range of policy areas [...] in a way that could boost Europe's economic performance over time."^[82] The concept of European added value thus clearly reflects the fact that it emerged in the context of economic integration through the development of the European single market.

The economic origin story of the conceptualisation of European added value is worth spending some time on, given the central role of the concept as a reference point from the outset of the process that saw Nordic added value become the central English-language term used for legitimising official Nordic co-operation. Hence, in the *Rethinking Nordic Added Value in Research* policy brief, European added value and Nordic added value were compared, and while it was argued that the "added value" of research co-operation at the Nordic and European levels were different on some accounts, not least given the informal dimension of Nordic added value, the two concepts were essentially treated as comparable.^[83]

Moreover, the policy brief specifically used the term "Nordic Added Value" when referring to the operationalisation of *nordisk nytta* in connection to the 1995 *Nordisk nytte* report without this prompting further reflections.^[84] The brief did not refer to *nordiskt mervärde* but instead equated Nordic added value with *nordisk nytta*, although in a way that encompassed both economic and socio-cultural connotations.^[85] As such, the English-language concept Nordic added value was retroactively aligned with an earlier description of the purpose and constitution of joint Nordic efforts that had been described as economic and had caused the termination of a large number of Nordic institutions.^[86] In the transfer and

adaptation of the concept from the European to the Nordic level, Nordic added value thus came to embody multiple layers of meaning and multiple conceptual composites, most notably *nytt* and *mervärde*, leaving the concept ambiguous.

Nordic added value in Nordic co-operation reform initiatives

During the last couple of decades, Nordic co-operation has gained renewed momentum and also faced substantial crises.^[87] On the one hand, "Nordicness" has been in demand internationally. The performance of the individual Nordic countries in international rankings on social and economic parameters has gained significant attention at home and abroad, *The Economist* famously labelling the Nordic countries as "The next supermodel" in 2013.^[88] There has also been keen international interest in Nordic cuisine, Nordic noir television series, and supposed "Nordic" ways of living happily, with the adoption of words such as *hygge*, *sisu*, and *lagom* within the day-to-day vernacular.^[89]

Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, the "Nordic brand" was cultivated actively – and rather successfully – by the Nordic Council of Ministers.^[90] In that context, it has been argued that the increase in the use of the term *nordiskt mervärde* to some extent correlated with efforts to create a competitive and distinctive Nordic profile in the global arena.^[91] This, moreover, at a time when Nordic cultural co-operation started to be framed with reference to the marketing-inspired notion of "the creative industries," meaning that culture and creativity were portrayed as assets strengthening the Nordic region's economic competitiveness.^[92] Moreover, the last decade and especially the last couple of years have seen a sharp rise in the relevance of and interest in security policy from a Nordic point of view, not least with the very recent Finnish and Swedish accessions to NATO.^[93]

On the other hand, the Nordic region has faced challenges that have sparked tensions between the countries and adversely affected Nordic co-operation, but which have also been seen as a signal for closer co-operation.^[94] Some of these challenges are intra-Nordic in nature, such as the lack of a common public sphere, the continued decline in mutual language comprehension, and the seeming lack of interest in Nordic co-operation among Nordic politicians and ministerial officials,^[95] some of whom regarded the co-operation framework as offering "limited political added value."^[96] Other challenges are global in scope, such as the climate crisis, financial crises, geopolitical tensions, and security policy challenges. In particular, the rise of exclusionary nationalism and populism and the consequent favouring of national priorities have posed challenges for the EU and international co-operation more widely. Moreover, this has put Nordic co-operation to the test, not least during the 2015 refugee crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, both of which saw a lack of intra-Nordic co-ordination and the temporary suspension of free movement between some of the Nordic countries.^[97]

In the face of internal tensions and differences of opinion, continued European integration, as well as pressing global challenges, the question about the political significance of Nordic co-operation has continued to shape it in its official form. In a sense, official Nordic co-operation has been characterised by a quest for political significance throughout the decades since the 1995 reform report, catalysing a perpetual drive for reform, especially in the Nordic Council of Ministers.^[98] Against this backdrop, and on the basis of a mandate from the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation to reform the Nordic Council of Ministers and make Nordic co-operation more flexible, less bureaucratic, and more politically operational, the Nordic Council of Ministers' secretariat under Dagfinn Høybråten's leadership (2012-2019) sought to operationalise Nordic added value in its reform work. The purpose was to make Nordic co-operation more efficient and more politically useful, and to create an organisation that could achieve visible and measurable results so that Nordic co-operation could "create [*nordisk nytte*], contribute [*merværdi*] to all, and lead to concrete political results."^[99]

This, then, was when Nordic added value – discussed both in terms of *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt mervärde* in the relevant documents – was operationalised and institutionalised as a means to measure, align, and showcase the effects of the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers and its subsidiary institutions. The ambition was to make the Nordic Council of Ministers a better tool for the policy makers in the Nordic governments by operationalising the slogan of Nordic added value for the sake of a practically oriented reform effort aimed, at the same time, at providing Nordic co-operation with more political content and usefulness. For the Secretariat, the goal, as stated in one reform paper, was to "contribute to results that create added value [*merværdi*] and make the Nordic region visible internally and externally" by:

- initiating, launching, and following up on political decisions
- developing knowledge as the foundation for common solutions
- constructing networks for exchange of experiences and ideas.^[100]

What was meant by Nordic added value was expanded upon in the Nordic Council of Ministers' Strategy for Cultural Co-operation published at around the same time, which maintained that:

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Fundamental to Nordic cultural co-operation is the principle of Nordic added value, i.e. that the collaboration involves areas where the Nordic countries have common interests and face common challenges.^[101]

It was in facing such common challenges through joint efforts that the Nordic Council of Ministers' secretariat saw the potential for Nordic co-operation, provided that the efforts of the Nordic Council of Ministers and its subsidiary institutions could be mobilised to face them, and provided that the Nordic governments could be convinced about their usefulness in doing so.^[102] Consequently, the Secretariat sought to align the different institutions under the Nordic Council of Ministers more closely to the Secretariat through a clearer model for institutional ownership. This included the operationalisation of Nordic added value through the regular issuing of grant letters as the basis for the individual institutions' funding, which soon came to include sections outlining the intended Nordic added value [*nordisk nytte*] of the institutions' ongoing and prospective projects.^[103] The institutions were thereby supposed to become more immediately instrumental to the policy makers in the Nordic governments.^[104] In the quest for political relevance, Nordic added value thus became an unavoidable principle – or tool – for employees working in all branches of the Nordic Council of Ministers and its subsidiary institutions in the mid-to-late 2010s.

Nordic added value today – and in the future?

As discussed above, over the last three decades, the political legitimacy and significance of Nordic co-operation has been articulated through the concepts of *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt mervärde*, and their various English-language translations. From the early 2010s onwards, the English-language term Nordic added value has become increasingly prominent. Especially in those Nordic organisations that prominently use English, the concept Nordic added value is today used frequently to state the purpose of joint activities. The concept is evoked prominently, for example, in the communications of Nordic research co-operation organisations such as NordForsk, Nordic Energy Research, and Nordregio.^[105]

The two Scandinavian-language concepts are often used in parallel, almost synonymously with each other and with Nordic added value, even if a hierarchy of meaning can at times be identified between the two concepts – with contribution to *nordisk nytta* represented as the overarching goal of Nordic co-operation, whereas *nordiskt mervärde* is expressed in more practical terms as the outcome of activities. The standard statutes for Nordic institutions that were outlined in 1999 and which still form the basis of the statutes of many Nordic institutions today offer a good example of this (as discussed above).^[106]

As the rest of this report also demonstrates, the term Nordic added value and its Scandinavian equivalents are now integrated and used far and wide within all branches of official Nordic co-operation, especially in respect of inter-ministerial co-operation, even if the meanings of the term differ among different institutions and individuals. Nevertheless, Nordic added value is not mentioned in the Vision 2030 programme, which outlines the current guidelines for official Nordic co-operation.

According to the strategic objectives of Vision 2030, outlined by the Nordic prime ministers and adopted by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2019, the Nordic region is to become the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030, and all co-operation under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers is supposed to serve this purpose. The vision is linked to three strategic priorities: "a green Nordic Region", "a competitive Nordic Region", and "a socially sustainable Nordic Region". These three strategic priorities respond to many pressing challenges such as climate change, pollution and threats to biodiversity, and challenges facing democracy, integration, and inclusion, but also emphasise the Nordics in a global context.^[107]

Somewhat paradoxically, at the same time as Nordic added value is not mentioned in the primary strategic document outlining the politically desired direction for official Nordic co-operation, the principle is increasingly being systematically incorporated into the institutional framework for co-operation. *Nordisk nytta* is, for example, increasingly used as a set category when individual institutions under the Nordic Council of Ministers are asked to evaluate their efforts in annual reports, or when their tasks and projects are being outlined in grant letters.^[108] One possible interpretation of this seeming paradox is that Nordic added value no longer serves as a central legitimising principle for official Nordic co-operation at a political level but instead purely serves as an instrument for pursuing whatever visions are outlined for Nordic co-operation at a given time – having little, if any, visionary or forward-looking value. Or, alternatively, that Nordic added value is so central to Nordic co-operation that the ambitions and priorities of Vision 2030 merely represent the current configuration of the idea, meaning that the vision and Nordic added value are in fact two sides of the same coin.

Both interpretations seem to exist within the institutions of official Nordic co-operation today, yet no matter the interpretation, it seems clear that the meanings of Nordic added value have evolved following the launch of Vision 2030 and will continue to do so. Sustainability, for example, has increasingly begun to appear in discussions of Nordic added value in recent years.^[109]

Hence, the principle of Nordic added value is still evolving in Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation, and it is increasingly being operationalised in the commissioning of projects as well as in the assessment and prioritisations of the individual institutions under the Nordic Council of Ministers. To this end, there are good reasons to assess how the concept is understood and used in the different institutions under the Nordic Council of Ministers, and how such understandings and uses have come about.

The remainder of this report therefore outlines the histories, understandings, and uses of Nordic added value in the individual institutions of the Nordic Council of Ministers, beginning with the Nordic Council of Ministers itself and its Secretariat.

Summary

This chapter has explored the origins, evolution, and contemporary usage of the concept of Nordic added value within official Nordic co-operation. It has demonstrated how, over the course of three decades, a term that was originally introduced to justify budget cuts has become a guiding principle deeply integrated in official Nordic co-operation. The complex and multifaceted nature of this process has been demonstrated, including multiple significant changes in both the form and meaning of the concept. Furthermore, it has been shown how these changes have been fundamentally linked with the development of official Nordic co-operation, from the crisis triggered by European integration in the mid-1990s to the brand-building initiatives and incorporation of the EU-inspired added value discourse in the new millennium and the last decade's attempts to operationalise the concept to enhance the efficiency and political relevance of Nordic co-operation. Finally, the chapter looked at Vision 2030, which dictates the present and future work of the Nordic Council of Ministers, as it posits the year 2030 as the target year for the Nordic Council of Ministers' ambition to make the Nordic region the most sustainable and integrated region in the world. The chapter notes that the vision does not explicitly mention the Nordic added value principle, an aspect that potentially contributes to tensions between the political objectives and goals of Nordic co-operation and the institutional framework of co-operation.

Chapter 4: Nordic added value in inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation

This chapter explores the historical and contemporary uses and meanings of Nordic added value in greater detail across the sectors of official inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation. Each sub-chapter deals with one institution or sector, outlining for each:

- *a brief institutional history of that sector of co-operation;*
- *the history of Nordic added value in that sector of co-operation;*
- *the current use of Nordic added value in that sector of co-operation; and*
- *the meanings attached to Nordic added value in that sector of co-operation.*

The chapter's final sub-chapter provides a comparative analysis and crystallisation of the chapter's empirical findings.

The Nordic Council of Ministers and its Secretariat

Frederik Forrai Ørskov

The Nordic Council of Ministers is the official body facilitating Nordic inter-governmental co-operation. It consists of multiple individual councils of ministers, which co-ordinate co-operation on specific policy areas between the relevant ministries and which are all served by a committee of senior officials drawn from the national ministries. Its activities revolve in particular around culture, socio-political issues – including the Nordic welfare state model – the environment, research, and education.^[110]

Currently, there are ten permanent ministerial councils and one ad-hoc ministerial council (for digitalisation) in addition to the Council of Ministers for Nordic Co-operation (MR-SAM). MR-SAM has, along with the Nordic Co-operation Committee (NSK), been delegated the practical responsibility for Nordic inter-governmental co-operation from the Nordic prime ministers, who hold formal overarching responsibility. The Nordic countries take turns holding the presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers for one year at a time, chairing council meetings and outlining guidelines for Nordic inter-governmental co-operation through annual presidency programmes.^[111] Sweden holds the presidency for 2024.^[112]

The Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers runs inter-governmental co-operation on a day-to-day basis. It is located in *Nordens Hus* in Copenhagen, and its main tasks involve preparing agenda items for meetings in the various ministerial councils as well as following up on and implementing the decisions made in them (although with no formal power vis-à-vis national governments).^[113] Moreover, the Secretary General has a right of initiative, meaning that the Secretariat can table proposals and actively shape the direction of Nordic inter-governmental co-operation.^[114] The Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers describes its tasks as:

- *initiating*, implementing, and following up on policy decisions,
- *developing* knowledge on which to base Nordic solutions,
- *building* networks for the exchange of experiences and ideas.^[115]

In practice, a large part of this work is carried out in the institutions and offices under the Nordic Council of Ministers ([Figure 1](#)). These subsidiary institutions report to the Secretariat and their basic funding and functions are outlined by the Secretariat through annual grant letters. The subsidiary institutions are analysed in the remainder of this chapter, and this sub-chapter therefore also provides the context for the analyses undertaken in this chapter's other sub-chapters.

The Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers has been a key player in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of Nordic added value in official Nordic co-operation. There are therefore overlaps between the historical accounts outlined in this sub-chapter and the outline presented in [Chapter 3](#). Whereas Chapter 3 provides more historical context and a broader view of official Nordic co-operation, this sub-chapter provides a more detailed account of developments directly related to the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers.

History of the Nordic Council of Ministers

The Nordic Council of Ministers was established in 1971. Its creation followed the collapse of the hopes to create a Nordic Economic Community, the so-called NORDEK plan, at the end of the 1960s, exemplifying what has occasionally been described as the Phoenix effect in Nordic co-operation, where more pragmatic forms of co-operation have emerged from the ashes of failed grander ambitions.^[116] It was part of what some scholars have described as “the second track change” of Nordic co-operation, lasting from approximately 1970 to 1975, in which sectoral co-operation infrastructure was created along with a strengthened foundation for inter-governmental co-operation through the establishment of civil servant committees, secretariats, and other common organs.^[117]

In the following decades, the Nordic Council of Ministers spawned a range of new projects and institutions, granting official Nordic co-operation renewed vitality as part of a wider build-up of common-Nordic institutions.^[118] However, the Nordic

Council of Ministers was reformed following the end of the Cold War and increasing Nordic involvement in the European integration process in the early 1990s. Among the structural reforms following from this were the introduction of the annually rotating presidency, the inauguration of new offices in the Baltic countries and Northwestern Russia, and the trimming down of institutions under its purview.^[119]

Subsequent reforms have seen additional changes to the Nordic Council of Ministers as part of efforts to maintain and renew its political relevance and adapt to changing external pressures, not least imperatives to face the perceived challenges of the 21st century, including globalisation, European integration, and the climate crisis. The number of ministerial councils was reduced from 18 to 11 between 2005 and 2006, while the Secretariat was restructured twice in the late 2000s.^[120]

Another reform process was initiated in 2014 with the then Secretary General Dagfinn Høybråten's *Nyt Norden* reform report,^[121] which offered a string of recommendations aiming to make the Nordic Council of Ministers and its subsidiary institutions more flexible, demand-oriented, and politically relevant.^[122] This was followed up by another reform report, *Nyt Norden 2.0*, in 2016.^[123] The resulting reforms promoted, among other things, the role of the Secretariat in catalysing new initiatives, while a greater role was envisioned for the Nordic heads of government in the activities of official Nordic co-operation in a bid to heighten its political legitimacy and visibility.^[124] This latter ambition has at least partly been realised with the Nordic prime ministers' joint declaration – Vision 2030 – which now provides the overall guideline for the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers as well as official Nordic co-operation as a whole.^[125]

Institutional history of Nordic added value

The 1995 reform led to a restructuring of the Nordic Council of Ministers and the termination of many of its institutions. As discussed in Chapter 3 of this report, the degree of *nordisk nytta* achieved by the institutions under the Nordic Council of Ministers was evaluated individually in the 1995 *Nordisk nytte* report that led to the restructuring. The evaluation took place according to the following dimensions:

1. the geographical width/impact
2. the cost efficiency/competency utilisation, and
3. the quality of the results in terms of visibility, demand, efficiency, and impact.

In the evaluation of each institution's *nordisk nytta* outlined in the report, the individual institutions' performance in each of these three overall dimensions could be evaluated according to three evaluation parameters for *nordisk nytta*, namely:

1. the demonstrable positive impact,
2. whether and to which degree Nordic cohesion was manifested or developed, and
3. whether and to which degree there was an increase in Nordic competences and competitiveness.^[126]

Finally, the project group outlined more specific criteria linking each of the dimensions with each of the evaluation parameters, thereby forming the basis for a series of analytical questions to support its evaluation of the individual institutions.

The report led to the termination of 13 Nordic institutions and a shift towards a stronger emphasis on temporary project funding vis-à-vis basic funding for permanent Nordic institutions.^[127] The terminated institutions were not unequivocally the ones scoring lowest on the report's scale of *nordisk nytta*, however,^[128] just as the working group did not always recommend termination of the low-scoring institutions (but often recommended reforming their operations or opting for different forms of institutional ownership or funding).^[129]

From the early-to-mid 2000s onwards, *nordisk nytta* was frequently cited in official documents describing and outlining the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers. In English-language documents, terms such as added value, benefit, advantage, and synergy were frequently cited, seemingly not according to any set principles.

As had been the case in the mid-1990s, *nordisk nytta* was often used to describe the perceived essence of Nordic co-operation in the early 2000s, and to rhetorically delimit the areas where official Nordic co-operation was believed to be most useful or most cost-efficient in a changing international context. In the Danish presidency programme for 2005, for example, *nordisk nytta* was used to legitimise the concurrent reform of the Nordic Council of Ministers. For the future of Nordic co-operation, it was stated that it was decisive that political results could be delivered "for the benefit [*gavn*] of the citizens of the Nordic countries." Notably, "renewal" and "*nordisk nytte*" were described as "key words in the presidency programme for 2005," with the invocation that "Nordic cooperation must be result-oriented, politically relevant and must not drown in bureaucracy and technocracy!"^[130] Likewise, in the foreword of a joint annual report from that year, the Director of the Nordic Council and the Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers stated that:

”

The reform process will now continue down a path designed to pursue the benefits that Nordic co-operation offers, while bearing in mind that co-operation must be seen in a wider European and international context than has previously been the case.^[131]

Nonetheless, a reform report from 2008 relayed a sense among some – if not all – officials in the ministerial councils who saw the political added value of the ministerial councils as being limited.^[132]

Yet, notions of *nytta* and *mervärde* have also been frequently cited outside of reform contexts. While “Nordic added value” has not been used as a standardised term in the presidency programmes of the Nordic Council of Ministers, the visions, ambitions, and proposed projects of the presidencies have consistently been motivated with reference to terms and phrases such as the added value of Nordic co-operation, Nordic synergy, the potential Nordic benefit or mutual benefits, etc. When it comes to the notion of added value, the following snippets from the English-language versions of the annual programmes offer a representative selection (in the Scandinavian-language versions of the presidency programmes, *nordiskt mervärde* in its different Scandinavian forms is used as the equivalent in most of the examples cited below):

- “the added value that comes about through co-operation” (2007)
- “so that Nordic co-operation continues to generate added value for our citizens” (2010)
- “it is important to identify projects that will generate real added value” (2011)
- “prioritise projects which create Nordic value-added for the environment and society” (2014)
- “it is crucial that we continue to generate real added value and come up with tangible solutions to new challenges as they arise” (2015)
- “at the EU level the Nordic countries can assess in what area Nordic co-operation on water resources delivers added value with a view to ongoing work and national implementation” (2016)
- “generates considerable added value in terms of raising the profile of the region” (2017)
- “four projects will be launched [...] in areas where we see a clear added value of stepping up Nordic co-operation and exchange of experiences” (2018), and
- “the projects [...] are based on the principle that Nordic co-operation can add value beyond what each country has to offer individually” (2019).

In the presidency programmes, notions related to added value have frequently been used in relation to Nordic co-operation in general, but have increasingly been cited in reference to outcomes of specific or envisioned projects outlined in the programmes, especially from 2014 onwards. In the programmes, the policy areas involved have related in particular to environmental issues, socio-political issues, and the region’s international profile.

In the course of the 2010s, the international profile of the Nordic region was referred to as an additional parameter for *nordisk nytta* to the three outlined in the 1995 report, namely that the *nordisk nytta* of an activity also depended on whether it strengthened Nordic influence internationally.^[133] In a vision outlined for the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2014 entitled *Together we are stronger*, it was similarly asserted that Nordic co-operation needed to have a clear profile in relation to the rest of the world "so that the value of the Nordic identity is fully utilised," while it was similarly argued that it was both "in inter-Nordic and international affairs" that Nordic co-operation had to "generate Nordic synergies, add value for all and lead to tangible political results."^[134]

Also in 2014, the *Nyt Norden* reform process involved a conscious operationalisation of the concept of Nordic added value. According to the then-Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers, the desire for reform of what was perceived as an inflexible and bureaucratic organisation came from an assumption that the "*nordisk nytta*, the *mervärde* of working together" could be increased. For that purpose, attempts were made to operationalise *nordisk nytta* – already present in the organisation as "a kind of slogan" – in order to "offer a sharpened tool, but also to offer a more political agenda as a menu for the politicians, so that they could see the possibilities to a greater extent and exploit those opportunities based on the political considerations made internally in their own country and in the Nordics." As part of broader initiatives to make the Nordic Council of Ministers more politically relevant, there were also efforts to transform Nordic added value from a slogan into an operationalizable concept that could guide "more practical, [or] sometimes less practical reform work, but with a clear ambition to lift more politics into Nordic co-operation, raise the political ambitions, and get the governments to exploit the political opportunities" of Nordic co-operation.^[135]

In the Secretary General's *Nyt Norden* reform report, 39 reform recommendations were outlined for the Nordic Council of Ministers and presented to the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation. Six of these recommendations were specifically aimed at achieving more *nordisk nytte* from the projects and programmes of the Nordic Council of Ministers and all were approved by the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation. These recommendations were to:

- fund fewer but bigger projects,
- spend less of the Secretariat's resources on project and programme administration (and more on serving ministerial councils and committees of officials),
- adjust programme funding so as to extend it according to more streamlined criteria,
- streamline the contracting, follow-up, and reporting of funding,
- create guidelines for evaluating programme funding, and
- develop an Open Access-compliant project portal for the projects and programmes of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The suggested recommendations can furthermore be seen as interlinked with the remainder of the report's recommendations, which revolved around focusing more on strategy and politics, creating a new Nordic budget, building a more efficient Secretariat, and ensuring the better management of the institutions under the Nordic Council of Ministers.^[136] It was argued that it was important to "secure good *nordisk nytte* from the resources used in the Nordic institutions on everything from research and culture to the management of common genetic resources," and that the management of the institutions should be simplified and made more transparent "so that the owners can secure the *nordiske nytte*." As has been discussed in Chapter 3 of this report, this marked the introduction of the Nordic added value concept in many of the institutions under the Nordic Council of Ministers, as their contributions to Nordic added value/*nordisk nytta* became central criteria in grant letters and annual reports.

Somewhat tellingly, the need for efficiency and simplification was linked to 2014 budget cuts for Nordic co-operation almost in the same breath, making it evident that twenty years after its first appearance, the invocation of the concept of *nordisk nytta* was still closely tied to cost-cutting measures.^[137]

In February 2016, the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation tasked the Secretary General with further reforming Nordic co-operation with the stated aim of making it more flexible, relevant, and driven by political demand.^[138] Among other things, the report positioned Nordic co-operation and its need for flexibility and demand-driven results in the context of the 2015 refugee crisis, the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea, the EU's legitimacy crisis, as well as the growing international interest in the Nordic region.^[139]

While not directly framed as part of the desired outcomes of reform efforts as in the 2014 report, *nordisk nytta* made appearances throughout the 2016 report as well. Interestingly, it was presented as having constituted the overall principle for deciding on which areas to focus the efforts of Nordic co-operation since the establishment of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1971, namely "the areas where the countries obtain greater advantages by working together than by working separately." What constituted those areas, it was argued, changed with shifting global circumstances and with the Nordic government's shifting priorities and positions – for example in relation to the European Union.^[140] In this interpretation, then, *nordisk nytta* appears as a core prioritisation principle, adaptable to different circumstances and particularly well-suited as a guiding principle for a flexible and demand-driven organisation.

Moreover, *nordisk nytta* was imbued with a specific international dimension also in the 2016 report. One focus point cited efforts to obtain "more *nordisk nytte* in the EU and other international arenas," including the commissioning of an inter-sectorial EU working group in the Secretariat as part of an initiative to qualify the

Secretariat in respect of EU matters, and to further Nordic co-ordination, visibility, and influence in the EU to "achieve more *nordisk nytte* in relation to the EU." Other international organisations were deemed relevant arenas for such Nordic promotion and co-ordination as well.^[141]

The "concept of *nordisk nytte*" was also addressed in the Nordic Council of Ministers' handbook for projects from 2018. Here, it was argued that in order for projects to have *nordisk nytta*, they must align with the Nordic Council of Ministers' prevailing strategies, while being "able to contribute either to a *borderless* Norden, an *innovative* Norden, a *visible* Norden or an *outward-oriented* Norden," with reference to the four main pillars of the *Together we are stronger* vision from 2014.^[142]

Current use of Nordic added value

Today, the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers describes its purpose as helping to "achieve results that add value and raise the profile of the Nordic Region at home and abroad,"^[143] a formulation that was first implemented following vision discussions with the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation in 2013.^[144]

Likewise, the Nordic Council of Ministers describes the projects' provision of "added value to the Nordic countries, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland" as being its "most important criterion" for project funding. While the projects funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers transcend many policy areas, funded projects are supposed to share two commonalities: that they possess Nordic added value and that they relate to Vision 2030.^[145] This is also reflected in the conditions that projects funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers must fulfil, namely:

- Connecting to the strategic platforms of the Nordic Council of Ministers, first and foremost Vision 2030.
- Including three Nordic countries, or alternatively two Nordic countries and one or more countries from outside the region.
- Help to add Nordic value, defined as:
 - the project is a collaborative effort between the Nordic countries, and
 - the outcomes benefit the Nordic countries.
- Having a policy for cross-sectorial perspectives, namely sustainable development, gender equality, and a children's right and youth perspective.^[146]

As with earlier definitions, geographical breadth is included as a foundational feature in the definition of Nordic added value in the current project funding guidelines, further concretised here in the conditions as requiring participants from three Nordic countries (or two Nordic countries and at least one non-Nordic

country). Still, the overall definition of Nordic added value is rather broad, allowing for a wide range of possible interpretations, depending on what outcomes are deemed to “benefit” the Nordic countries. The conditions in their entirety suggest that what is deemed beneficial to the Nordic countries is closely related to Vision 2030 as well as other strategic priorities outlined politically through the ministerial councils and the inter-sectoral strategies on sustainability, gender equality, and children and young people.

The central role of Nordic added value (*nordisk nytta* in the Scandinavian-language versions) in the project guidelines is mirrored in its prominence in most of the grant letters outlining the relationship between the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic institutions under its umbrella. Here, the institutions are typically required to outline the *nordisk nytta* of their overall operations, as well as for the individual activities they are facilitating.^[147]

Like the project guidelines, the most current presidency programme for the Nordic Council of Ministers, outlining the priorities for the Swedish presidency in 2024, links Nordic added value and Vision 2030. Using “Nordic synergy” as the English-language equivalent to *nordisk nytta*, it is stated in the introduction of the programme that the Swedish presidency will work towards drawing up an “action plan” that contains “clear objectives and priorities, effective working methods and measures that generate clear Nordic synergy and help realise the vision” as they work on a joint overall action plan for 2025 to 2030 to be tabled for adoption by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2024.^[148] Likewise, the presidency programme describes co-operation efforts relating to the bio-economy and sustainable food systems as “a strategically important area and one in which Nordic co-operation can provide significant added value” (*mervärde* in the Swedish version).^[149]

Meanings of Nordic added value

It is worth noting that the 2024 presidency programme links Nordic added value and sustainability under the section heading “a competitive Nordic region.” This section heading has appeared along with “a green Nordic region” and “a socially sustainable Nordic region” in all presidency programmes since 2020 in direct reference to the strategic priorities of Vision 2030. In these programmes, notions of “benefit” (usually *nytta/nytte* in the Scandinavian language versions) and “value” (*värde/værdi* in the Scandinavian-language versions) mostly figure in the sections outlining visions for a competitive region, although quite often, as in the example cited above, in reference to sustainability and so-called “green growth,” where it is suggested that the Nordic region either possesses or should aim to develop a competitive edge. Hence, while sustainability has clearly emerged as a central theme in relation to Nordic added value in the presidential programmes not just since the launch of the vision but over the last decade or so, it has often been from a clearly economic perspective. This would seem to suggest that notions related to

Nordic added value, *nordisk nytta*, *nordiskt mervärde*, and other variations of the concept in both Scandinavian and English today carry largely economic connotations when used to outline visions for inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation at the political level.

Moreover, the organisation of the presidential programmes to align them with the strategic priorities of Vision 2030 reflects the importance attached to aligning the Nordic Council of Ministers' efforts to those priorities. This is also evident in the Nordic Council of Ministers' self-description, which holds that the organisation's efforts should seek to serve the priorities outlined in the prime ministers' vision for 2030.^[150]

While the vision makes no specific mention of Nordic added value, it is evidently envisioned to play a central role in the pursuit of the strategic priorities outlined in Vision 2030. Indeed, one official at the Secretariat stated in an interview conducted for this report that, after the emergence of the vision in 2019, focus in the Nordic Council of Ministers shifted from what they termed "Nordic identity" towards *nordisk nytta* – stressing that while identity-building still had an important role to play in the Nordic Council of Ministers, there was now a desire for a keener focus on delivering results, with *nordisk nytta* playing a key role as a prioritisation tool.^[151] A former employee also highlighted the definition of *nordisk nytta* as embodying a discussion in the organisation between perspectives emphasising the role of Nordic co-operation in Nordic identity building vis-à-vis societal development in the Nordic countries that took place around the time the vision was adopted.^[152]

As we have seen above, the process towards creating a tool for the prioritisation of projects in the Nordic portfolio and for leveraging political relevance out of Nordic added value was already initiated during the reforms of the mid-2010s. This process seems to have intensified with the adoption of Vision 2030. As such, Nordic added value and *nordisk nytta* are, practically speaking, used as prioritisation tools in regard to very different policy areas and sectors of Nordic co-operation. Moreover, the Secretariat official argued that a greater focus on *nordisk nytta* would help bolster the legitimacy of Nordic co-operation vis-à-vis politicians, and ultimately taxpayers, while enabling the Secretariat to pursue the agenda on issues relating to Vision 2030 rather than just facilitating meetings or keeping existing projects running.^[153] It seems, then, that Nordic added value is being envisioned as a tool for pursuing politically defined strategic priorities rather than as a vision or ideal for Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation on its own.

Yet, it is clear from the interviews conducted for this report that what Nordic added value means beyond its potential as an operationalizable tool is still felt to be relatively vague, even among former and current employees who have been thinking actively about how to define or operationalise it.^[154] On the one hand, added value was described in line with the definition in the current project guidelines cited above

as "what it adds to the Nordic countries on many, many criteria to solve a task together instead of separately," for example when it comes to issues relating to mobility or to issues where the individual countries are too small to address specific challenges on their own. In addition, the role that the Nordic countries could play in the world by acting together was described in the same manner.^[155]

Yet, on the other hand an official in the secretariat noted that the criteria for Nordic added value had to be further specified if it were to be useful in prioritising which projects have relevance for Nordic co-operation and create real value from a Nordic perspective.^[156]

Moreover, there is little standardisation in regard to the terms used in the organisation or how they relate to each other – including how they are translated and used in English vis-à-vis the Scandinavian languages. In the current project guidelines for the Nordic Council of Ministers quoted in the previous section, the English-language text could seem to reflect a distinction or hierarchy between Nordic added value (*mervärde*) and Nordic benefit (*nytta*), where the benefit for the Nordic countries constitutes a sub-component of the added value of a project. Yet this distinction does not appear in the Scandinavian-language translations, where *nordisk nytta* is used equivalently with Nordic added value, while *mervärde* is not used in the description of conditions at all.^[157] Indeed, the former Secretary General argued that added value or *mervärde* is perhaps more exact and operationalizable whereas *nytta* is more vague, but that no attention was paid to this semantic difference in the actual reform efforts.^[158]

In general, *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt mervärde* seem to be used almost interchangeably within the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers and in its documents. One former employer noted in an interview that "*nordisk nytta* was a term that we used 50% of the time and the other 50% of the time we talked about *nordiskt mervärde*. Both were used to an equal extent, and it was, what to say, equally unclear what they actually meant."^[159]

Offices and cultural institutions

This sub-chapter addresses the questions of the history of Nordic added value, the current use of Nordic added value, and the meanings attached to Nordic added value in selected Nordic offices and institutions that facilitate cultural exchange or that represent the Nordic Council of Ministers in the autonomous Nordic territories as well as outside of the Nordic region. The sectors and institutions addressed in this sub-chapter are:

- *[The Nordic House in Reykjavik](#)*
- *[Nordic Culture Point](#)*
- *[The Nordic offices in the Nordic autonomous territories](#), including perspectives from the Nordic House on the Faroe Islands, the Nordic Institute in Greenland, and the Nordic Institute on Åland*
- *[The Nordic Council of Ministers' offices in the Baltic countries and Northwestern Russia](#), including perspectives from the Nordic Council of Ministers' offices in Latvia and Lithuania, as well as the no-longer functioning office in Saint Petersburg.*

The Nordic House in Reykjavik

Essi Turva

The Nordic House in Reykjavik is a culture centre located just outside the city centre of the capital, nowadays accompanied by several university buildings. Its library and art exhibitions are central to its operations, and it also hosts events and rents out premises for external events. It engages in social debates through various programmes and collaborates with several other organisations. The Nordic House has many activities aimed at children and young people including a library for children. It runs the secretariat for some of the prizes of the Nordic Council: the Literature Prize, the Children and Young People's Literature Prize, and the Environment Prize. The employees come from across and outside the Nordic region.

History of the Nordic House in Reykjavik

The Nordic House in Reykjavik was the first of the Nordic cultural institutions. Its history dates back to the 1960s, making the institution older than its current overseeing body, the Nordic Council of Ministers. In the early years, there was some uncertainty as to how exactly the Nordic House would be used.^[160] The architecture provided the framework for its operations and the premises, which included a library, a café, and meeting rooms.^[161] However, the overall mission was clearer and has remained unchanged.^[162] Iceland had been under a heavy American influence since the Second World War and the purpose of the Nordic House was to act as a bridge between Icelandic and Nordic culture.^[163] The symbolic role of the institution is significant and extends to the house itself.^[164] The building was designed by a

famous Finnish architect, Alvar Aalto, and the architectural history and design has remained important for the institution. The physical building is an essential part of the institution's identity: the Nordic House in Reykjavik is both the house itself and the cultural institution.^[165]

The Nordic House has reinvented and reinterpreted its role and maintained its relevance in Iceland's culture scene,^[166] and has been described as a catalyst for Nordic co-operation and exchange between the Nordic countries and Iceland.^[167] Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Nordic House welcomed more than 100,000 visitors a year.^[168] Although the number of visitors declined during the pandemic, it has been increasing again.^[169]

Institutional history of Nordic added value

The Nordic House was evaluated in the *Nordisk nytte* report in 1995,^[170] which described it as a link between Iceland and the Nordic region. The report concluded that the level of *nordisk nytte* of the Nordic House in Reykjavik was medium to high.^[171] According to the report, the Nordic House was a well-known institution in Iceland and beyond. However, it questioned the necessity of the Nordic House being under the Nordic Council of Ministers and called for alternative funding options. According to the report, the funds of the Nordic Council of Ministers should only be spent on projects that had a "high [proportion of] Nordic content or a clear Nordic profile."^[172] The report compared the Nordic House in Reykjavik with the other Nordic houses and urged co-ordination to reduce costs. Consequently, the report implied that the Nordic House would possibly lose funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers despite being a well-established culture institution in Iceland, unless it was able to prove the significance of its Nordic dimension or to modify its activities accordingly.

The report had a significant impact, forcing the Nordic House put a considerable amount of effort into the concept of *nordisk nytte* in the late 1990s.^[173] In practice, this meant quantifying all work at the Nordic House in order to measure the *nytte* created, for which the staff compiled a wealth of statistics.^[174] In the end, the Nordic House in Reykjavik maintained its funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Although *nordisk nytta* has remained in the vocabulary of the Nordic House, its use has changed since the 1990s, while the term Nordic added value was also later introduced. Its origins as an evaluation criterion by the Nordic Council of Ministers are still evident, as *nordisk nytta* appears in texts describing the overall operations at the Nordic House or in the context of programmes initiated by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

In 2018, the Nordic House in Reykjavik celebrated its 50th anniversary. In the annual report for that year, *nordisk nytte* appeared in quotation marks and was said to be a recurring theme in all celebratory speeches.^[175] In the same context, the annual

report mentions the ability of the Nordic House to reinterpret its role and to remain relevant.

It has been pointed out that each of the Nordic cultural institutions has its own identity and there is no uniform discourse for them.^[176] The programmes must nonetheless follow the official cultural strategy, and Nordic added value has been adapted from these strategies. In the *Strategy for Nordic cultural co-operation 2013-2020*, Nordic added value was described as a "principle" according to which "the co-operation involves areas where the Nordic countries have common interests and face common challenges."^[177] In the 2021-2024 strategy, it is described as a prerequisite for Nordic co-operation on culture.^[178] According to the strategy, Nordic added value forms part of the overall goals but should also describe activities in general.

Current use of Nordic added value

Today, although *nordisk nytta* has a more implicit function than in the 1990s, there are similarities to its initial use. The concrete use of *nordisk nytta* is established as part of the institution's strategy and the reporting of its outcomes. Although there is still no single definition for the concept, some accounts exist. The grant letter, for example, describes the *nordisk nytta* of the Nordic House in Reykjavik in the following way:

”

NOREY is an arena where knowledge, creativity, and experiences from across the Nordic region converge, contributing to increased Nordic exchange, competence, and the manifestation of Nordic solidarity.^[179]

Since 2019, *nordisk nytta* has had its own, albeit brief, section in the institution's annual reports.^[180] The section describes the history of the institution and its role as a symbol for the Nordic region and Nordic co-operation.^[181] *Nordisk nytta* is mentioned as a goal:

”

As an institution, the Nordic House is familiar with its mission and strategically works to achieve the broadest nordisk nytta possible through its diverse program.^[182]

Although *nordisk nytta* appears as a goal, explicit evaluations of how or to what extent the goal has been achieved are limited in the official documents. The 2021 annual report has a short mention: "We believe that despite periods of uncertainty in 2021, we have been able to fulfil the *nordiska nyttan*."^[183] Given that COVID-19 affected the whole of society, business, and culture alike, it is notable that the Nordic House still considered *nordisk nytta* and referred to it in its reflections for the year.

Nordisk nytta is cited most explicitly in the Norden i Fokus (The Nordic Region in Focus) programme. Norden i Fokus is a programme in which the Nordic House aims to contribute to social debates by providing a Nordic perspective through information campaigns and events. The programme has been initiated by the Nordic Council of Ministers and has partners from five Nordic capitals. Norden i Fokus is described as creating *nordisk nytte* by raising awareness of Nordic co-operation and thus increasing interest in it.^[184] *Nordisk nytte* is said to have an individual dimension as well when individuals and organisations learn what added value Nordic co-operation can bring for them.^[185] The target groups include politicians, officials, collaboration partners, organisations, businesses, and media. To this end, *nordisk nytte* operates at different levels in Norden i Fokus: individual, local community, and national.^[186]

Today, the mission of the Nordic House builds on Vision 2030, which employees at the institution think is, to an extent, related to *nordisk nytta*.^[187] In interviews, mentions of *nordisk nytta* are accompanied with a reference to Vision 2030 and its goals. On the other hand, other interviewees argue that Vision 2030 has replaced the 1990s version of *nordisk nytta*, having become a tool for the same purpose.^[188] Vision 2030, too, has been associated with funding cuts in the culture sector. The Nordic House has lost a quarter of its funding in the contemporary budget period.^[189] However, this is not understood as being due to Vision 2030 itself, in which culture is generally thought to have a place. While there is now a keener focus on Vision 2030, Nordic added value has remained a funding criterion for projects.

When reporting on its activities, the institution must clarify how it has created *nordisk nytta*. Yet, *nordisk nytta* is considered to be a vague concept, even "lofty" as one interviewee put it.^[190] This underlines that while Nordic added value is used in strategy, the substance of the concept is vague and subject to interpretation. In practice today, Nordic added value is operationalised so that if the goals set out in the funding documents are reached, Nordic added value is fulfilled.

Meanings of Nordic added value

At the Nordic House, Nordic added value (most commonly referred to as the Scandinavian-language equivalent *nordisk nytta*) carries two different meanings, which have emerged over the course of almost thirty years. These relate firstly to how it is and has been used, particularly in regard to the Nordic Council of Ministers, and secondly to what the concept is thought to entail in relation to the Nordic House.

The first approach regards *nordisk nytta* as a tool by and for the Nordic Council of Ministers. The background of this approach is rooted in the 1990s reforms and the *Nordisk nytte* report from 1995. This understanding has relatively negative connotations and is associated with cuts and institutional reforms rather than budget increases. Here, Nordic added value is understood as an economic concept related to productivity, efficiency, and measurements, which in practice can be difficult to apply to cultural institutions. Indeed, an evaluation report of the Nordic houses and institutions from 2014 concluded that quantitative measures are not suitable for evaluating culture and tend to neglect the importance of quality in the long run.^[191] One employee pointed out that *nordisk nytta* is a contradictory concept since it presumes clear results while being difficult to measure as a goal and target.^[192] However, employees stress that the extensive reporting to the Nordic Council of Ministers born out of the emphasis on *nordisk nytta* has also provided useful information for the institution itself.

The ability to apply the principle of *nordisk nytta*/Nordic added value means that the Nordic House has been able to adapt to the reforms in the Nordic Council of Ministers. In this way, Nordic added value has legitimised the institution. In addition, the adaptation to thinking in terms of Nordic added value can be seen in a broader context. It has been argued that the recent institutional developments of Nordic libraries such as the Nordic House can be understood in the context of new public management – the idea that publicly funded institutions should resemble for-profit corporations especially in terms of funding and competitiveness.^[193] Therefore, the adaptation to Nordic added value and later Vision 2030 can be related to the adoption of the new public management style, signified by competitive thinking and the quantification of results.^[194]

The second approach is to understand Nordic added value more broadly and apply it so that it better fits the institution. The more recent descriptions of *nordisk nytta* imply that it is closely connected to what the Nordic House is and what it does even when the concept is not explicitly defined. One interviewee expressed the view that *nordisk nytta* permeates the work of the Nordic House at all levels.^[195] This approach allows for the interpretation that, as long as Nordic cultural co-operation takes place, it creates Nordic added value while also being something to strive for. Here, *nordisk nytta* is regarded as something intrinsic in cultural co-operation and

something that refers more generally to the relevance of Nordic co-operation. This approach emphasises the fact that culture has long been at the core of Nordic co-operation. The Nordic House sits above the local level and provides a Nordic perspective.^[196] This applies not only to culture but also to social debates.

The emphasis on the Nordic dimension does not mean exclusivity. According to employees, diversity and accessibility are important values at the Nordic House. It is acknowledged that the Nordic House is an international institution.^[197] The audience is not merely Icelandic. The institution collaborates with various international communities in Iceland, such as Baltic and Ukrainian communities. In the Nordic House, the aims of the Nordic Council of Ministers to make the Nordic brand known to international audiences has been expanded from imposing the Nordic idea on others to also integrating and actively involving non-Nordic actors.^[198] In this way, Nordic added value has an external dimension at the Nordic House, and one that relies on encounters and networks.

Although it has been acknowledged that there are multiple meanings of Nordic added value and the actors were able to discuss them fluently, the relationship between the Scandinavian terms and the English translations was a more difficult topic. The preferred Scandinavian term at the Nordic House is *nordisk nytta/nytte*. *Mervärde/merverdi* was not as familiar and reflections on its meaning were speculative, just as it does not appear with any frequency in official documents regarding the institution. One interviewee brought up that in the 1990s, *nytta* used to refer to the absolutely necessary aspects of Nordic co-operation so that it was not referring to anything extra as *mervärde* or added value suggest.^[199]

Nordic Culture Point

Essi Turva

Nordic Culture Point is a cultural institution located in Helsinki city centre with a mission to promote, strengthen, and inform about Nordic cultural co-operation. Nordic Culture Point has a special library with books in several Nordic languages, and also organises events and manages Nordic funding programmes for art and culture. The office and the library are located in the city centre and there is another venue on the Suomenlinna fortress island. Nordic Culture Point also promotes opportunities in and results of Nordic cultural co-operation.

History of Nordic Culture Point

Although the history of official Nordic cultural co-operation in Helsinki can be dated to the late 1970s, the institutional make-up has gone through several organisational changes. The predecessors of Nordic Culture Point underwent closures and mergers. The first institution was the Nordic Culture Centre, which operated from 1978 to 1996 on the Suomenlinna fortress island. The Nordic Culture Centre was evaluated in the 1995 *Nordisk nytte* report. According to the report, the institution had a low level of Nordic added value. The Nordic dimension at the Nordic Culture Centre was said to be insufficient. The organisation was not cost-effective, and the location on an island was considered a problem. The assessment recommended that the Nordic Council of Ministers stop funding the Nordic Culture Centre. The ministers for culture opposed the idea of abolishing the Nordic Culture Centre but supported reforms to downsize and streamline the institution.^[200] The Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art (NIFCA) replaced the Nordic Culture Centre on Suomenlinna in 1997. The Nordic Institute in Finland (NIFIN) was founded in Helsinki city centre in the same year. Nordic Culture Point was founded in 2007, replacing NIFCA and taking over the administration of the funding programmes. Nordic Culture Point and NIFIN merged in 2012 and the institution has since remained in its current form.^[201]

Institutional history of Nordic added value

When established in 2012, Nordic Culture Point acquired a vision and a mission.^[202] The mission was to "create space for cultural encounters in the Nordic region and beyond."^[203] The vision highlighted the unique position of the institution, which it described as an "indispensable partner for our target groups and other key actors in Nordic cultural cooperation."^[204] The high quality in the culture sector and new collaboration opportunities were also mentioned. Although the vision cited a dedication to Nordic added value – referred to as *nordisk nytte* – the more precise function of Nordic added value or its meaning were not further elaborated upon.

From 2013 to 2020, the Nordic Council of Ministers' Strategy for Culture Co-Operation served as a governing document for Nordic Culture Point.^[205] In the strategy, Nordic added value was a principle according to which common interests and challenges should drive co-operation.^[206] Nordic added value also appeared in Nordic Culture Point's own strategy. A status report in 2014 stated that Nordic Culture Point "focuses on opportunities and promotes collaboration that can contribute to developing and showcasing Nordic culture, the Nordic region, and creating *nordisk nytte*."^[207] A reference to *nordisk nytte* was provided in all areas of the strategy: Nordic Culture Point as a hub, as a programme administrator, as a creator of a profile for Nordic cultural co-operation in the Nordic region and internationally, and in the development of Nordic Culture Point as an institution.^[208] The annual report from 2014 stated that annual qualitative reporting would serve as a starting point for the effects of and political discussion about *nordisk nytte*.^[209] In its programme administration, Nordic Culture Point should demonstrate the *nordisk nytte* of the grants and gather the experiences of applicants and those who received funding. This information was said to be useful for the Nordic Council of Ministers. *Nordisk nytte* was said to be demonstrated when the results of the funding programmes were promoted.^[210]

Current use of Nordic added value

Nordic added value plays a role in the institution's mission. The section on *nordisk nytte* in the annual report from 2021 describes the history of the institution and states that the Nordic Culture Point is familiar with its mission to create *nordisk nytte*. Since 2018, *nordisk nytte* has been incorporated into recurring themes in the annual reports instead of constituting a novel topic of its own. The sections titled "We create *nordisk nytte*" highlight the institution's mission to create encounters, not just between people but also between ideas and cultures.^[211] These encounters are said to create new insights, experiences, knowledge, progress, social community, and sustainability.^[212] Mobility is described as a precondition for development and learning and as being essential for both Nordic and Baltic funding programmes. The same section highlights the successes of Nordic Culture Point as an appreciated collaboration partner and its increasing number of visitors.

According to the 2022 annual report, creating *nordisk nytte* means generating knowledge and creating networks in a Nordic, Baltic, and international framework.^[213] *Nordisk nytte* is related to the goal of Nordic cultural co-operation being inclusive and diverse. The encounters created through Nordic Culture Point are universal, regardless of language, age, occupation, or ethnic background.^[214]

The Nordic Council of Ministers' programme Norden i Fokus is also mentioned under the section on *nordisk nytte*.^[215] The programme's administration by Nordic Culture Point is said to provide *synergies* in the institution's outward-facing work. Norden i Fokus is said to improve Nordic Culture Point's opportunities to participate in social debates.^[216]

Nordic Culture Point acknowledges that it is challenging to demonstrate the direct connection between Nordic added value and the institution itself because individual projects are the key in the funding programmes.^[217] Instead, the role of Nordic added value is more explicit in the funding programmes.

Nordic added value or a “Nordic dimension” or “Nordic-Baltic dimension” are criteria in all of the funding programmes. Funding is prioritised for genuinely inter-Nordic collaboration and content, and Nordic added value [*nordisk nytta*] is contrasted with local added value [*den lokala nyttan*].^[218] In other words, projects that are not eligible for local funding are more likely to receive Nordic funding.

The funding applicants must explain how their project will contribute to Nordic added value. Nordic added value is described in the application instructions. For example, the instructions regarding Nordic added value in projects under the *Demos* programme explain that:

”

[t]he projects should contribute to the participating organisations and individual participants to forge a wider Nordic network of contacts in which they can learn from each other and gain greater knowledge of other Nordic countries and areas and their cultures and languages.^[219]

The *Norden 0-30* funding programme mentions *Nordic added benefits* as a criterion in addition to the involvement and influence of children and young people. The instructions for Nordic added benefits are the following:

”

The project seeks to promote outstanding Nordic meetings and collaborations. It is considered beneficial if the project contributes to new partnerships, long-term results, or greater interaction between young people in the Nordic countries, which they themselves consider relevant and which has a positive impact on their role in Nordic culture, politics, or society.^[220]

The interpretation can be creative. In one example of a project that received funding, *nordisk nytta* was seen in a societal context, and trust was emphasised as a cornerstone for co-operation and society. Trust was said to have “trickled down through generations, organisations and people.”^[221] In a report about *Volt*, a programme focusing on culture and language for children, the effects of the programme and *nordisk nytte* are discussed together.^[222] The projects in the *Volt* programme are described as having young participants from all over the Nordic

region, being of high quality, and addressing important themes for children and young people.^[223]

The common value system is considered useful in deciding which projects receive funding.^[224] Since Nordic added value is part of the funding criteria, it opens up possibilities for the applicants.^[225] The production of Nordic added value becomes a precondition for the projects once they enter the domain of Nordic Culture Point. This means that the final results are expected to demonstrate Nordic added value by default as well.

Meanings of Nordic added value

At Nordic Culture Point, Nordic added value is described as being achieved when cultural actors get to know other actors in the Nordic countries, get to exchange experiences, and get to learn from each other.^[226]

Individual employees at Nordic Culture Point recognise that Nordic added value can have different meanings. For example, Nordic added value can have a broader meaning when understood as a principle of solidarity or as describing the presence of a Nordic perspective.^[227] The use of Nordic added value can also be associated with Nordic identity, which can make the Nordic perspective easier to comprehend.^[228] Nordic added value can even serve as a personal motivation when it is perceived as something that is created when people meet and work together.^[229]

Nordic Culture Point uses Finnish, English, and Swedish on its website. *Mervärde* is the preferred term on the website while *nytta/nytte* appears in official documents. In one instance, Nordic Culture Point has also used "*nordiske nytteværdi*" as a term.^[230] The English terms used are Nordic added value or Nordic added benefits. All concepts are very familiar to employees, but the difference between them is not thought to be entirely clear. *Nytta* and *mervärde* are mostly used interchangeably. Their meanings overlap to an extent, and the interpretations are personal. The biggest difference seems to be the context in which they appear. This is not necessarily considered problematic because it is argued that the content matters more.^[231]

Nordisk nytta is perceived to carry a slightly more economic tone. Although it is understood in terms of learning, an essential component of it is how to recognise the benefits of collaboration and in that way creates growth.^[232] *Mervärde* has a more cultural connotation.^[233] When understood in this way, *nordiskt mervärde* is said to describe the work at Nordic Culture Point better than *nordisk nytta*.^[234]

Vision 2030 and Nordic added value are seen as connected. Nordic added value is said to be implicit in everything in Vision 2030 and as a principle that helps Nordic Culture Point implement it.^[235] Vision 2030 has brought about a keen focus on sustainability whereas previously diversity, accessibility, and equality were more important.^[236]

Some challenges in the use of Nordic added value arise from the fact that the funding programmes at Nordic Culture Point have a clear Baltic dimension. Formulating Nordic added value can be difficult for Baltic applicants who may struggle with receiving funding in the first place.^[237]

Nordic added value has mostly a social and cultural dimension at Nordic Culture Point. Although the framework is culture and art, the sharing of experiences and the creation of networks with and learning from different Nordic and Baltic actors is also seen as fundamental. Nordic Culture Point facilitates the process by administering the funding programmes for culture. At the same time, Nordic Culture Point serves as a physical hub where Nordic culture and language can be promoted through the library and various events.

The Nordic offices in the Nordic autonomous territories

Hasan Akintug

The three instances of territorial autonomy within the Nordic region – the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland – have also been incorporated into Nordic co-operation, albeit on a somewhat unequal basis with Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. The Faroe Islands and Åland have been formally involved with the Nordic Council since 1970, and Greenland since 1984. The three self-governing territories have the option to “opt into” those binding decisions in the Nordic Council of Ministers that pertain to their competences.

As three sub-state entities in Nordic co-operation, the Nordic offices in these three island communities are tasked with connecting the local culture to the broader cultural field in the Nordic region and vice versa. The office in the Faroe Islands carries the label “house,” while the offices in Greenland and Åland are defined as “institutes.” In contrast to the two institutes, the Nordic House in the Faroe Islands has a large physical presence, hosting up to 400 events per year and maintaining a large presence within the local cultural scene.

History of the Nordic offices in the autonomous territories

The Nordic Council of Ministers maintains the Nordic House in the Faroe Islands (Nordens Hus på Färöarna). The house’s existence is credited to the efforts of the Faroese politician Erlendur Patursson who expressed his desire for a “Nordic cultural house” in the Faroese parliament during the 1960s. In 1977, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Faroese government agreed to the establishment of such a house, which was opened on 8 May 1983. Although it is primarily funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers, it has some income from the Faroese government and from renting out its premises.^[238]

The Nordic Institute in Greenland (NAPA) was established in 1987. It is hosted in the cultural centre Katuaq, which was a joint project between the Nordic Council of Ministers, Nuuk Municipality, and the Greenlandic government.^[239] The Nordic Institute in Greenland has a very clear emphasis on Arctic-related issues and stresses the fact that it administers funding to support activities relating to Greenland.

Åland has participated in official Nordic co-operation since 1970. The Nordic Institute on Åland (NIPÅ) was established in 1985 after the Ålandic government struggled to convince the Nordic Council of Ministers to agree to the project. Culture is an essential component of its function. However, unlike the Greenlandic office, it does not manage any funds directly, and instead steers individuals and groups to seek funding from other Nordic funds.^[240]

Institutional history of Nordic added value

The concept of *nordisk nytte* was used during the 1990s to evaluate the use of Nordic institutions. The three offices from Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Åland were included in the *Nordisk nytte* report from 1995.^[241] All three were deemed to produce a "medium" level of *nordisk nytte* according to the report. The logic behind the utilisation of this concept was to evaluate whether or not the common Nordic foundation for these institutions furthered their cost efficiency.

The role of the Nordic House in the Faroe Islands was defined as serving "the cultural life of the Faroe Islands and to mutually link the cultural life on the islands to the rest of the Nordic region."^[242] The report notes that the office has substantial ties with other Nordic institutions and to some extent the Baltic countries.

The Nordic Institute in Greenland's role was defined as connecting "Greenland with the rest of the Nordic Region in the fields of culture, education, and research." The report also notes that the Nordic Institute in Greenland is not well known outside of Greenland and is primarily a tool for the Nordic region to gain visibility.^[243]

The Nordic Institute on Åland's purposes was stated to be "to strengthen the Ålandic cultural life and to establish and maintain ties with other Nordic countries and autonomous regions." The report notes that the office has substantial ties with other Nordic institutions and to some extent the Baltic countries. However, it also states that its visibility in relation to the Nordic region as a whole is quite modest.^[244]

It was recommended that all three institutions continue to receive basic funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers, but that they also be asked to seek funding from external institutions. In this sense, they "survived" the conclusions of the report amid budget cuts within the reform efforts of official Nordic co-operation in the 1990s.

Current use of Nordic added value

In an interview conducted for this report, an official at the Nordic House in the Faroe Islands stressed the important role that the house has in the islands' cultural scene, and that it practically functions as a media house.^[245]

In the latest (2022) annual report on the activities of the Nordic House in the Faroe Islands, the concept *nordisk nytte* is used as the heading of one subsection. This subsection cites the role of the house in "connect[ing] Norden to the Faroe Islands and the Faroe Islands to Norden and the rest of the world through culture, language, debate, information, and its physical building in Torshavn, which also reflects Nordic culture."^[246]

One official at the Nordic Institute in Greenland stressed the cultural element of the institution and its efforts to “be a part of the local cultural life, with a focus on linking the local cultures to the other Nordic cultures.” When it comes to Nordic values, the official stressed the importance of the idea of trust and how mistrust characterises the relationship between Greenland and Denmark, this being a legacy of colonialism. The interviewee also stressed an understanding of Nordic added value as being primarily linked to cultural values and not economic ones. For example, they stated that roughly 10 to 15 years ago, when anything labelled “Nordic” such as “New Nordic Cuisine” – which would be seen as inherently positive in Denmark – would automatically be a negatively charged term in Greenland due to its association with colonialism.^[247]

Although neither Nordic added value nor *nordisk nytte* is used in the institute’s 2022 annual report, the report defines its own function as “bringing Nordic culture to Greenland and Greenlandic culture to the Nordic region” with a special focus on the Arctic region and young people.^[248]

The last publicly available report at the time of writing from the Nordic Institute on Åland dates from 2021. The term “nordisk nytte” features as a heading of a subsection in which the concept is defined as being related to efforts “to inspire, develop, and unite civil society during necessary processes of change.”^[249] More specifically, the institute states that democratic values such as “self-government, equality and sustainable lifestyles” characterise the Nordic region, and that Åland could help promote such values.

Meanings of Nordic added value

The official from the Nordic House in the Faroe Islands elaborated that, for them and their function, the concept of Nordic added value reflected issues of social inclusion (such as LGBT rights) and, especially in the later years, the green transition and other issues related to Vision 2030. The official linked Nordic added value to the Scandinavian concept of *nordisk nytta* on the grounds that it was “more concrete” whereas *nordiskt mervärde* was an “add-on.”^[250]

The emphasis on LGBT rights must be understood in reference to the previous Faroese election in 2022, when the then Minister of Foreign Affairs and Culture expressed scepticism towards having a homosexual prime minister in Denmark and caused the collapse of the government. The other dimension of Nordic added value was the green transition, which also features prominently on the house’s website. The “Nordic” is constructed as a progressive and climate-conscious force against more socially conservative elements within Faroese society. In this way, the Nordic House serves both as an artistic platform and beacon for the values that the Nordic Council of Ministers wants to promote.

The official at the Nordic Institute in Greenland stated that, for them, Nordic added value is an interplay of two contradictory ideas of difference and sameness. On the one hand, the Nordic region is constructed as a relatively homogenous region, and on the other, as a region encompassing cultural diversity and interchange between cultures. The interviewee noted that while everything "Nordic" was considered universally positive in Denmark, the reception and discourse about the "Nordic" was much more negative and even regarded as inauthentic in Greenland due to the legacy of colonialism.^[251]

Greenland is an exceptional case when it comes to Nordic co-operation as the historical weight of colonialism clearly affects the work of the office and the interpretation of Nordic added value, a fact also conceded in the interview with the official at the Nordic Institute in Greenland and in the institution's annual report from 2022.^[252] Greenland is not an unambiguous part of the Nordic region and has a North American draw through its Inuit culture and the importance of Greenland to the American continental defence system.

The official on Åland stressed that the concept of Nordic added value was based on identity. This, the official argued, was built on two points: a sense of togetherness and shared values on the one hand, and the possibility to "open doors, to inspire and create debates" based on internal differences within the region on the other.^[253] The role of culture, and cultural activity's crucial role in Nordic co-operation at large, was strongly emphasised.

The Nordic offices in the Baltic countries and Northwestern Russia

Frederik Forrai Ørskov

The Nordic Council of Ministers currently has three offices in Estonia (Tallinn, Tartu, and Narva), one in Latvia (Riga), and one in Lithuania (Vilnius). Formerly, the Nordic Council of Ministers ran two offices in Northwestern Russia as well (Saint Petersburg and Kaliningrad). The offices in the Nordic neighbourhood areas are tasked with facilitating and developing co-operation between Nordic and local actors, including NGOs, businesses, cultural actors, and public administrators. They advise on funding opportunities, administer grants, facilitate events and activities, and are meant to be "exponents of everything 'Nordic'."^[254]

The changing geopolitical realities around the Baltic Sea over the last decade have impacted the offices directly and indirectly. This has most notably been the case in relation to Russia following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Russian government's designation of the offices as "foreign agents," and the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, developments that led the Nordic Council of Ministers to terminate its activities in Kaliningrad and Saint Petersburg.^[255] Simultaneously, the Baltic offices have adapted to increasingly include Ukrainian partners when relevant.^[256] Moreover, the Nordic Council of Ministers has been involved in projects aimed at the development of democracy and civic society in Belarus since the mid-2000s.^[257]

History of the Nordic Council of Ministers' offices in the Baltic countries and Northwestern Russia

The Nordic Council of Ministers opened information offices in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in early 1991 as the culmination of a keen interest in the Baltic countries among the institutions of Nordic co-operation during the final years of the Soviet Union, and the Nordic countries' early support of Baltic independence.^[258] The opening of the information offices in the Baltic capitals came in the wake of the 39th Session of the Nordic Council, where it was presented as part of the presidium's programme for Nordic-Baltic co-operation – with a rather modest Nordic budget to go with it, featuring mostly as a symbolic addition to funding from national governments.^[259]

The Nordic Council's information offices in the Baltic countries were initially designed to facilitate cultural co-operation and provide information about the Nordic countries, but while cultural co-operation retained a significant role in Nordic-Baltic co-operation, its initial primacy gradually gave way to emphases first on Nordic values (and societal features), then in the 2000s and into the early 2010s on economic co-operation and cultivation of the Nordic brand.^[260]

Following a major restructuring of the Nordic Council in 1995, "Norden and its neighbourhood areas," meaning the Baltic countries and Northwestern Russia, was instituted as one of the institution's three central focus areas.^[261] In this context, the first joint co-operation programme with the Baltic countries and Northwestern Russia emerged in 1994, leading to the opening of an information office in Saint Petersburg in 1995 along with a number of other co-operation initiatives in Northwestern Russia.^[262] In 2005, a new office was opened in Kaliningrad, and from around 2007, the offices in Russia engaged more actively with local partners, facilitating activities that were deemed beneficial to Nordic interests or which aimed to connect Russian and Nordic institutions and individuals in a range of spheres.^[263]

After the Baltic countries' accession to the EU in 2004, the guidelines for the Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation with the Baltic countries for 2006 to 2008 addressed a shift over time from Nordic support and aid to "co-operation between eight states on an equal basis," with the result being an introduction of joint financing for Nordic-Baltic co-operation projects.^[264]

Strengthening the EU's Northern Dimension partnership and the EU's Baltic Sea strategy became central priorities in Nordic-Russian and Nordic-Baltic co-operation programmes in the late 2000s and in the 2010s, while EU projects within the Nordic-Baltic framework of co-operation came to constitute a larger part of the offices' work. Yet, the in-house administration of such projects was scaled down towards the end of the decade.^[265]

Institutional history of Nordic added value

Notably, the mid-1990s reform process that made "Norden and its neighbourhood areas" one of three central pillars of the Nordic Council's work also introduced the concept of Nordic added value (initially quite exclusively as *nordisk nytta*) as a key yardstick for Nordic co-operation. When, as part of the reform process, the institutions of Nordic co-operation were evaluated by a joint-Nordic working group in the 1995 *Nordisk nytte* report, more than half of all institutions stated that they were occupied with the neighbourhood areas, especially the Baltic countries. According to the report's authors, this was most likely the result of the contemporary political prioritisation of the Baltic countries, but also a cause for concern, since it implied that many organisations had moved away from their original purpose.^[266] The information offices themselves were not evaluated in the report, however.

Nordisk nytta nonetheless soon came to frame Nordic-Baltic and Nordic-Russian co-operation, obtaining a status as the leading principle to be followed at the information offices in the Baltic countries as well as in Saint Petersburg.^[267] It retained this status into the 2000s. In the Framework Programme for Co-operation with the Areas Adjacent to the Nordic Region for 2000-2002, it was

stated that "the concept of *Nordic advantage* is an overarching goal for all co-operation activities," referring to "shared Nordic values [, ...] politically relevant measures where joint implementation can yield a tangible advantage," and the promotion of the Nordic countries at a higher international level.^[268] Likewise, the contractual agreements between the Nordic Council of Ministers and individual information offices stipulated "Nordic benefit" as the central operating principle under which aims to strengthen security and stability in the region, promote, disseminate, and strengthen Nordic culture, values, and visibility as well as the market economy could all be pursued.^[269]

As Nordic-Baltic co-operation was reconceptualised as co-operation on an equal footing in the mid-2000s, the concept of Nordic benefit was expanded to reflect this. Hence, the Guidelines for the Nordic Council of Ministers' Co-Operation with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania for 2006-2008 made it clear that the new financing principles, including the termination of development aid projects, ensured that "co-operation is of mutual Nordic-Baltic benefit." The co-operation itself was seen to contain "strong intrinsic value" as it would enable further mutually beneficial future co-operation, with cultural co-operation shaping the foundations by offering the "connective tissue" of Nordic-Baltic co-operation. "Through joint Nordic-Baltic co-operation," it was argued, "the countries will achieve more than they are in a position to do separately." The environmental state of the Baltic Sea was one area where joint Nordic-Baltic responsibility was highlighted. Moreover, it was stressed that co-operation should only be pursued when representing "added value and additional worth by comparison to bilateral co-operation, regular EU/EEA co-operation and co-operation with EFTA."^[270] Likewise, the guidelines for 2009 to 2013 stated that "first and foremost, the co-operation between the NCM and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania should be a political co-operation that generates Nordic-Baltic benefit." The co-operation should strive to accomplish shared goals and build on "common values such as democracy, good governance, equality, freedom of speech and tolerance and allowing cultural co-operation, amongst other things, to serve as a link in Nordic-Baltic relationships," while allowing the Nordic and Baltic states to jointly address "the opportunities and challenges of globalisation."^[271]

Current use of Nordic added value

In the most recent and currently valid guidelines for Nordic co-operation with the Baltic countries from 2014, the expanded concept of Nordic-Baltic benefit has again given way to the concept of *nordisk nytta*, although now translated as "Nordic synergies" in the English-language version. That is, according to the guidelines, the Nordic Council of Ministers has its remit in the Baltic in "areas where Nordic synergies [*nordisk nytte* in the Scandinavian version] provide greater benefit than a bilateral approach," while its offices are tasked with playing "a key coordinating role in the implementation of joint initiatives that generate Nordic

synergies [*nordisk nytte* in the Scandinavian version]."^[272] Since the guidelines for Nordic-Baltic co-operation have not been changed since 2014, having been evaluated as working satisfactorily, the offices are still tasked with acting as catalysts in initiatives that create *nordisk nytta*.^[273] It should be noted, however, that a very recent NordForsk workshop with the participation of the Nordic organisations in the Baltic countries revolved around the question of added value in Baltic-Nordic research co-operation.^[274]

In interviews conducted for this report, officials from the offices expressed a high degree of familiarity and identification with the concept of Nordic added value.^[275] One official emphasised that Nordic added value is "the overarching idea behind everything we do" and a question of "being stronger together" as well as speaking with one voice politically and economically on the many aspects where the Nordics agree among themselves.^[276] Another official framed the concept as a starting point for asking both what the Nordics can contribute to and gain from specific projects, while specifying that both contributions and outcomes can be measured in different ways – money, influence, branding, policy outcomes, to mention a few – meaning that clear indicators are needed if Nordic added value is to be measured.^[277]

In more concrete terms, officials from Baltic and Russian offices alike mentioned the participation of two or more Nordic countries in the projects they facilitated as an important condition for creating Nordic added value. This "golden rule" is important, they argued, because it allowed for comparisons of best practices in the Nordic countries that are instructive for Baltic/Russian and Nordic partners alike.^[278] One official described a *modus operandi* where the Nordic office added value by "Nordicising" local events and projects by facilitating – generally well-received and appreciated – Nordic contributions rather than initiating such projects themselves.^[279]

While rarely referred to by the term Nordic added value, concepts articulating the desired outcome of joint Nordic co-operation are frequently cited in relation to the grant programmes administered by the Baltic offices. The most used terms in this regard are Nordic benefit and Nordic synergy, while objectives are often outlined that are often seen in relation to the concept of Nordic added value. The objectives of the Nordic-Baltic Mobility Program for Public Administration, for example, include: "promotion of knowledge transfer for mutual benefit"; "joint Nordic-Baltic utilisation of different EU funds and project financing"; "increase the global competitive power of the region"; and the participation of participants from three or more countries.^[280] Moreover, grants recipients are asked to qualitatively evaluate how the project benefited Nordic-Baltic co-operation.^[281] Applicants for the Grant Programme for Nordic-Baltic NGO Cooperation, in turn, are asked to outline whether the prospective project will "generate any Nordic benefits, utilise any specific Nordic competence or alternatively transfer knowledge from or to the Nordic countries" or whether there are "other arguments in support of the project

being run under the auspices under this programme and with Nordic Council of Ministers' funding."^[282] What such Nordic benefits, competences, or arguments could entail is not specified further in the application guidelines, but the purposes of the programme are outlined as follows:

- Network cooperation in prioritised areas
- Knowledge transfer for mutual benefit within different sector areas
- Experience exchange on best practices
- Capacity building within civil society.^[283]

Nordic added value, then, primarily functions as an overarching goal rather than as an operationalizable principle, although a goal that is tied to concrete practices of knowledge transfer, networking, comparisons and exchange of best practices, and similar practices of mutuality, along with branding of Nordic cultural and societal features and general representation of Nordic interests, perspectives, and values in the Baltic (and previously Northwest Russian) context.

Meanings of Nordic added value

The Nordic Council's offices in the Baltic countries and the now-defunct offices in Northwestern Russia constitute a special case among the institutions of Nordic co-operation since they are located and operate outside the Nordic region itself. They constitute a Nordic public diplomatic presence in a non-Nordic context with the aim of furthering Nordic interests and promoting supposedly Nordic values and perspectives to foreign audiences, often in close co-operation with the Nordic embassies. At the same time, they encourage and facilitate co-operation that involves local partners.

This context is reflected in the meanings attached to Nordic added value in the Baltic and Russian offices. Officials in the Baltic offices generally linked Nordic added value to the legitimacy of regional co-operation and the Nordic presence in the Baltic countries. According to one interviewee, the pursuit of Nordic added value at the Baltic offices is often tied to a general sense of what is seen to be good for the Nordic countries at an overarching level, while another interviewee stressed that Nordic added value is interlinked with branding – “to be seen, to be heard, to be listened to” – and with the Nordics playing an active role in the world by taking responsibility and living up to their own self-image on issues where they claim to be world-leading.^[284]

At the same time, it was argued in interviews that the basis for co-operation between the Nordic and Baltic countries, as well as between the Nordic countries and Russia, should be mutual benefit, offering an extended understanding of Nordic added value, echoing the earlier concept of Nordic-Baltic Benefit.^[285] The role of culture in Nordic-Baltic co-operation has been framed accordingly, with the co-operation guidelines from 2006 to 2008 arguing that a common cultural

understanding has also been framed as “a connective tissue of mutual Nordic-Baltic cooperation” that might aid “joint access to the development of democratic societies, respectful of human rights and with open economies.”^[286]

However, it was also noted that it should not be taken for granted that Nordic interests always align with what is beneficial from a Baltic point of view.^[287] This tension is recurring, reflecting the offices’ dual purpose as arbiters of Nordic interests as well as facilitators of Nordic-Baltic co-operation. Consequently, despite the new emphasis on mutuality in Nordic-Baltic relations implemented in the Nordic Council of Ministers’ guidelines in the mid-2000s, the offices were still tasked with serving as “exponents for all that is ‘Nordic’” [emphasis in original].^[288] This, among other things, has led critics to argue that the offices represent an asymmetric relationship in Nordic-Baltic co-operation.^[289]

In relation to this, one interviewee noted that it is somewhat challenging to sell Vision 2030 in the Baltic context, for example, even if there might be sympathy for its overall goals, since the Baltic offices, and international co-operation more broadly, is not mentioned in Vision 2030, just like the Baltic countries were not consulted during the development of the vision document.^[290] Still, officials in the Baltic offices express a clear belief that the vision is valid for their work as well, and that they are engaged in pursuing all three of the vision’s strategic priorities.^[291]

Moreover, as cultural diplomatic institutions operating outside the Nordic region, the offices in the Baltic countries and Northwestern Russian place particular emphasis on cultural and societal values, also in relation to Nordic added value. The distinction between Nordic added value and Nordic values more broadly is seemingly quite blurred. Concepts such as “Nordic benefit” and “Nordic advantage” have been linked to Nordic values in relation to co-operation with geographic areas adjacent to the Nordic region in programme documentation since the early 2000s,^[292] and this meaning has been adapted in the concept of Nordic added value as well. In other words, Nordic added value is and has been understood as Nordic values being added (promoted or transferred) to Baltic and Russian contexts, including on issues relating to democracy, gender equality and gender roles, innovation, climate, and sustainability. As part of this, the notion that the Nordic countries have a stronger voice if speaking together appears prominently. So too, however, does the fact that some of the supposedly Nordic values are regarded with scepticism in parts of the Baltic societies, such as those relating to gender and migration.^[293]

On a more practical level, Nordic added value is also linked to cost-sharing benefits the possibility of having Nordic cultural producers or exhibitions, for example, “tour” all three Baltic countries instead of just visiting one office^[294] knowledge exchange, sharing of best practices, facilitation of inter-sectoral co-operation, and division of subject areas between the different offices, for example. However, these are often although not always framed as practices that create Nordic added value by

facilitating the promotion of Nordic values. It was noted in one interview, for example, that Nordic added value could not always be created or described by the office in Saint Petersburg but would depend on exchanges that would allow Russians to observe how different gender roles are reflected in the Nordic societies, for example.^[295]

Officials at the offices generally expressed hesitance towards the feasibility of concretely measuring the Nordic added value of the work done at the offices.^[296] The scepticism about the feasibility – or even desirability – of measuring Nordic added value might be related to Nordic added value particularly often being understood in relation to cultural and societal values in the Baltic and Russian offices. Values and attitudes are generally difficult to quantify, while it is seldom possible to know when and to what extent results for certain parameters in the Baltic countries can be attributed to Nordic efforts, such as in relation to major societal issues like sustainability where Nordic efforts are one of many factors potentially driving change.^[297]

Finally, officials in the Baltic offices also linked Nordic added value to geopolitics and security issues. Such issues are formally outside the remit of Nordic co-operation but still frame the context in which the offices operate, and which have changed drastically over the course of the last decade. According to one official, Finland joining NATO was perceived as adding value to Nordic-Baltic co-operation in the local context,^[298] while another official highlighted that “co-operation that includes the Baltics is of *mervärde* or *nytta* for the Nordics” since the Nordic and Baltic countries are all small countries with an interest in joining forces.^[299]

Research and innovation

This sub-chapter addresses the questions of the history of Nordic added value, the current use of Nordic added value, and the meanings attached to Nordic added value in selected Nordic institutions conducting or facilitating research and/or innovation. The institutions addressed in this sub-chapter are:

- [The Nordic Welfare Centre](#)
- [Nordregio](#)
- [NordForsk](#)
- [Nordic Energy Research](#)
- [Nordic Innovation](#)

Nordic Welfare Centre

Emilia Berg

The Nordic Welfare Centre is an official institution under the Nordic Council of Ministers for Social and Health Affairs (MR-S) and serves as a platform for Nordic co-operation in the social affairs and health sector. It is responsible for collaboration on health and social affairs, as well as some cross-sector initiatives. It currently has a total of 27 employees at two offices in Stockholm and Helsinki. While the institution mainly operates in Scandinavian languages, English is also utilized in its day-to-day activities. By gathering and sharing knowledge on welfare issues, the institution aims to offer stronger instruments for policymaking as well as tools for promoting health and well-being. The institution's focus areas include public health, disability, the integration of refugees and migrants, as well as welfare policy covering children and young people, the elderly, and welfare technology. The aim of the institution is to contribute to the development of welfare initiatives in the Nordic region, and to contribute knowledge that might serve as the foundation for political decisions at the national, regional, and local levels.

History of Nordic Welfare Centre

Although Nordic welfare co-operation has deep historical roots originating in the late 19th century, socio-political co-operation only became integral to the Nordic region in the post-war period.^[300] Since then, it has been fundamental to the region's identity as it has been intertwined with the development of extensive welfare states and the Nordic welfare model.^[301] The foundations of the Nordic Welfare Centre date back to the period between the 1960s and 1980s, during which various Nordic institutions dedicated to the welfare sector were established.^[302]

The Nordic Welfare Centre was formally established in 2009, following a comprehensive reform initiative that involved organisational restructuring and mergers within official Nordic co-operation in the social affairs and health sector.^[303]

Institutional history of Nordic added value

Prior to the establishment of the Nordic Welfare Centre, the concept of *nordisk nytta* was discussed in the framework of assessment processes of the Nordic institutions in the social affairs and health sector. Following the general reform report for official Nordic co-operation by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council in 1995, in 2003 the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Health and Social Affairs (EK-S) decided to conduct an analysis of the sector's institutions, with an emphasis on an administrative-economic perspective.^[304] The assessment, conducted by an external evaluator, covered the six institutions within the scope of EK-S, as well as two institutions in the labour market and gender equality sectors. The assessment did not so much concern the institutions' activities in great detail, rather it sought ways to simplify management and administration, and looked at the level of engagement and competence found within the framework of the institutions. The concept *nordisk nytta* was linked to the co-operation outcomes and was described as the starting point for all Nordic activities. Furthermore, the external evaluator described *nordisk nytta* as relating to activities that would not be done otherwise, or that would be better done as part of Nordic co-operation.^[305]

The 2003 evaluation was followed by another assessment commissioned by EK-S, this time reviewing and evaluating the substance of the six institutions and the two collaborative bodies that operated in the social affairs and health policy area.^[306] Also conducted by an external expert, the review aimed to ensure greater efficiency and more targeted efforts in the priority areas within the policy sector.^[307] In this context, the concept of *nordisk nytta* was mentioned among the reform goals. These included an aim to improve the potential of the institutions to serve as a tool for EK-S in achieving politically set goals that deliver *nordisk nytta*. In practice, the concept was linked to the effective and target-oriented use of Nordic funds, with an increased focus on the needs within social affairs and health policy, as well as *nordisk nytta*. In addition to the requirements of the concept drawn up in 1995, the external evaluator suggested adding a new dimension to the concept by proposing to connect it more clearly to the international operations of the institutions.^[308]

Following the assessments in the early 2000s and the establishment of the Nordic Welfare Centre, terms such as "benefit," "synergy," and "added value" have been discernible across numerous steering documents within the Nordic social affairs and health policy sector. For instance, the concept of "synergy" (referred to as "*nytta*" in Scandinavian-language versions of the same documents) has been a

consistent element in the co-operation programmes for health and social affairs since 2009. It has been recognised as a core principle in guiding the sector's activities, with the aim that participating countries acquire added value when addressing and solving tasks at the Nordic level. Furthermore, it has often been linked with efforts to highlight Nordic interdependence and efforts to elevate competence and competitiveness in the region.^[309]

Current use of Nordic added value

The Nordic Welfare Centre has not provided an independent definition of the concept of Nordic added value in the context of Nordic co-operation on health and social affairs. Despite this, the concept frequently features in numerous documents shaping the institution's framework and is extensively utilised as a tool in project planning, implementation, and evaluation, as well as in the institution's annual reports and other governing and steering materials.

The current use of Nordic added value has been examined within the framework of Nordic co-operation on social affairs and health policy by Emilia Berg in a master's thesis in 2023. The thesis investigated and compared the understanding of the concept by individuals working in or with Nordic co-operation within social affairs and health policy at two separate levels of formal Nordic co-operation, including those employed by the Nordic Council of Ministers and involved in the decision-making of the Nordic Welfare Centre, as well as external stakeholders participating in the many networks co-ordinated by the Nordic Welfare Centre.^[310]

From the study, it is evident that Nordic added value is employed in multiple contexts (see Table 2).^[311] It is primarily used to outline the purpose and functions of the Nordic Welfare Centre as a whole, as delineated in the 1995 report by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council, as well as the 2007 sector assessment report. Secondly, the concept denotes prerequisites and attributes that form and facilitate co-operation. For example, the existence of similar social systems across the Nordic region features as a condition for meaningful co-operation in the field of social political research. Moreover, the concept serves as a prerequisite for projects carried out at the Nordic Welfare Centre, since it is used as an evaluative criterion for receiving funding for Nordic co-operation between organisations for people with disabilities, for example. Finally, the concept may refer to potential and tangible advantages, outcomes, and achievements stemming from co-operation efforts in the sector.

Table 2 Nordic added value as a tool at the Nordic Welfare Centre.

Usage context	Explanation
Institution's mandate, development, and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General purpose of the institution, providing a framework for its goals and objectives.• Evaluation criteria for the institution, including what the institution achieves, how its operations and services function, and how they can be developed in the future.• A guide for all activities of the institution, going beyond the practical and professional co-operation results whilst taking Vision 2030 into account.
Preconditions and characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Similar social systems facilitating co-operation.• Assessment criteria for receiving funding.
Benefits, outcomes, results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Possible and concrete benefits, outcomes, and results of co-operation, such as increased knowledge, exchange of experiences, development of (new) knowledge, a broader Nordic contact network for participants, and the promotion of organisational and competence development.

Meanings of Nordic added value

Consistent with previous research on the concept of Nordic added value, the findings of Berg's study confirm that the concept is characterised by a certain degree of elasticity and ambiguity, contingent upon the perspectives of the individuals employing it. Consequently, operationalising and establishing a single definition of the concept has proven challenging. Moreover, different translations and terms such as "benefit," "synergy," and "added value" are often used interchangeably. Despite the elasticity and various terms used to describe Nordic added value, the concept of Nordic added value (*nordiskt mervärde* and *nordisk nytta*, often used interchangeably) seemed relatively familiar among participants surveyed for the study. Interestingly, the understanding of the concept among those participants who stated that they were not familiar with it was not drastically different from or inconsistent with the understanding among those who were familiar with it. This finding suggests that the concept might be (or seem) self-evident in practice, indicating that individuals involved in or engaged with Nordic co-operation might not actively pursue it or realise that added value is continuously being generated.^[312]

Looking at the deeper meanings of the concept, the results demonstrate that the concept can be understood in both symbolic and pragmatic terms, which can be instrumental in setting and achieving the desired outcomes and objectives of Nordic co-operation efforts.^[313]

Firstly, the concept is deeply rooted in symbolic and philosophical notions, intertwined with the shared background and values associated with the Nordic welfare state models. According to the findings, these shared values are not only perceived to foster cohesion, trust, and a sense of unity among the Nordic countries, but also to bolster the collective influence of the "Nordic family" in the global arena. Furthermore, it appears that the perception that the Nordic countries share common values and welfare systems facilitates co-operation and contributes to mutual understanding within the welfare sector. This reflects an understanding that Nordic co-operation is interest-driven, meaning that Nordic added value is produced for the common benefit and for every Nordic citizen.

Secondly, the concept can be understood in pragmatic terms, as a common ground that allows for the exchange and sharing of examples, practices, and experiences, whether positive or negative. Participants in both surveys and interviews highlighted that, due to the learning and inspiration that can arise out of the exchange, the Nordic countries may draw useful comparisons that can be utilised and applied in national contexts to help both individual countries and the region as a whole to develop. At the same time, this process may result in positive competition between the Nordic countries and, as a result, more useful co-operation and comparisons, creating a continuous cycle.^[314]

The results of the surveys and interviews conducted for Berg's study suggest that within Nordic co-operation on social affairs and health policy, Nordic added value is perceived more through a (socio-)political lens than an economic one. While resource pooling was mentioned in surveys, its significance stemmed less from benefits derived from economies of scale and more from the rationale that combining resources and expertise is logical given the relatively small size of the Nordic populations. This is demonstrated, for example, in efforts related to individuals with deaf-blindness or other rare conditions and diseases.

The concept of Nordic added value was also criticised among the participants in the study. Firstly, the concept was questioned for its perceived lack of substantive meaning, often being invoked in Nordic rhetoric and speeches without clear practical implications. Secondly, it was noted that its abstract nature makes it challenging to quantify or measure it. At the same time, it was argued that excessive emphasis on measurement and scrutiny of the concept can also potentially restrict the organic and diverse nature of Nordic co-operation, which, according to one of the interviewees, has historically thrived on the principle of "letting all the flowers bloom."^[315]

Nordregio

Frederik Forrai Ørskov

Nordregio is an international research centre for regional development and planning under the Nordic Council of Ministers. Nordregio is based in Stockholm and employs more than 45 people.^[316] Its strategic mandate is set out by the Nordic Council of Ministers for Regional Development and Planning (MR-R) and it defines Nordregio's role as a Nordic institute for research, policy advice, and analysis with a focus on policy-relevant research with significance for sustainable regional development and planning.^[317]

In addition to regional development, the research centre lists its core research areas as regional development, rural development, urban planning, demography, and governance, while its efforts also revolve around the development of mapping tools, GIS analysis, cross-border and comparative statistics, as well as outreach efforts. The bi-annual *State of the Nordic Region* reports feature prominently among the institution's efforts to offer knowledge of relevance to Nordic policy makers.

In addition to funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers, Nordregio gets project funding through international funding agencies and from national and regional authorities.^[318] Nordregio is an official research entity under the European Union's statistical office, Eurostat, and is involved in research activities on national, Nordic, and European levels.^[319] It has a significant proportion of non-Nordic researchers among its staff, and its official working language is English.

History of Nordregio

The decision of the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation to establish Nordregio was made in October 1996, and the institution began its operations under the Nordic Council of Ministers on 1 July 1997. Its establishment came in the wake of the 1995 reforms of the Nordic Council of Ministers and was effectively the result of a merger of three other Nordic institutions: the Nordic Institute of Regional Policy Research (NordREFO), the Nordic School of Planning (NORDPLAN), and the Nordic Group for Regional Analysis (NOGRAN). These institutions had existed since 1967, 1968, and 1979 respectively, meaning that many of the core tasks of Nordregio had already been part of the framework of Nordic co-operation for three decades.^[320]

The initial statutes for Nordregio defined the institution's tasks as developing and communicating relevant knowledge to authorities concerned with regional development and planning in the Nordic region.^[321] Nordregio's current statutes were implemented in 2014, while its goals and budget have been outlined on a yearly basis in a grant letter from the Nordic Council of Ministers since 2015.^[322]

Institutional history of Nordic added value

The notion of *nordisk nytta* was part of the process that led to the merger that established Nordregio in 1997, as the merger happened in the wake of the 1995 *Nordisk nytte* reform report which evaluated two of Nordregio's predecessor institutions, NordREFO and NORDPLAN. Both institutions were evaluated as contributing a "low" amount of *nordisk nytta*, citing, among other things, a lack of synergies on competencies, a lack of impact, and a lack of a unique profile and skillset compared to similar national institutions. For both institutions, the report recommended that the basic funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers be ceased and that the institutions be financed through project-based funding – including through EU projects – and by payment from the users of their services at the regional and national levels.^[323]

In line with the Nordic Council of Ministers' standard statutes for its subsidiary institutions, Nordregio's original statutes asserted that Nordregio should "contribute to *den nordiska nyttan* so that the activities create *nordiskt mervärde* beyond the purely technical co-operation results,"^[324] a formulation that still exists in Nordregio's current statutes following the latest revision in 2014.^[325]

Beyond those standard formulations, Nordregio addressed issues regarding added value in its English-language conceptualisation at a relatively early stage compared to most other branches of Nordic co-operation. For example, ahead of the European Commission's 2014-2020 programming period for its five Common Strategic Framework funds and the European Regional Development Fund, Nordregio was commissioned in 2012 by the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Regional Policy (EK-R) to "facilitate the selection of thematic objectives which may ensure cross-border added value in the coming programming areas involving the Nordic countries."^[326] The report operationalised "territorial added value" as a way to evaluate and prioritise programmes with Nordic involvement through what they identified as four types of territorial added value, seen as potential outcomes of territorial co-operation:

1. learning opportunities/organisational and policy learning
2. solutions to common problems
3. generating/mobilisation of critical mass
4. creation of structures for further co-operation^[327]

Tellingly, and as was the case in NordForsk and in Nordic co-operation more broadly (see Historical outline and NordForsk chapters), the report's discussion and operationalisation of the concept was with reference to the use of the term in an EU-context, here with regards to the EU's European territorial cooperation programmes. Similarly, a 2009 Nordregio working paper had already discussed the "added-value" of adopting "a macro-regional approach" to the Baltic Sea Region

with reference to a trans-European facilitation of "European added-value" into national and regional development strategies.^[328]

By the mid-2010s, Nordregio had begun to employ the term Nordic added value, such as in the institution's vision statement, in which the term featured as part of its ambitions for "visibility and outreach," namely that Nordregio was "committed to promoting Nordic added value by acting as a knowledge broker between practitioners and researchers," and by making research accessible to target groups and stakeholders.^[329] A Nordregio-authored synthesis report disseminating the work of the "Nordic working group for green growth – innovation and entrepreneurship 2013-2016", established by the Nordic Council of Ministers, discussed the "added value of Nordic cooperation for regional green growth," including the "added value of cross-border Nordic cooperation" as one of the key elements of a proposed draft vision for Nordic regional growth, allowing for a "diverse but unified and clear Nordic voice." The notion of Nordic added value was not explicitly defined in the report, but denoted the competitive advantages that might be achieved through Nordic co-operation in the green bioeconomy and the possibility to diminish Nordic weaknesses through co-operation.^[330]

In Nordregio's 2020 strategy, approved in 2016, Nordic added value was again related to sustainable development, with Nordregio's "main goal" being described as the promotion of "sustainable regional development and Nordic added value," while Nordregio was also cited as contributing to the addressing of global challenges (such as rapid demographic changes, growing societal inequalities, and climate change) and future issues facing the Nordic region by "working closely with national, regional and local stakeholders to find sustainable policy solutions and promote Nordic added value." The primary methods for achieving this were described as the production of new knowledge, methods, and tools for developing policies tailored to the specificities of the Nordic region and the identification of "growth potential" in rural and urban areas alike.^[331] In the same document, Nordic added value was also applied in the context of a so-called milestone project on cohesion and territorial development called RELOCAL, which transposed Nordic case studies and experience in regional development at a European scale. In this context, Nordic added value was construed in the sense of the Nordic countries adding value to the European context.^[332] The added value concept, which Nordregio had previously discussed with reference to its usage in the European Commission's territorial co-operation and cohesion programmes was now used to describe Nordic contributions to exactly those European policy areas.

Current use of Nordic added value

Nordregio's most recent strategy, covering the years 2021 to 2024, states that the institution "defines the contribution of its activities to the creation of Nordic added value through the facilitation of co-operation between Nordic stakeholders," while its research is described as a substantial contribution towards "Nordic cooperation

and synergies" which furthermore makes Nordic policies, experiences, and competences visible internationally.^[333] In its mission statement, Nordregio presents itself as working towards generating "Nordic synergies" through a number of objectives and principles that structure the institution's day-to-day operations. These include: the production of high-quality scientific research; the development of Nordic statistics at local, regional, and national levels; critical comparisons and identification of best practices; supporting policy makers; communicating "Nordic solutions" and comparative research within and beyond the region; and facilitating synergies between different policy sectors.^[334]

Nordic synergies, then, is a term that is often cited alongside added value when describing the value of Nordregio's work in a Nordic perspective, both as an intended overall outcome and as a working principle. It is not clear from the strategy documents that Nordic synergy and Nordic added value are conceptualised as different terms, and one interviewee did indeed report interpreting the two terms as more or less synonymous.^[335] Another interviewee defined Nordic added value as the principle that co-operation on a Nordic scale must add something extra that could not be achieved if the Nordic countries worked on their own, and that this something extra should be societally beneficial, whether as part of policy development, the improvement of democratic processes, or something else.^[336]

In the most recent of the institution's grant letters that has been made available online, from 2022, *Nordisk nytta* is, among other things, stated to be achieved by:

- facilitating co-operation between Nordic actors towards the goals for regional development related to Vision 2030,
- highlighting the added value [*mervärdet*] of Nordic co-operation in different projects and solutions through communication and outreach efforts, creating visibility within and beyond the region,
- encouraging knowledge exchange between relevant actors,
- collecting and presenting comparable data and offering an overview of developments on regional and municipal levels across the Nordic countries,
- meeting and co-operating, increasing intra-Nordic understanding and knowledge, and further developing the Nordic affinity,
- identifying common Nordic challenges and potential for Nordic co-operation to accelerate the green transition and facilitate a Nordic discussion on the issue,
- contributing to the strategic ambitions of Vision 2030, such as by providing information about opportunities related to mobility and integration and offering relevant digital services, and
- sharing knowledge and experiences relevant to the pursuit of the ambitions of Vision 2030 across the Nordic region at the local, regional, and national levels.^[337]

Knowledge exchange, the identification of best practices, comparative research, and the development of cross-regional spatial data are also aspects that were highlighted as Nordregio's particular contribution to Nordic added value in an interview with one of the institution's researchers.^[338] Likewise, a recent policy brief on Nordic co-operation on remote work and multilocality, to cite one example, highlighted differences in regional policy responses as the aspect containing "the greatest potential for Nordic added value" if subject to strengthened Nordic co-operation and "cross-Nordic learning on issues related to the regional development and planning implications of remote work."^[339]

Finally, one interviewee reflected on the difficulties of measuring Nordic added value in practice. Although Nordregio measures specific indicators relating to audience reach and conducts surveys with relevant stakeholders, for example, some of the institution's most important functions in Nordic co-operation are much more difficult to measure. These include its function as a facilitator of informal discussions and knowledge exchange between Nordic officials working in the relevant policy areas, the creation of non-hierarchical learning environments, and the development of policies in close interaction with relevant social-scientific research. In particular, Nordregio's ability to bring people together physically for informal exchanges of knowledge and experiences was highlighted as an essential element of not just Nordregio's work, but of Nordic co-operation more broadly.^[340]

Meanings of Nordic added value

While primarily working in English, the standard Scandinavian term used in the organisation as an equivalent to Nordic added value seems to be *nordisk nytta* rather than *nordiskt mervärde* although this does not seem to be based on any conscious distinction.^[341] As we have seen above, the 2022 grant letter outlining the relationship between the Nordic Council of Ministers and Nordregio utilises a mixture of Danish and Swedish. It describes the Nordic *nytte* of the institution's overall efforts as well as of each of its sub-goals. When it comes to the Nordic added value of Nordregio's activities as a whole, they are described as:

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being based on the assumption that the Nordic countries can learn from each other and create *Nordisk nytta* [capitalised in original] through research projects, which among other things are based on Nordic comparisons, field work, and quantitative and qualitative inquiries in order to lead to increased knowledge exchange and increased Nordic affinity through project groups with participants from all Nordic countries and regions.^[342]

Simultaneously, *nordiskt mervärde* appears in one of two overall performance goals outlined for the institution, which stipulates that:



Nordregio must show that the institution's research, consultancy, and analyses create *nordisk mervärde* through references to deliverables, reports, publications, projects etc. in academic contexts, and that these are used in the public sector.^[343]

In this context, *nordiskt mervärde* quite straightforwardly refers to outcomes from the institution's research and the ways in which those outcomes are being put to use in academic and public-sector contexts, whereas *nytta* links the institution's effort to values, principles, and visions that serve to legitimise Nordic co-operation more broadly. On other occasions, however, *nordisk mervärde* is used in a very similar way. For example, in the Nordic co-operation programme for regional development and planning, which Nordregio is tasked with implementing, *nordisk mervärde* is highlighted as a necessary outcome of efforts in this sector of Nordic co-operation. In this context, *nordisk mervärde* is described as being achieved by "taking up prioritised themes which affect the development of [...] Nordic cities and rural areas" and by pursuing practical, cross-border co-operation in those sectors.^[344] Moreover, *nordisk nytta* is not applied in a particularly abstract way in the grant letter. On the contrary, the descriptions of *nordisk nytta* related to the different sub-ambitions and special projects throughout the grant letter, as outlined above, are quite specific.

Nordregio's field of expertise – regional planning, and its focus on geographical and territorial comparisons and developments – as well as the integrated European dimension in both the subject and institutional framework of its research (such as through EU-funding or trans-European research partnerships), has arguably prompted Nordregio to engage early on with issues regarding cross-regional additionality. Similarly, it is not surprising that the notion of Nordic added value is quite strongly linked to cross-regional comparisons specifically and geographic/spatial dimensions of Nordic added value more broadly.

Moreover, Nordic added value at Nordregio is very clearly attached to an ambition to be relevant for policy makers and other Nordic stakeholders. Indeed, Nordregio has been highlighted as an example of a successful effort at making Nordic institutions relevant to policy makers during the reforms of the Nordic Council of Ministers and its institutions, spearheaded by the Secretariat during the 2010s.^[345]

By the same token, Nordregio seems well-positioned to engage Vision 2030's goal to work towards a sustainable and socially integrated region. Within Nordregio, the experience is that Nordic added value and the vision are closely linked and that the vision has stepped up the focus on creating Nordic added value within the institution.^[346] Moreover, sustainability and "green" developments have been linked to the concept of Nordic added value in Nordregio's strategies, projects, and policy briefs already since the mid-2010s,^[347] although the specific relationship between sustainable development and Nordic added value has not been outlined in any detail.

NordForsk

Tuire Liimatainen

NordForsk is an organisation that funds and facilitates cross-sectoral Nordic co-operation on research and research infrastructures under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers and within the responsibility of the Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research (MR-U). It supports research in the Nordic region by bringing national research groups together and enhancing the quality, impact, and efficiency of Nordic research co-operation.

NordForsk is funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the national research funding organisations in the Nordic countries. NordForsk's three primary funding instruments are research projects, Nordic Centres of Excellence, and Nordic University Hubs. It has regular calls for funding, averaging six per year. In 2022, NordForsk had a total of eight calls, with funding totalling NOK 396 million.^[348] NordForsk is based in Oslo, in the same premises as its sister organisations Nordic Energy Research and Nordic Innovation.

History of NordForsk

While collaboration within the field of research has historical roots in the Nordic region, the formalised research cooperation as seen today has its origins in the mid-2000s. In 2004, the Nordic Research and Innovation Area (NORIA) was established following a joint ministerial declaration by the Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research (MR-U) and the ministers for industry. Subsequently, new regional institutions for research co-operation were founded: the Nordic Innovation Centre (NICE) in 2004 and NordForsk in 2005. In addition to these, Nordic Energy Research (NEF) joined this field of collaboration.^[349] Since 2012, NordForsk has hosted the Nordic e-Infrastructure Collaboration (NeIC), which is a joint Nordic initiative that facilitates the development and operation of high-quality e-infrastructure solutions in areas of joint Nordic interest.^[350]

In broad terms, the establishment of formal Nordic research collaboration can be attributed to the increasingly influential role of research and knowledge as strategic assets that drive national competitiveness and economic growth in the emerging global knowledge society.^[351] More specifically, the acceleration of European integration and the introduction of the European Research Area (ERA) in 2000 can be identified as a key factor in fuelling the formalisation of Nordic research collaboration. The ERA was introduced with the aims to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economic area globally by 2010, but as a side effect it also led to a vision of an established Nordic research and innovation area.^[352] Introduced as a regional contribution to the ERA, the Nordic

research and innovation area was visioned as a tool to prioritise Nordic co-operation, enhance competitiveness in accessing EU resources, and foster the development of the Nordic region as one of the most appealing destinations worldwide for education, research, and business.^[353]

Institutional history of Nordic added value

At the time of NordForsk's establishment, Nordic co-operation was increasingly guided by the goal-oriented formulation of *nordiskt mervärde*.^[354] In the context of Nordic research collaboration, this meant that cooperation could not be prioritised solely because it was Nordic, but it was strongly linked to the aim of enhancing the quality of knowledge produced without incurring substantial costs.^[355]

In search of a guiding vision to guide the newly established research collaboration, the mid-1990s catchphrase of *nordisk nytta* was viewed as insufficient. For example, in the 2006 anthology *Nordisk styrka – perspektiv till samarbete inom forskningen* envisioning the newly established research collaboration, the concept of *nordisk nytta* was described as "paralysing", "inward-looking", and "restrictive".^[356] Instead, alternative concepts such as 'Nordic strength' (*nordisk styrka*) (and the plural 'strengths') were suggested as guiding visions for research collaboration.^[357] Consequently, these terms were used sporadically in the early years of NordForsk, with the aim of forming a more dynamic and outward-focused vision for Nordic research co-operation.^[358] Nevertheless, the notion of Nordic strengths was defined by both socio-cultural and economic values, much like the concepts of *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt mervärde*.^[359]

In the late 2000s and early 2010s, reports, strategy papers, and call texts concerning Nordic research co-operation began to prominently feature expressions such as 'added value', 'added value by Nordic research co-operation', or formulations referring to how research co-operation 'adds value'.^[360] As a concept in its own right, however, "Nordic added value" was introduced for the first time in the 2011 policy brief *Rethinking Nordic Added Value in Research*. The report, prepared by Erik Arnold from the science consultancy company Technopolis, constituted one in a series of three policy briefs aiming to describe and assess Nordic research collaboration within a European framework across research policy, strategy, and research-performing levels. The report was preceded by the new strategy for Nordic research co-operation presented by MR-U in 2011. Driven by the Nordic Council of Ministers' new globalisation agenda and the need to address significant societal challenges through research and innovation, the report aimed to enhance research collaboration, as the improvement of research-based knowledge was seen as an important basis both for fostering development and growth through various objectives. These included the further refinement of NORIA and reinforcing the central role of NordForsk.^[361]

In the report, the concept of "Nordic Added Value" (NB capitalised) was analysed in relation to the development of the European Research Area (ERA) and aligned prominently with the corresponding European concept, "European Added Value" (EAV), which also serves as the primary policy justification within ERA. The report thus demonstrates an evident harmonisation of concepts at both the Nordic and European levels instead of utilising previous translations (benefit, synergy) or other alternative terms (strength). The establishment of Nordic added value as a fixed concept is also evident in the report by the capitalisation of each of the concept's components, mirroring the spelling of the concept of European added value. Furthermore, the novel use of the abbreviation "NAV" was introduced in the report. At the same time, the report did not attempt redefining the principle of Nordic added value but instead brought together the familiar socio-cultural and economic dimensions that were also entwined with *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt mervärde*. The report also somewhat anachronistically used the term "Nordic added value" as a translation for the 1995-term *nordisk nytta* while other sources have held EAV and *nordisk nytta* as different types of concepts because they do not contain the same words in their formulations.^[362] The report further noted that a key difference between EAV and NAV was the informal dimension that was inherent in NAV, based on trust, shared history, geography and, to some extent, cultural similarity, but which was perceived to be lacking in European-level research collaboration.

Since the publication of the report in the first half of the 2010s, the English-language concept of Nordic added value was hardly touched upon within NordForsk's operations. Instead, Scandinavian terms such as *nytta*, *mervärde*, and *styrka* continued to be used as standard operational terms. They were often seen as synonymous with each other and as containing natural and self-evident meanings.^[363]

In the context of establishing a new, specifically English-language concept, it is worth remembering that NordForsk is one of the few official Nordic institutions which uses English as its official language. Consequently, it has also been noted that the English-language term "Nordic added value" seems to surface for the first time in official Nordic co-operation in the context of the research policy area, making research and innovation an important area for conceptual change.^[364]

Current use of Nordic added value

The concept of Nordic added value has been notably integrated into NordForsk's activities since 2015. It has become incorporated in strategy papers and call texts for research programmes laying emphasis on research that has a focus on areas where joint Nordic action adds value to national initiatives.^[365] Since 2018, the concept has been further integrated into the ways in which Nordic research co-operation is articulated. The same year, MR-U adopted six principles for future

Nordic research co-operation, one of which calls for a clearer focus on Nordic added value based on the priorities of the Nordic countries.^[366]

Today, Nordic added value is used as the key justification and evaluation criteria in Nordic research co-operation, and Nordic added value created through NordForsk is also increasingly communicated. As stated in the most recent strategy for 2019 to 2022, NordForsk's primary goal is to facilitate effective and trustworthy co-operation in the Nordic region that is of the highest international quality, and to deliver Nordic added value.^[367] Nordic added value is an integral part of programme preparation, implementation, and monitoring. It has become more comprehensively defined within each programme over the last few years, and illustrated through various examples of activities that generate Nordic added value. While funding decisions prioritise high scientific quality, in cases where applications are equally strong, Nordic added value can be a determining factor.^[368]

In order to clarify how NordForsk-funded projects create Nordic added value, NordForsk has devised its own definition of Nordic added value, which is the most comprehensive definition of the concept that can be currently found within official Nordic co-operation.^[369] NordForsk defines two main categories of Nordic added value, which are

1. added value generated because the research collaboration is taking place in the Nordic region; and
2. added value generated because the research can only be carried out in the Nordic region.

Under these two categories, research activities that generate added value are defined as follows:

Table 3 NordForsk definitions of added value in research

Added value generated because the research collaboration is taking place in the Nordic region	Added value generated because the research can only be carried out in the Nordic region
<p>Added value is produced when research activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• help to build critical mass and/or expertise at the Nordic level in important disciplines or research areas;• enhance cost-effectiveness by sharing infrastructure or data or harmonising systems for utilising data and other resources in the Nordic region;• lead to regional mobility and networking among the Nordic countries;• enhance scientific quality and expand the number of high-quality scientific publications through Nordic co-operation;• increase the chances of success for Nordic researchers in EU research activities or other international research co-operation;• lead to more results and stronger, quality-assured conclusions as a basis for shaping the statutory framework or rationalising and improving the public administration;• promote the creation of innovations, patents or other solutions that help to enhance industrial development and co-operation in the Nordic region.	<p>Added value is produced when research activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• build on particular strengths of Nordic researchers, and when the research is carried out by groups with unique expertise;• address needs that are unique to the Nordic countries in light of our similar social structures, institutions and institutional culture, and shared cultural heritage;• focus on, e.g., geographical, climatic, cultural, linguistic, or social phenomena in the Nordic region;• utilise data from uniquely Nordic registries.

As part of its monitoring activities of research impact, NordForsk tracks the results and effects of NordForsk-funded research including Nordic added value. NordForsk defines research impact as both academic impact and societal impact. Academic impact refers to the enhancement of scientific quality and the building of critical expertise, among others. Societal impact refers to the contribution of research to society and the economy, benefitting individuals, organisations, and individual nations. In addition, as part of project monitoring and reporting activities, NordForsk assesses how the research projects have created Nordic added value.

NordForsk currently gathers data about research impact from the reporting system Researchfish, through which NordForsk-funded projects are expected to report annually. The Nordic added value that the NordForsk-funded projects create is currently evaluated quantitatively based on the research activities presented above. NordForsk's 2023 impact report reveals that the top five contributions of Nordic added value in NordForsk-funded projects were: 1) building on particular strengths of Nordic researchers, 2) enhancing scientific quality, 3) fostering regional mobility and networking, 4) building critical mass and/or expertise, and 5) increasing chances of EU/international success.^[370] In line with this, other studies have previously also highlighted that researchers traditionally consider the primary benefit/Nordic added value of Nordic research collaboration to be centred on the establishment and maintenance of networks among researchers and research institutions, as well as the pooling of critical mass and expertise.^[371]

Meanings of Nordic added value

Despite the extensive definition, the use of Nordic added value in Nordic research collaboration has faced criticism, prompting active efforts to further define the concept. For instance, the 2022 evaluation of NordForsk, commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers and conducted by the Danish Technological Institute, notes that the concept lacks an established definition, rendering it somewhat unclear and anecdotal.^[372] The evaluation further states that the concept is not widely known among researchers, making it less easy to address the Nordic added value of research projects in both applications and reports. Consequently, the evaluation suggests redefining the concept to clearly distinguish between preconditions, and results, outcomes and benefits. As a precondition, Nordic added value would refer, for example, to the research team or the topics to be addressed, while results, outcomes and benefits would refer to the highest international quality and the development of the Nordic research environment and the Nordic countries.^[373]

To address the need for a deeper understanding of the concept, NordForsk commissioned a research report on the Nordic added value in Nordic research co-operation from the University of Helsinki's Centre for Nordic Studies (CENS) and the ReNEW university consortium. Published in 2023 and authored by Tuire Liimatainen, the report *Nordic Added Value in Nordic Research Co-operation:*

Concept and Practice examines the historical evolution of the concept within Nordic research collaboration and its present-day uses. The report is based on document analysis, interviews conducted among science advisors working in national research institutions, and a survey of NordForsk-funded researchers. The report concluded that both science experts and researchers widely perceived the concept as clear and established. At the same time, however, it stated that the term was subject to diverse interpretations and meanings, influenced by individual, disciplinary, and other contextual factors. The report identified four ways to conceptualise Nordic added value. These were:

1. **Nordic added value as a relative concept:** The perceived added value of Nordic research co-operation depends on individual and disciplinary differences, and on whether the added value is expected to be generated for the academic or societal level. Activities that generate Nordic added value can be understood as both concrete/material and abstract/immaterial.
2. **Nordic added value as a multidimensional concept:** Nordic added value refers to both a set of characteristics/preconditions that contribute to research and the contributions of research for the Nordic societies and the Nordic scientific community.
3. **Nordic added value as a relational concept:** The benefit of joint Nordic effort is defined in relation to both national and European/global levels. These different levels are not mutually exclusive, but complementary.
4. **Nordic added value as a contested concept:** Nordic added value may convey essentialising and prescriptive connotations of Nordic similarities, uniqueness, and exceptionalism.^[374]

Interviews conducted among science experts highlighted a particular dilemma in combining Nordic added value with high-quality science, given that science is rarely limited to regional borders. Thus, success was seen to hinge on both addressing Nordic needs and continuing collaboration beyond the Nordic countries. Furthermore, the interviews underscored the significance of a common language and culture in terms of efficiency, yet they also acknowledged the risks of perpetuating stereotypical notions of Nordic similarities, uniqueness, and exceptionalism. Among researchers, there was a notable emphasis on the relative nature of the concept, offering various justifications for collaboration needs, from practical benefits to societal contributions. Overall, the report demonstrates that the concept of Nordic added value is flexible, evolving, and adaptive. Consequently, the report asserted that "Nordic added value" cannot be rigidly applied as a normative standard within Nordic research co-operation or broader Nordic co-operation.

Nordic Energy Research

Tuire Liimatainen

Nordic Energy Research is the platform for co-operative energy research and analysis under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers.^[375] Its mission revolves around funding co-operative energy research and facilitating inter-governmental co-operation within the energy sector. Additionally, Nordic Energy Research plays a role in transforming research findings into innovations, aiding the commercialisation of technologies and contributing to policy development. This is primarily achieved by funding research projects and researcher mobility, along with gathering data and conducting analyses used in conjunction with strategy and policy development in the Nordic countries. In addition, Nordic Energy Research provides secretarial support to numerous working groups operating under the Nordic Council of Ministers, which serve as forums for national representatives to engage in discussions, co-ordination, and collaboration.

Nordic Energy Research's activities have a prominent European dimension as it co-ordinates Nordic co-operation within EU research programmes and energy legislation. Its primary focus lies in amplifying the Nordic voice in legislative processes, research programmes, influencing, and administration.^[376] Furthermore, collaboration with the Baltic countries is an integral part of Nordic Energy Research's activities, both through knowledge exchange and due to the geographical location of the Baltic region, which expands the possibilities for extending energy connections to Europe beyond the current Nordic pathways.^[377]

The board of Nordic Energy Research comprises authorities and ministerial representatives responsible for energy research funding from all the Nordic countries. Its funding primarily originates from national sources. Today, Nordic Energy Research's key objectives build on the Nordic Council of Ministers' Vision 2030 by supporting the development of the Nordic region into the most sustainable and integrated region in the world, with a particular emphasis on supporting the Nordic countries at the forefront of the green transition.^[378] Nordic-level energy collaboration and infrastructures have gained increased importance due to the recent geopolitical turmoil.^[379]

History of Nordic Energy Research

Collaboration between the Nordic countries in the field of energy research can be traced back to the increasing demand for knowledge and expertise in the energy sector in the aftermath of the oil crises of the 1970s. At the time, the Nordic countries had already made substantial investments in energy research on a national scale. However, there was a perceived necessity for additional investment and the vision was to attain this through increased collaboration at the Nordic

level.^[380] This initiative culminated in the establishment of the Nordic Energy Research Programme in 1985. In addition to being a response to energy security challenges, the new funding programme sought to strengthen Nordic co-operation and elevate the region's international profile in energy research.^[381]

In 1999, the programme became an independent institution under the Nordic Council of Ministers following the growing prominence of the environmental dimension in both energy policy in the Nordic countries and the Nordic Energy Research Programme. At the same time, the institution was renamed Nordic Energy Research (*Nordisk Energiforskning*).^[382]

Institutional history of Nordic added value

Based on an analysis of official Nordic Energy Research documents from the 1990s to the present day, it is evident that the principle of Nordic added value has had a clear role in the institution's operations. However, different terms and translations have been used at different times, reflecting the broader development of the concepts of Nordic co-operation.

At the turn of the millennium, the Scandinavian term *nordisk nytte* was still regularly present in Nordic Energy Research documents, and *Nordic benefit* as its common English-language equivalent.^[383] In the 2000s, references to the "added value" of Nordic co-operation began to appear in the documents. The use of this formulation is particularly prominent in the 2008 report titled *Nordic Energy Research – an evaluation of its activities*, prepared by the science consultancy company Technopolis.^[384] For example, the consistent use of expressions such as "added value", "the added value of the Nordic level", or "added value to national programmes and initiatives" can be observed throughout the report. Conceptually, however, the report employs the term "Nordic Benefit" (NB capitalisation) and indicates "Nordisk Nytte" (NB capitalisation) as its Scandinavian origin. Based on the evaluation of Nordic Energy Research, which was also included in the report, the report further states that "acting at the Nordic level should probably be seen as a complement rather than an alternative to action at the national and EU levels."^[385]

In the 2010s, both the Scandinavian concept of *nordisk merværdi* and the concept of "Nordic added value" became more common and established operational terms within the Nordic Energy Research. For example, the Nordic Energy Research Action Plan for 2010 to 2013 mentions the term *nordisk merværdi* in reference to the need to focus on those areas of research where added value can be created on a Nordic level, promoting the development of critical mass and enhancing the impact and visibility in knowledge development and dissemination.^[386] The action plan also mentions the need to build co-operation on "Nordic strengths" (*nordiske styrker*) in specific fields of energy research.^[387]

The Nordic Energy Research strategy for 2011 to 2014, however, does not use the concept of Nordic added value nor any other similar concepts. Instead, the strategy

emphasises the grand challenges of climate change as a defining factor for joint action.^[388] In contrast, the 2015-2018 strategy features the concept prominently as the first of the three core principles that guide all of Nordic Energy Research's activities and serve as the basis for the evaluation criteria for project selection (the other two principles are system perspective, i.e. actions that address system-level challenges, and policy-relevant research results). The principle of Nordic added value is explained in the strategy in a way that largely follows the mid-1990s definition of *nordisk nytta*:

- Activities should provide clear and explicit additionality to activities already supported by national or EU funding.
- Limited Nordic resources should be focused where they can make a difference.
- Activities should address uniquely Nordic challenges common to at least three countries in the region.
- Activities should enhance Nordic integration and facilitate network-building and the exchange of information.^[389]

In addition to these documents, in 2014, Nordic Energy Research also published a magazine called "Nordic Added Value" in which the concept features prominently even at the title level. The magazine presents eight cases that exemplify how Nordic research collaboration in the field of energy can generate impactful outcomes. In the magazine's preface, Hans Jørgen Koch, the former executive director of Nordic Energy Research, dissects the concept of "Nordic Added Value" (NB capitalisation) within the realm of energy co-operation. The notion of 'Nordic' is defined in regional terms, but also as a well-known regional forerunner and a benchmark for well-functioning liberalised energy markets. 'Added' is defined in reference to scale, but instead of referring to co-operation as a means of providing added value at the national level, it refers to more than the sum of its parts (thus the added value is created in co-operation itself). The term 'Value' is defined in progressive terms as research-based, new, or improved knowledge for decision-makers in business and society, as well as through the creation of unique networks among research, policymaking, and industry.^[390]

Current use of Nordic added value

Today, Nordic added value appears as an established principle that guides the activities of Nordic Energy Research. In the institution's current strategy for the period 2022 to 2024, Nordic Energy Research outlines its vision as "The Nordics as the world's most sustainable and integrated energy region."^[391] Concurrently, the institution articulates its mission as fostering "sustainability, integration, and progress through Nordic cooperation."^[392] "Nordic Added Value" (NB capitalisation) is defined in the strategy paper as one of the nine funding and research principles that guide the institution's choices and priorities. Within the framework of these

principles, Nordic added value is presented interchangeably with the expression “highest impacts” at the heading level. In the description, Nordic added value is similarly defined as the impact of joint activities, but also more notably as an evaluation tool for impact assessment. The precondition for energy research, on the other hand, is expressed through the notion of national and/or Nordic strengths:

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Our research calls should build on our national/Nordic strengths and needs to ensure effectiveness and highest impact. The call procedures should be transparent, the research focuses should be timely, at the right level of focus, and aiming at high impact. Stakeholder involvement in the procedure may enforce the engagement of the relevant applicators. Impact assessment (Nordic added value) should be given relevant priority in the evaluation of research proposals for our calls as well as in project reporting. ^[393]

While the Nordic Energy Research strategy explicitly denotes Nordic added value as a distinct principle, it is noteworthy that several other principles outlined in the strategy align with concepts previously defined as Nordic added value by other organisations, such as NordForsk. For instance, Nordic Energy Research’s principle concerning “researcher mobility, exchange, and networking” parallels NordForsk’s characterisation of regional mobility and networking among the Nordic countries as an activity that generates Nordic added value. Furthermore, Nordic Energy Research’s principle of “applied research and collaboration with the industry” identifies societal impact directly as “Nordic added value”. Additionally, the principle of “outreach”, emphasising engagement with the Nordic countries and other regions to translate research outcomes into impact, gains significance from the perspective of scale in light of Nordic Energy Research’s objective to foster a “Nordic voice” in international forums.^[394]

In current research funding calls, Nordic Energy Research utilises similar categories and examples of Nordic added value as NordForsk (e.g., building critical mass, establishing networks, sharing data etc.). Moreover, Nordic Energy Research’s calls for proposals emphasise the promotion of green growth in the Nordic countries, aligning with the Nordic Council of Ministers’ objective of making the Nordic region a sustainable and competitive region.^[395] Additionally, within Nordic Energy Research’s mobility funding call texts, there is a distinct emphasis on advancing and fostering mobility and long-term networks as a means to bring added Nordic value to national research.^[396]

Based on an interview with a representative of Nordic Energy Research, the Nordic added value principle serves self-evidently to guide co-operative efforts alongside the Vision 2030 programme. Nordic added value is prominently defined in the field

of energy co-operation through the additionality principle, whereby Nordic-level collaboration should provide something extra at the national level. The nature of this added value, however, is diverse, ranging from societal impacts that benefit every Nordic taxpayer to expediting processes. Consequently, evaluating which projects or activities generate the highest impact poses its own challenges as there is often no singular definition for Nordic added value. Instead, the meaning of this principle is acknowledged as varying across different sectors, activities, and stakeholders. Measuring impact is also experienced as challenging because effects of co-operation may only become apparent later on. Moreover, the weight assigned to different impacts may change over time, making comparison difficult.^[397]

The pressure to assess and measure the added value generated by Nordic collaboration has been acknowledged in Nordic Energy Research for years, with the interviewee noting an increasing top-down emphasis on evaluating the impacts of collaboration. In other words, the focus of evaluation is not merely on *what* is being done but on understanding *why* it is being done. Although Nordic Energy Research has conducted surveys to assess and inquire about impact, comparing and evaluating the results has proven challenging due to the diversity of measurable and assessable factors. The representative holds that surveys have not been conducted too frequently and this is an area where the institution is open to improvement and development.^[398]

When asked about the added value of Nordic collaboration in relation to European-level co-operation, added value emerges as relatively easy to identify. Based on the interview, it covers, for example, reduced administrative workload, a similar communication culture, and increased effectiveness when compared to European-level co-operation initiatives. Furthermore, Nordic collaboration is perceived as serving as a stepping stone for broader EU-level collaboration.^[399]

Meanings of Nordic added value

Based on document analysis and the interview, there have been no active debates or attempts to define the concept of Nordic added value in the field of Nordic energy research. Furthermore, the concept appears semiotically somewhat unstable within the sector, exemplified by the varying ways of spelling the term even within a single document, such as in the current strategy paper for 2022 to 2024. Concurrently, however, the concept is acknowledged as serving as a self-evident guiding principle alongside the Nordic Council of Ministers' Vision 2030 programme.

Within Nordic Energy Research, Nordic added value is primarily conceptualised as an impact that contributes value at the national level. As a consequence, the concept appears as somewhat synonymous with impact assessment and evaluation, which represents a rather narrow conceptualisation of the notion of Nordic added value. Within Nordic energy research, outcomes and results are

defined in terms of highest impact, effectiveness, and societal impact. In Nordic Energy Research's own communication, particular emphasis is also placed on economic implications of collaboration and the global competitiveness of the Nordic countries by showcasing how they collectively constitute one of the world's largest economic zones.^[400]

Within the field of Nordic energy research, the conceptualisation of Nordic added value is primarily understood as outcomes that arise from collaborating at a Nordic level, rather than, for instance, a precondition for action. Simultaneously, challenges related to the definition, assessment, and measurement of Nordic added value are associated with the varying meanings of the concept across different activities, sectors, and stakeholders, as well as contingent upon evolving perspectives on what constitutes desired impacts in different times.

Nordic Innovation

Tuire Liimatainen

Nordic Innovation is an institution under the Nordic Council of Ministers that promotes entrepreneurship, innovation, and competitiveness in Nordic businesses. Through these activities, Nordic Innovation aims to make the Nordic region a pioneer in sustainable growth. Nordic Innovation's main activity is providing funding and support for projects and programmes that stimulate innovation. Furthermore, the institution works to improve framework conditions for Nordic markets and exports.^[401]

In the period 2021 to 2024, Nordic Innovation has been promoting eight initiatives launched by the five Nordic ministers of trade and industry to support sustainable solutions, the circular economy, digitalisation, and innovation. These initiatives are: Sustainable construction; AI and data; Green mobility; Smart connectivity; Life sciences and health tech; Circular business models; Sustainable minerals; and Sustainable ocean economy.^[402] In recent years, Nordic Innovation has also endorsed four special initiatives: Nordic Innovation Houses, Nordic Scalers 2.0, Tourism in the Nordics, and Diversity and inclusion.^[403]

Nordic Innovation supports the Nordic Council of Ministers' Vision 2030 and contributes to achieving it through three innovation missions: 1) a waste-free Nordic region, 2) a pioneering region for green mobility, and 3) leading within smart and sustainable growth. Nordic Innovation is headquartered in Oslo and has an annual budget of approximately NOK 100 million.

History of Nordic Innovation

The roots of Nordic Innovation are in the Nordic Industrial Fund (*Nordisk Industrifond*), which was established in 1973 on the initiative of the Nordic Council of Ministers with the purpose of promoting the more efficient use of Nordic resources for technology and industrial development. In 2004, Nordic Industrial Fund was merged with *Nordtest*, forming the Nordic Innovation Centre (*Nordiskt innovationscenter*, NICE).^[404] In 2011, the institution changed its name to Nordic Innovation.^[405]

The priorities and operational methods of Nordic Innovation have evolved throughout its history. According to some publications exploring the 50-year history of the institution in 2023, the initial focus from the 1970s to the mid-1980s was on utilising enabling technologies in various ways. In the subsequent period leading up to the 2000s, the primary emphasis was research-based innovation projects. Since 2015, Nordic Innovation's priorities have shifted towards projects focusing on sustainability and systemic innovation.^[406]

Institutional history of Nordic added value

The emergence and establishment of the concept of Nordic added value within Nordic Innovation follow a similar trajectory to those discussed earlier concerning NordForsk and Nordic Energy Research. The solidification of the English-language term in its current form within the operations of Nordic Innovation began around the mid-2010s onwards. The term or any related terms were not used at all in the 2000s and, even in the early 2010s, the lack of terminological stability is evident. For example, between 2012 and 2015, various documents featured terms and phrases such as "Nordic add-on", "Nordic advantages", and "added value through Nordic co-operation".^[407] These expressions seem to be associated with both the results of co-operation and the idea of shared Nordic benefits, especially those mediated through the formulation "Nordic advantage".^[408]

From the late 2010s onwards, the contemporary formulation of the principle of Nordic added value became integrated into the operational terminology of Nordic Innovation. Notably, and in comparison with Nordic Energy Research, for example, the appearance of the term remains consistent, with no variation in capitalisation, and without any alternative terms presented alongside it. While there is limited material available in the Scandinavian languages, in the available material, *nordiskt mervärde* seems to be used as the general Scandinavian translation of the concept.^[409]

In Nordic Innovation's *Mini-evaluation of the Nordic Scalars Programme* report, published in 2019, the concept of Nordic added value is discussed in particular detail. The report evaluates the two-year pilot project Nordic Scalars that was conducted between 2017 and 2019. It highlights how the added value that was generated through the programme was created through the sharing of experiences, competences, skills, and networks, which brought together the various strengths and weaknesses of different Nordic countries.^[410] According to the report, Nordic Innovation defined Nordic added value as follows:

- Gaining critical mass (volume, higher quality)
- Enhancing peer learning and creating healthy competition between the Nordic scale-ups
- Exploiting Nordic brand value (visibility, attractiveness)
- Sharing competencies, skills, and funding possibilities
- Strengthening community building around scale-ups at the Nordic level^[411]

The report defines Nordic added value as primarily emerging through the Nordic-level approach, bringing added value to national-level activities.^[412] It is defined in particular through the perspective of complementarity, where different partners are brought together due to their complementary advantages.

Alongside the concept of Nordic added value, the report also briefly discusses the concept of “Nordic brand value”, which can be viewed as a concept related to Nordic added value with some overlapping meanings related to efforts to create a competitive and distinctive Nordic profile in the global arena. According to the report, stakeholders and companies participating in the Nordic Scalars programme saw Nordic brand value as particularly relevant and advantageous, such as in attracting talents and investors. The Nordic brand was perceived as esteemed and highly valued, especially among potential customers and investors outside the Nordic region, where the Nordic countries were typically seen as one unified region.^[413]

Another definition of Nordic added value can be found in Nordic Innovation’s annual report from 2021. In it, the concept is defined as follows:

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Through our diverse activities, we bring actors from the Nordic countries together, with the explicit goal of generating added value. We believe that our region can achieve more through co-creation and partnerships across borders and sectors; we call this Nordic added value.^[414]

This definition also emphasises the significance of Nordic co-operation as something that specifically generates added value in comparison to operating only at the national level. Nordic added value is further highlighted as a result of actions rather than preconditions that characterise Nordic countries or Nordic actors.

Current use of Nordic added value

At present, the notion of Nordic added value remains an important aspect in evaluating the operations of Nordic Innovation. Within Nordic Innovation, the concept of Nordic added value is prominently defined as something that adds value compared to operating at the national level. However, although the concept seems to be well-established, neither it nor activities that generate Nordic added value are detailed extensively. This applies, for example, to Nordic Innovation’s call texts, where Nordic added value is referred to generally by highlighting the added value of conducting projects at the Nordic level compared to the national level.^[415] Furthermore, some calls especially cite the sought-after project proposals as those that maximise the impact of Nordic co-operation.^[416]

An interview with a representative from Nordic Innovation confirms that the idea of bringing together complementary competencies at the Nordic level continues to be a crucial element in conceptualising Nordic added value at Nordic Innovation. Furthermore, it remains important that Nordic co-operation creates added value at

the national level and that funded projects achieve results that cannot be attained otherwise. Additionally, conceptualising Nordic added value primarily involves stepping up competencies and learning from each other. This means that merely bringing together different stakeholders is not deemed as sufficient, rather that the activities must also lead to the dissemination and application of acquired knowledge resulting in societal impact and systemic change. Central to this is the concept of economy of scale, which in this context refers to benefiting the entire region instead of just one country. This is linked with notions of achieving results more efficiently and exporting them to the rest of the region.^[417]

When asked about the relationship between the Nordic and European levels in the context of Nordic Innovation, Nordic co-operation appears relevant and to add value, especially when the results of co-operation can also be further expanded within the European system. In other words, besides being something sensible to do at the Nordic level, Nordic added value can also be something that is relevant in the bigger, international picture.^[418]

When evaluating the Nordic added value generated by the projects, quantitative analyses, such as statistical analyses, have not been conducted due to the relatively small size of Nordic Innovation's portfolio compared to national organisations, for example. Conducting such assessments after the projects have ended also requires a longer waiting time, as changes take time. Instead of focusing on tracking and evaluating the results of projects, the interviewee emphasised the importance of applying a "theory of change," which here refers to a thorough evaluation of the potential outcomes and societal impacts of the projects before funding decisions are made. This requires comprehensive expertise in the evaluation process and also a sufficient national representation in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of what is prioritised at the national level. Furthermore, this enables the Nordic countries to be brought together to jointly determine where it makes sense to work at the Nordic level.^[419]

The interview highlighted that, rather than solely focusing on the concept of Nordic added value, Nordic Innovation's current operations are substantially guided by the Nordic Council of Ministers' Vision 2030. It is seen as a cross-cutting vision for everything that happens within the framework of Nordic co-operation and thus deemed as a common denominator for all activities that are conducted under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Vision 2030 is primarily seen as something to be achieved at the societal level. For Nordic Innovation, this means that just conducting a research project or developing a new product in collaboration with a group of companies, for example, is not enough. Instead, the emphasis lies primarily on initiating processes that help to steer Nordic societies in a certain direction, as outlined by the Vision 2030 programme. This emphasis plays a key role in the implementation of programmes, how funding decisions are made, and how the added value of co-operation is assessed and conceptualised.^[420]

Meanings of Nordic added value

The examination of the use of the principle of Nordic added value within Nordic Innovation showed that there have not been any specific initiatives to define the concept within this field of co-operation, nor have there been any particularly active debates surrounding it or its use. However, compared to Nordic Energy Research, for example, the concept appears to have been established relatively quickly in the operational terminology, with no variation in spelling or parallel usage with other similar terms. Additionally, there has not reportedly been any specific challenges related to the evaluation of Nordic added value.

Within Nordic Innovation, the concept of Nordic added value primarily manifests as the outcome of collaborative efforts – as added value of joint activities. There is a strong discourse of additionality present, whereby collaboration at the Nordic level is seen as something that cannot be achieved or carried out otherwise. The concept of Nordic added value is defined primarily in relation to the national level, but it does not merely refer to co-operation between countries, rather it involves bringing together different competencies and expertise in a unique way that adds value compared to operating at the national level alone.

The interview findings highlight the key role ascribed to the ambition of societal impact in guiding Nordic Innovation's activities in close alignment with the Vision 2030 programme and its similar societal change-focused goals. Therefore, Vision 2030 seems to constitute a more significant guiding framework for Nordic Innovation's present-day activities than the principle of Nordic added value, although they remain interconnected.

Comparative analysis and findings

Frederik Forrai Ørskov and Tuire Liimatainen

This chapter has examined the historical and contemporary meanings and understandings of Nordic added value within the Nordic Council of Ministers and its subsidiary institutions across the various sectors of official Nordic co-operation. In this sub-chapter, an analytical overview is provided of the chapter's main findings. The aim is to expand upon and add detail to the different dimensions contained in a definition of the contemporary meaning of Nordic added value at the policy level, as given in Tuire Liimatainen's 2023 report *Nordic Added Value in Nordic Research Co-operation*:

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The positive effects of joint Nordic efforts that strengthen the Nordic region as a cultural and historical community, and as a locally and globally competitive and sustainable welfare society. ^[421]

A closer look at the Nordic Council of Ministers over the past three decades has shown that the Nordic added value principle has been central to the various reforms that have defined co-operation since the mid-1990s. Through these reforms, Nordic added value has increasingly become a more operationalised concept, used to streamline efforts and organisational processes across and within the institutions of Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation. The in-depth analysis conducted in this chapter regarding the various sectors of official inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation affirms that this top-down demand resonates at a practical level. Entering the 2020s, the notion of Nordic added value has entrenched itself quite prominently in different sectors as a prevalent operational framework for planning, implementing, and monitoring co-operation initiatives. At the same time, this chapter also directs attention to an alternative bottom-up understanding of Nordic added value as a concept denoting the purpose of Nordic co-operation as seen from within its individual sectors and institutions, as well as to the challenges associated with defining and operationalising the concept.

Domains of Nordic added value

This chapter's empirical analysis has demonstrated that, when applied and operationalised in the Nordic institutions, the multi-dimensional concept of Nordic added value relates in complex ways to the different sectors of Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation. From this report's analysis of interviews, documents, and research literature, it is possible to identify at least four domains of Nordic added value in Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation. These are, in a non-hierarchical order:

- Culture and identity
- Society and welfare
- Economy and innovation
- Sustainability and climate

This typology offers one heuristic framework for systematising how Nordic added value is – and has been – understood across the breadth of Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation. An overview of these four domains of Nordic added value and their different features, including potential contestations and criticisms arising from defining the legitimacy of joint Nordic action according to these specific domains, is provided in Table 4. It is meant to be a descriptive, heuristic, and schematic overview based on the interviews and documents analysed for this report as well as additional research literature.

Table 4 Domains of Nordic added value, an overview of four domains and some dimensions, characteristics, and contestations

Domains of Nordic added value:	Culture and identity	Society and welfare	Economy and innovation	Sustainability and climate
<i>Central discursive elements</i>	Culture, identity, language, creativity, commonality, peace, interactions, tradition	Nordic model, welfare state, demographics, gender equality, social equality, knowledge, innovation, social cohesion	Growth, market solutions, resource allocation, competitiveness, efficiency, innovation	Environment, climate, sustainability, green growth, green transition, sustainable social models, sustainable transitions
<i>Significance of the regional scale (vs. national but also EU-level)</i>	Regional identity, linguistic community, informal networks and interactions	Comparing and sharing statistics, data, and knowledge, pooled research populations, joint societal infrastructure	Economies of scale, benefits from scale not available at national level, bigger potential market, joint branding efforts	Shared knowledge, transnational and intra-regional problems and issues, shared solutions and investments in transition initiatives
<i>External dimensions</i>	Adding value through a stronger international voice for promoting common values, cultural diplomacy, 'Norden' as amplifier of national identities	Adding value to others through e.g. societal model, influence in adjacent regions, cultural diplomacy, 'Norden' as amplifier of national models	Economic value through brand value, creating joint trade and marketing opportunities and markets, cultural and trade diplomacy	Adding value through 'climate diplomacy', providing an example for others to follow, addressing global issues
<i>Rhetorical characteristics</i>	Often implicitly assumed ("what we do" / "what Nordic co-operation has always been")	Often visionary, offering consensus view of Nordic societies and politics	Often explicitly stated with reference to specific initiatives	Often explicitly stated with reference to specific initiatives, often visionary and solution-oriented
<i>Envisioned outcomes</i>	Strengthened preconditions for Nordic co-operation, informal ties, network, formulations of Nordic values	Ranking indicators, research results, informal ties, societal change and improvements, formulations of Nordic values and interests	Economic output, cost-efficient solutions, contribution to economic growth	Better environmental solutions, contribution to green transition, contribution to more sustainable Nordic societies
<i>Contestations and redefinitions</i>	Non-Scandinavian and indigenous cultures and languages, increasingly multi-cultural societies, English as language for intra-Nordic communication	Welfare states and the Nordic welfare state model under pressure, demographic changes, border obstacles, changing geo-political circumstances	Continued European integration, part of globalised economy vulnerable to geo-political tensions and other crises	Unsustainable energy production, potentially unequal effects of green transition
<i>Criticisms</i>	Instrumentalization of culture for political ends, risk of essentialising what it means to be 'Nordic'	Risk of Nordic exceptionalism (on societal model)	Risk of too singular focus on measurable results at the expense of less measurable outcomes	Risk of serving to greenwash Nordic image, over-estimation of Nordic climate results

Put schematically, Nordic added value refers to:

- the sense of shared values and preconditions for trust-based and informal interactions gained from and created through common cultural, linguistic, and value-based exchanges in the "culture and identity" domain;
- the commonality of societal models, the formal and informal exchange of knowledge, including the common development of solutions, infrastructure, and data on issues relating to welfare and social issues in the "society and welfare" domain;
- the additional outcomes of joint efforts gained by utilising economies of scale, cost-efficient trans-regional solutions, or the potential benefits of shared markets and brand value in the "economy and innovation" domain; and
- the necessity and possible advantages of facing common challenges and transnational issues by means of developing and investing in knowledge exchange, shared solutions, and a strong international profile in the "sustainability and climate" domain.

The different domains are interpretative frameworks available to stakeholders within the Nordic institutions and they are fundamentally linked with the different meanings that Nordic added value attains across and within the sectors of Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation. They shape the driving forces, objectives, and envisioned outcomes that guide stakeholders and their co-operation efforts. Moreover, they frame the significance of efforts being carried out at the regional (rather than the national or, to some extent, the European level) level are conceptualised. They also reflect different understandings of what is meant by "value," reflecting the enigmatic nature of value-based concepts.

The outlining of domains of Nordic added value has taken current-day Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation as a starting point. Yet, the typology also relates to the temporal layers of meaning that the concept of Nordic added value has taken on over the course of the more than three decades covered in the report. As listed above, the domains follow a rough chronology, from the 'culture and identity' and 'society and welfare' domains that have traditionally been central to Nordic co-operation, with historical roots preceding official co-operation, towards domains such as 'economy and innovation' and 'sustainability and climate' that represent more recent priorities that have emerged with force in the last 40 and 20 years, respectively.

Therefore, the domains of Nordic added value in Nordic co-operation are also related from a more abstract and long-term perspective. Most notably, the more than two-century long history of for a long time mainly civic society-based Nordic co-operation in domains related to culture and identity-building has been essential in creating and maintaining the preconditions for successful co-operation in other

domains. The same goes for the history of co-operation in the domain of society and welfare over the last century. The informal ties, common ideas about Nordic values and societies, and the strong sense of cultural community that constitute the added value of co-operation in these parts of Nordic co-operation have been seen as having a value on their own merit. At the same time, they are essential preconditions for the creation of Nordic added value in the domains prioritised more recently. In the present as well, activities relating to cultural and social co-operation will be essential for maintaining and strengthening the preconditions for co-operation in other domains, thereby ensuring that Nordic co-operation remains viable in the future and able to create Nordic added value in pursuit of strategic goals deemed politically relevant.

The four domains outlined here overlap to certain degrees and the meanings attached to Nordic added value in individual documents and institutions often relate to more than one domain at the same time. This is especially the case in the practical applications of the principle of Nordic added value. NordForsk offers one of the most pointed examples of an institution that incorporate elements from all four domains in its articulations and operationalisations of Nordic added value. The typology nonetheless offers a tool for mapping and understanding some of the different meanings attached to Nordic added value in different domains. It thereby provides a starting point for furthering cross-sectoral understanding and co-operation, and for resolving persistent tensions regarding the cross-sectoral use of Nordic added value, and thus for outlining how the different sectors of Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation can contribute to the strategic goals outlined for Nordic co-operation while maintaining and strengthening the very foundations of these efforts.

Inter-sectoral differences

The analysis presented in this chapter uncovered tensions in defining and operationalising the concept, both within and between sectors. The unacknowledged co-existence of different interpretative domains of Nordic added value, outlined above, provides one potential source for such tensions. Moreover, another fundamental tension in efforts to define Nordic added value arises from the concept's application at the policy level as a guiding vision versus its practical-level application as both the desired outcome of co-operation and a means for executing co-operation. When the findings are considered collectively, Nordic added value underscores the more symbolic dimensions of Nordic regionality, identity, and values as unique preconditions for joint action on the one hand, and the pragmatic, concrete, and assessable dimensions that give Nordic added value meaning as a tool, objective, and desirable impact of co-operation on the other.

The differences in meaning inherent in the concept also crystalize when the different sectors of Nordic co-operation are viewed in comparison. This reflects the varying significance that the various sectors attach to Nordic co-operation's

contribution to the region's culture, identity, societal developments, economic growth and, recently more prominently, efforts related to sustainability and climate. As a result, Nordic added value holds different functions across the sectors of Nordic co-operation and depending on the priorities that frame their conduct. These functions range from outlining the preconditions for joint efforts to the objectives of such efforts to functioning as an operationalizable tool for reaching such objectives.

Different regional dynamics also emerge as an important determinant of Nordic added value. Nordic added value differs when viewed from the perspectives of the autonomous regions, Nordic-Baltic co-operation, or in relation to European-level co-operation. This has, notably, led to efforts to expand the concept geographically, such as through references to Nordic-Baltic added value and similar notions. Additionally, it has prompted stakeholders within the Nordic institutions to reflect on the added value of Nordic co-operation from the vantage point of co-operation partners outside the region. Regional dynamics also have an impact on, for example, how the idea of "Nordicness" is interpreted. As the Greenlandic example shows, in some cases this is not unreservedly positive. Still, Nordic co-operation remains prominently defined in relation to the national level, as its value is still collectively defined by the capacity to deliver something more than what can be achieved through national-level actions alone.

The different institutional memories of Nordic added value within the Nordic institutions are another factor that drives the sectors' divergent interpretations of Nordic added value. The histories of some of the institutions analysed in this chapter were shaped by the mid-1990s reforms of Nordic co-operation and the associated financial cutbacks, meaning that an enduring link exists between the principle of Nordic added value and cost-cutting considerations. This is particularly pronounced within the cultural sector, while many of the institutions currently operating within the research and innovation sectors, for example, have only been introduced or become more pronounced in the institutional framework of Nordic co-operation in the last 20 years or so. The concept of Nordic added value thus reflects the histories of the various institutions in different ways, ranging from what might be characterised as more "traditional" ways of thinking Nordic co-operation, where Nordic ties and affinities are seen as a value in themselves, to more direct operationalisations of Nordic added value as a steering principle. As a result, there is a certain skew in relation to which sectors have influenced the ongoing conceptualisation of Nordic added value, as the principle has been actively operationalised and articulated in some sectors, while it has been more implicitly assumed in others. For the same reason, some sectors find it easier to adapt their tasks to the understandings of Nordic added value that are currently inscribed and institutionalised as steering principles throughout the Nordic Council of Ministers and its subsidiary institutions.

Altogether, these inter-sectoral differences point towards the co-existence of two central understandings of the function of the principle of Nordic added value within the institutions of Nordic co-operation:

1. Nordic added value as an internal driving force:
In one understanding, Nordic added value functions as an internal driving force within the individual institutions and Nordic co-operation more broadly, including in inter-parliamentary and civic society-based co-operation. As such, it serves an identity-creating function while it might also serve as personal motivation for the employees of the individual institutions. In this understanding, historical, presently existing, or potential future preconditions for close-knit Nordic co-operation are often emphasised, such as identification with a specific Nordic identity, perceived Nordic values, or a sense of belonging to Nordic cultural and linguistic communities, as well as a strong presence of intra-regional informal ties.
2. Nordic added value as an external steering principle:
In another understanding, Nordic added value is seen as an externally defined steering principle that structures the work of the individual institutions of Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation by offering targets, demands, and a set of common goals. As such, it potentially ties the institutions and their efforts more closely to the overall strategic ambitions and political goals outlined for Nordic co-operation. This understanding often refers to outcomes such as accountability, legitimacy, efficiency, political relevance, and measurability.

Overall, this chapter's analysis has demonstrated that, at the practical level, Nordic added value regularly exhibits traits of vagueness, interpretability, elasticity, ambiguity, and abstraction. However, this vagueness is not necessarily a weakness because it may simultaneously contribute to the concept's flexible, evolving, and adaptive nature.^[422]

Terminological instability

Another important issue laid bare in this chapter is the terminological and semantic instability that is present both in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers and in the institutions under its auspices. While reflecting the temporal layers and evolving linguistic practices of Nordic co-operation, terminological ambiguities also contribute to the enigmatic character of Nordic added value.

As highlighted throughout the analysis, the Nordic terms *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt mervärde*, with their numerous English translations, have been used for several decades now, whereas in the 2010s the English formulation Nordic added value has increasingly become standard in the language of Nordic co-operation. This terminological stabilisation has taken place in reference to European-level co-operation and its conceptual particularities. At the same time, Scandinavian-language terms continue to be used alongside the English-language Nordic added

value, with what appears to be varying levels of familiarity among employees in the Nordic institutions. Some view these terms as synonymous with each other, while others draw conceptual hierarchies between them a distinction that is blurred when the English term Nordic added value is used. In such cases, *nordisk nytta* is typically defined in terms of values, core activities, identity, and vision, while *nordiskt mervärde* more often tends to evoke images of tangible results and economic drivers. However, this is far from always the case, and this chapter has shown that the terms are also open to reverse interpretations. This observation underscores the importance of paying attention both to individual and sector-specific differences.

Terminological instability is also indicated by the different spellings and variation in application of leading capitals for the English term Nordic added value (Nordic value-added being a relatively frequent variant) and the occasional introduction of new terms within individual sectors (such as, for example, *nordisk nytteværdi*).

Evaluation of Nordic added value

Due to the many ambiguities and dimensions inherent in the Nordic added value concept, the question of defining and evaluating the concept also emerges as a complex issue. The analysis in this chapter reveals both reluctant and positive attitudes towards the development of methods for assessing Nordic added value. Underlying these differing reactions were the different understandings and applications of the concept discussed above.

This is particularly the case in sectors where co-operation is framed by cultural and societal values that are considered abstract and difficult to measure or evaluate, or in institutions where Nordic added value is seen as an overarching *raison d'être* rather than as a specific measurable outcome. In some sectors, a temporal perspective was also highlighted as a point of consideration, noting that the effects of specific efforts are often only visible over a long period of time. This makes measurement and comparison difficult because the priorities for action also change over time.

Some institutions of Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation already use a variety of methods, such as surveys and reporting tools, to assess and measure the impact of the activities they facilitate. The importance of upfront evaluation and careful assessment of potential outcomes and societal impacts beforehand was also stressed. At the same time, however, the challenge of assessing the deeper function and purpose of co-operation efforts persists.

Nordic added value or Vision 2030?

The principle of Nordic added value is not mentioned in the Nordic prime ministers' Vision 2030 document, which posits that the Nordic region should be most integrated and sustainable region in the world by 2030. Yet, in practice, the findings of this chapter imply that Nordic added value and Vision 2030 are generally – if not always – seen as interlinked visions for present-day Nordic co-operation by actors working within the institutions of inter-ministerial co-operation. Instead of regarding Vision 2030 as a programme that has replaced the principle of Nordic added value, stakeholders in the Nordic institutions generally see both Vision 2030 and Nordic added value as important foundations for outlining the targets for the contribution of Nordic co-operation. The focus varies across different sectors, however. An overall development nonetheless seems to be that Nordic added value is increasingly fulfilling the function of a practical instrument that steers co-operation in various specialised sectors following the implementation of Vision 2030, rather than being an aim that guides formal co-operation in its own right.

Vision 2030 has undeniably shifted the orientation of Nordic co-operation, and therefore also what is commonly perceived to constitute Nordic added value. Traditional efforts in the fields of culture, society, and the economy play into the ambition of creating a more integrated region in different ways. However, Nordic co-operation is now also directed towards efforts in the fields of sustainability and climate (as well as, increasingly, defence and security), which are more recent focus areas in inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation. With the greater emphasis on the societal and environmental impact of the Vision 2030 programme, the meaning of Nordic added value is becoming increasingly associated with evaluations of the outcome or impact of joint action rather than on the preconditions for successful co-operation through cultural, linguistic, and societal regional integration.

Summary

This chapter has delved into the historical and contemporary interpretations of the principle of Nordic added value within the Nordic Council of Ministers and across various sectors of Nordic co-operation. The chapter found that Nordic added value operates across different key domains of Nordic co-operation, typologised here as "culture and identity", "society and welfare", "economy and innovation", and "sustainability and climate". It suggested that the unacknowledged co-existence of these domains of Nordic added value provides a potential source of tension in the definition and operationalisation of the concept. Such ambiguity is further amplified by a tension between Nordic added value's symbolic significance as a guiding vision and its practical utility as both a desired outcome of co-operation and a means of executing and steering co-operation efforts. The analysis also exhibited divergent interpretations of Nordic added value across the various

institutions, reflecting their varying emphases on cultural, societal, economic, and sustainability aspects of Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation. Institutional histories and regional dynamics were further seen to influence these interpretations, shaping sectoral priorities and operational frameworks. Among other things, the chapter found such different interpretations to have resulted in two different sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradictory understandings of Nordic added value as an internal driving force of individual institutions and their employees, and as an external structuring principle tying individual efforts to joint priorities. The multiplicity of meanings attached to Nordic added value gives rise to conceptual ambiguities, while also facilitating high degrees of flexibility within and adaptability to varying and changing sectoral needs and strategic priorities.

The chapter found that other factors contributing to the enigmatic, flexible, and adaptive nature of Nordic added value included the various regional dynamics that characterise Nordic co-operation, as well as terminological instability, with multiple terms and their translations used both interchangeably or hierarchically. Regarding the evaluation of Nordic added value, it remained a complex issue despite the concept's significance as an organisational steering principle. While some sectors have employed methods such as reporting tools and surveys, assessing abstract value-based concepts as well as long-term effects of joint action was deemed challenging. Overall, while Nordic added value continues to be a guiding principle in Nordic co-operation, its implementation and evaluation remain multifaceted and subject to interpretation, reflecting the evolving nature of regional collaboration and the diverse priorities of participating sectors. Moreover, the Vision 2030 declaration has impacted the aims of Nordic co-operation without explicit reference to the principle of Nordic added value, facilitating a shift towards an understanding of Nordic added value as a tool rather than a vision for Nordic co-operation.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations

This report set out to gain a better understanding of the ways in which the principle of Nordic added value is being and has been used and conceptualised across the institutions of inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation. This has been done in light of the association that is frequently drawn between Nordic added value and the legitimacy of Nordic co-operation, as well as the increasing institutionalisation of the principle within those institutions.

In order to understand the nature, development, and use of Nordic added value in inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation, [Chapter 2](#) explored the conceptual characteristics of Nordic added value. It was highlighted that Nordic added value is a **contested, composite, and temporally multi-layered concept**. Among other things, this means that the concept of Nordic added value has acquired and continues to acquire meanings based on who uses and debates it, and that such meanings are also influenced by the multiple other terms contained within the concept, saturating it through their associated and contested meanings, as well as the various temporal layers that have been ingrained in the concept through its usage history.

In [Chapter 3](#), the report outlined the historical emergence and development of the principle of Nordic added value and its related English and Scandinavian-language terms within the institutional framework of Nordic co-operation. Broadly speaking, it highlighted **three main historical shifts**:

1. In the 1990s, the principle of *nordisk nytta* was introduced as an evaluation tool for trimming back the institutional set-up of Nordic co-operation in the context of increased European integration, outreach to the newly independent Baltic countries, and cuts to Nordic budgets.
2. In the 2000s and 2010s, *nordisk nytta* was increasingly fused with the notion of *nordiskt mervärde* to describe the outcomes also of the preconditions for efforts of Nordic co-operation. At the same time, the English-language term Nordic added value was introduced as part of the continued Europeanisation of Nordic co-operation and an increased emphasis on the Nordic region's brand value.
3. From the mid-2010s onwards, Nordic added value has increasingly been institutionalised as an operationalised steering principle as part of the reform efforts of the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers, aimed at making Nordic co-operation more demand-driven and politically relevant.

Based on interviews and document analysis, [Chapter 4](#) has outlined historical and contemporary uses and understandings of Nordic added value within individual institutions and sectors across the institutional framework of inter-ministerial Nordic co-operation. As part of this, where relevant the chapter sections outlined how the historical developments described above have played out within, affected, and been affected by the different institutions and sectors. Moreover, the current uses and meanings of Nordic added value were outlined for each of the parts of the institutional framework of Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation, showing that ambiguity as well as different interpretative strategies and understandings still exist within and between the different institutions and sectors.

The analysis found that:

- Nordic added value operates across and obtains divergent meanings from **different key domains of Nordic co-operation**, typologised in this report as **"culture and identity"**, **"society and welfare"**, **"economy and innovation"**, and **"sustainability and climate"**. Especially if unacknowledged, the co-existence of these domains of Nordic added value creates tensions in the definition and operationalisation of the concept.
- There are significant inter-sectoral and inter-institutional differences in interpretations of Nordic added value, reflecting different institutional histories and sector-specific outlooks. This has resulted in two different – if often co-existing – understandings of Nordic added value as both an **internal driving force** for individual institutions and their employees, and as an **external steering principle** tying individual efforts to joint priorities.
- The **instability in terminology** that characterises the use of Scandinavian and English-language terms to legitimise joint Nordic efforts adds to the enigmatic character and ambiguous interpretations of the principle of Nordic added value.
- The **evaluation of Nordic added value** remains a complex issue and subject to interpretation, reflecting the evolving nature of regional collaboration and the diverse priorities of the sectors involved.
- The Nordic prime ministers' Vision 2030 declaration in 2019 has impacted the aims of Nordic co-operation without explicit reference to the principle of Nordic added value, facilitating a shift towards an understanding of **Nordic added value as a tool rather than a vision** for Nordic co-operation.

It should be emphasised that different interpretations of operational principles relating to purpose and legitimacy are likely inevitable in a wide-spanning, multi-sectoral organisation like the Nordic Council of Ministers and its subsidiary institutions. However, the different interpretations of the legitimacy of Nordic co-operation, if acknowledged and addressed, would become a strength rather than a weakness, creating the basis for connecting the unique preconditions of Nordic co-operation with the outcomes desired for its efforts.

Moreover, conceptual ambiguity and different possible interpretative frameworks are not necessarily negative aspects of the principle of Nordic added value, as they might allow for flexibility and reflect an ability to adapt to changing historical, political, and geopolitical circumstances. As a case in point, a domain of Nordic added value focusing on defence, security, and related issues is seemingly becoming more pronounced in response to the current geo-political instability in the Nordic region's neighbourhood areas and the recent accession of Finnish and Swedish to NATO.

Recommendations

The report makes the following recommendations regarding the current and future role of Nordic added value in Nordic co-operation:

- 1 Create institution-specific working definitions of Nordic added value:**

Outlining working definitions of what constitutes Nordic added value within each individual Nordic institution and for project funding – while allowing for flexibility and adaptation – would make it possible to acknowledge that different dimensions of the multi-dimensional concept of Nordic added value are relevant to pursue and operationalise within institutions that operate across different sectors.

This could be done in the grant letters outlining the relationships between the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers and the individual institutions in close co-operation with the institution itself, its employees, and its co-operation partners.
- 2 Attach value to the preconditions for impactful Nordic co-operation:**

The operationalisation of Nordic added value risks rewarding measurable short-term outcomes at the expense of the difficult-to-measure long-term efforts, which have been essential in the creation of the Nordic regional identity that facilitates present-day co-operation on, for example, aspects such as branding, innovation, climate, defence, and security. Moreover, a Nordic regional identity is more relevant and sought-after now than it was when the Scandinavian-language predecessor of Nordic added value emerged in the 1990s. By attaching value to the less immediately tangible results of joint efforts, the strengthening of a Nordic regional identity can regain a central place in the efforts of the Nordic institutions in the face of geopolitical instability, and the preconditions for successful Nordic co-operation can be sustained.

This could be done through a strategic prioritisation of efforts related to cultural programmes, the Nordic offices, and the facilitation of informal intra-regional networks that do not produce easily measurable or tangible short-term outcomes.

3

Clarify the relationship between Nordic added value and Vision 2030:

Articulating how and if Nordic added value relates to the strategic ambitions of Vision 2030 to make the Nordic region the most integrated and sustainable region in the world by 2030 would help align the visions and practices of Nordic co-operation. Moreover, a clarification of the relationship between Nordic added value and the two substantially different ambitions and an evaluation of whether Nordic added value is the most suitable steering principle for pursuing both those ambitions would offer a clearer sense of purpose for all sectors of Nordic inter-ministerial co-operation.

This could be done in a directive from the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation or the Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers, articulating the relationship between Nordic added value and Vision 2030.

4

Further examine tensions regarding the legitimacy of Nordic co-operation:

Further efforts to examine how the legitimacy of Nordic co-operation is viewed in the parts of Nordic co-operation not under the institutional umbrella of the Nordic Council of Ministers would likely reveal quite different interpretations. Given the significance of Nordic inter-parliamentary co-operation and Nordic civil society organisations for Nordic co-operation as a whole, constructive dialogue with such actors on what constitutes the added value of joint Nordic efforts would be necessary for creating a more robust basis for ambitious, meaningful, and forward-looking Nordic co-operation in the future.

This could be done through the initiation of cross-organisational dialogue or through the commissioning of one or more studies examining attitudes regarding the legitimacy of joint Nordic efforts outside the Nordic Council of Ministers.

5

Broaden the perspectives on regional co-operation:

Approaching the legitimisation of joint regional efforts from broader and comparative perspectives might allow for more meaningful co-operation with non-Nordic partners, with the potential for learning from other models of regional co-operation. This includes paying closer attention to perspectives from the Baltic countries and encouraging dialogue with Baltic partners about meaningful ways to conceptualise Nordic-Baltic added value, a term used occasionally by Nordic institutions operating in the Baltic countries. Moreover, a better understanding of the similarities and differences between the principles of European added value and Nordic added value would help clarify the legitimacy of Nordic co-operation vis-à-vis the project of European integration. Finally, lessons might be learnt from studying how other bodies of regional governance function and legitimise their work, for example the Benelux Union or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

This could be done through intensified dialogue with Baltic partners through the Nordic offices in the Baltic countries and through the commissioning of working papers or conferences providing comparative regional perspectives on Nordic co-operation.

6

Standardise translation practices:

Creating and implementing standardised translation practices across and within the institutions of official Nordic co-operation for terms like *nordisk nytta*, *nordiskt mervärde*, Nordic added value, Nordic synergies, Nordic benefits, etc. would help avoid conceptual confusion within and across the sectors and organisations of Nordic co-operation.

This could be done by producing an official style guide or glossary for employees within the institutions as well as researchers, consultants, translators, and other stakeholders performing commissioned work under the Nordic Council of Ministers.

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