

The increased Nordic cultural co-operation: an opportunity or a threat?

A research about the consequences of the increased Nordic cultural co-operation for the cultural relations of the Nordic countries with foreign countries



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Foreword

This thesis is written to complete the master programme Arts & Society at Utrecht University. I have written this thesis between February 2017 and March 2018. It took slightly longer than I planned because of my internship at the Department of Cultural Affairs at the Netherlands Consulate-General in Istanbul from August 2017 until January 2018. Notwithstanding, this internship was more than worth it to extend writing my thesis. It has absolutely given me new insights in and knowledge about the international cultural field that were of added value when writing this thesis.

I consider this thesis not only as a conclusion to my master, but moreover as the end of my study career at Utrecht University. I started my studies at the university in 2015 with the premaster Arts & Society. During this premaster I developed an interest in international cultural policy and I am thankful that I got the chance to develop this interest during the master itself. I became familiar with international cultural policy and collaboration from a practical perspective via my internships at DutchCulture and at the Consulate. This thesis has thereby given me the opportunity to increase and develop academic knowledge and way of thinking in regard to the international cultural field. It has sometimes been a challenge, but I am convinced that it will be of great added value in my further career.

I would like to thank my supervisor Toine Minnaert for his time, input and feedback throughout the period I was writing this thesis. Furthermore, I would like express a word of thanks to my boyfriend, family and friends for being helpful and supportive during my time studying Arts & Society at Utrecht University.

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Abstract

This research anticipates the increasing interest among scholars and governments in transnational collaboration and positioning by exploring cultural co-operation in the Nordic region from the perspective of Nordic countries. The main question is: What are the consequences of the increased Nordic cultural co-operation for the cultural relations of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden with foreign countries? This question is answered via a literature study and policy analysis. The literature study is used to construct a theoretical framework of the concepts of national identity and Nordic identity. The policy analysis reveals how governments of the Nordic countries formally deal with international cultural affairs and what the intended formal Nordic cultural co-operation looks like. These insights illustrate that increased Nordic cultural co-operation has limited consequences for the cultural relations between the Nordic and foreign countries.

The Nordic countries handle international cultural relations differently. The governments of Finland, Norway and Sweden are not involved in these relations. The Danish government, in contrast, is actively concerned with international cultural affairs and pays specific attention to the use of culture to brand itself in a selection of prioritised countries. The ministers for Nordic co-operation are also active in the international cultural affairs of the Nordic region. They are actively guiding common cultural activities of the Nordic countries abroad to strengthen the international position and relations of the Nordic region. The Nordic identity takes a central stage in these activities. With the efforts of the ministers in international cultural affairs, the Nordic region is thus active in a policy field that Finland, Norway and Sweden are not. Denmark is active as well. However, considering how the co-operation is constructed, it appears that Nordic co-operation does not pose a threat to Denmark and other countries. Instead, Nordic cultural co-operation delivers these countries opportunities in their international cultural relations. The co-operation is explicitly focused on the Nordic region and communicating the region to the outside world, but in doing so, the ministers for Nordic co-operation advance the interests, autonomy and national sovereignty of the Nordic countries. This ensures that the national identities of the Nordic countries are not threatened. The co-operation thus offers Finland, Sweden and Norway the opportunity to be involved in a policy topic in which they are currently not active and guarantees that Denmark will not be hindered by the Nordic co-operation. For these reasons, it can be concluded that the Nordic cultural co-operation has limited consequences for the international cultural relations of the Nordic countries with foreign countries. This outcome derives from policy documents. In policy, the ministers for Nordic co-operation claim that the co-operation places an emphasis on the Nordic countries. In practice, the situation could be less positive than presented in policy.

This thesis shows that culture is a qualified policy field for cross-border collaboration and positioning. The connection that culture can foster lends itself to international emphasis. This thesis also offers insights on what cross-border collaboration implies for participating countries. Regional collaboration can be beneficial for participating countries if the central body ensures their autonomy and sovereignty. However, these outcomes are based on one policy field and one case study. To obtain a better perspective on the Nordic co-operation and multilateral co-operation in general, further research should be conducted on the consequences of the Nordic co-operation in different policy fields and on other multilateral co-operations and positioning forms.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and problem definition

The official co-operation between the Nordic countries shifted in 2014. In this year, the ministers for Nordic co-operation published a joint statement declaring that they wished to intensify the existing Nordic co-operation: “We, the ministers for Nordic co-operation, are convinced of the value of continuing to work closely together at a time when globalisation, resource consumption and economic crisis pose challenges to the Nordic welfare model and regional co-operation is growing in importance.”¹ The motto of the intensified co-operation is “Together we are stronger”. The ministers hoped to raise the profile of the Nordic region and improve coordination on international affairs of mutual interest.² This increased co-operation strengthens the Nordic identity that is at the core of the Nordic co-operation. Many of the Nordic programs and much of the Nordic co-operation is closely associated with and based on the Nordic identity. While the co-operation strengthens the Nordic identity, this identity itself is informed and produced by regional cooperation initiatives.³

The renewed co-operation is reflected by an official branding strategy, the *Strategy for International branding of the Nordic Region*. The strategy was proposed by the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers at the request of the ministers for Nordic co-operation. The aim of the strategy is: “The competitiveness and international influence of the Nordic region and the Nordic countries will be strengthened through coordinated branding activities in a joint initiative.”⁴ The strategy is a guideline and framework to organise branding activities that should strengthen the international relations of the Nordic region. The ministers attach high value to branding the Nordic region through Nordic culture. Nordic culture is composed of culture of the Nordic countries and is one of the branding areas and thus has an important position in the co-operation. The Nordic countries are encouraged to organise common cultural initiatives that show foreign countries the unique character and added value of the Nordic region.⁵ This showcasing should strengthen the relations between the Nordic region and foreign countries.

The renewed co-operation differs from the traditional Nordic co-operation. The traditional co-operation is primarily inward-looking. This orientation derived from multiple characteristics. First, it was concentrated on combining efforts in policy fields with common interests. Culture was, and still is, one of these fields. The co-operation entailed culture in its broadest sense and concentrated on joint efforts in the fields of research, education and cultural expressions.⁶ Another characteristic of the traditional Nordic co-operation was ensuring easy access to other Nordic countries, such as by arranging freedom of movement

¹ “The Nordic Region – together we are stronger,” Nordic Co-operation, last modified February 6, 2014, accessed April 4, 2017, <http://www.norden.org/en/nordic-council-of-ministers/ministers-for-co-operation-mr-sam/declarations/the-nordic-region-together-we-are-stronger>.

² Nordic Co-operation, “The Nordic Region – together we are stronger.”

³ K. Lapintie, “Nordic identity revisited,” *Nordisk Arkitekturforskning* 4 (2004): 5; B. Aurstad, “Nordic identity – A question of Language Understanding?” in *Does the Nordic Region Speak with a FORKED Tongue?: The Queen of Denmark, the Government Minister and others give their views on the Nordic language community*, ed. by A. Karin (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2012), 117; Brian, “Nordic Identity between “Norden” and Europe,” *Kultuffe*, last modified January 6, 2014, accessed July 2, 2017, <http://kultuffe.dk/nordic-identity-between-norden-and-europe>; P. Maassen, T. Nokkala & T. Uppstrom, *Rethinking Nordic Co-operation in Higher Education: National and Institutional Case Studies* (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2005), 24; M. Kuldklepp, “Nordic identity and the history of regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea area,” accessed February 27, 2018, <http://www.martk.net/research/nordic-identity-1>.

⁴ Nordic Council of Ministers, *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region* (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2015), 9.

⁵ “New strategy for international branding of the Nordic region,” Nordic Co-operation, last modified October 28, 2014, accessed April 4, 2017, <http://www.norden.org/en/news-and-events/news/new-strategy-for-international-branding-of-the-nordic-region>; Nordic Council of Ministers, *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region*, 8-10.

⁶ “Agreement concerning cultural co-operation,” Nordic Co-operation, accessed February 8, 2018, <https://www.norden.org/en/om-samarbejdet-1/nordic-agreements/treaties-and-agreements/culture/agreement-concerning-cultural-co-operation/>.

and trade within the borders of the Nordic region.⁷ These characteristics show how the traditional Nordic co-operation took place primarily within the Nordic region, and appearances in foreign countries and common branding activities were not included. Hence, these features are notable new layers to the traditional formal co-operation. The new co-operation is more than ever focused on communicating an image of a unified region to the rest of the world and uses culture as one method to do so. Consequently, the traditional cultural co-operation has changed as well. Instead of only involving joining forces of Nordic countries, the new cultural co-operation entails the organisation of common cultural activities in foreign countries that contribute to the establishment and strengthening of the international relations of the region.

The recent development in the Nordic co-operation has piqued my interest. The role of culture in the relations between the Nordic countries is shifting. In the new formal cultural co-operation, culture is explicitly used in the favour of foreign relations of the Nordic region. I find this remarkable, because culture also plays a role in the foreign relations of the Nordic countries, particularly in their foreign cultural relations. The importance of culture in foreign relations dates back to the 18th century, when culture contributed to the rise and construction of the nation state.⁸ Culture is still of great importance in today's international relations. For this reason, I wonder how the role of culture in relations between the Nordic countries has shifted, and moreover how this shift influences the role of culture in relations between the Nordic countries and foreign countries. This topic raises questions such as: How is culture used to strengthen the foreign relations of the Nordic region? What does the Nordic cultural co-operation implicate for the bilateral relations of the Nordic countries with foreign countries, in which culture also plays a role? Does it threaten bilateral cultural relations of the Nordic countries? To investigate these questions, I have conducted research on the consequences of the increased Nordic cultural co-operation for the bilateral cultural relations of Nordic countries with foreign countries. To narrow down the scope of this research, I concentrated this research on Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. These countries are the most visible in the international cultural field.

1.2 Research question and reading guide

In this thesis, an answer is provided to the following question:

What are the consequences of the increased Nordic cultural co-operation for the bilateral cultural relations of the Nordic countries with foreign countries?

I took multiple steps to answer this question. First, I approached the possible consequences from a theoretical perspective. It was necessary to understand what the theory implies about possible consequences to see how they present in practice. This first step is presented in the second chapter. Second, I focused on how the Nordic countries formally arrange their bilateral cultural relations with foreign countries. It was only possible to describe the consequences of the Nordic co-operation on the cultural relations of the countries when I knew what the relations looked like. To narrow the scope of this step, I examined the cultural relations with one foreign country, the Netherlands. I present the bilateral cultural relations of the Nordic countries with the Netherlands in the third chapter. Third, I took a closer look at the operationalisation of the increased Nordic cultural co-operation. It was necessary to investigate the nature of the renewed cultural co-operation to understand how it can influence the cultural relations of the Nordic countries with foreign countries. The

⁷ "Passport issues, citizenship and national registration," Nordic Co-operation, accessed February 8, 2018, <http://www.norden.org/en/om-samarbejdet-1/nordic-agreements/treaties-and-agreements/passport-issues-citizenship-and-national-registration>; "Labour Market," Nordic Co-operation, accessed February 8, 2018, <http://www.norden.org/en/om-samarbejdet-1/nordic-agreements/treaties-and-agreements/labour-market>.
⁸ S. Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," in *Modernity and Its Futures*, ed. by T. McGrew, S. hall & D. Held (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 612-613.

outcomes of this step are presented in the fourth chapter. Fourth, I connected the results of the previous chapters to answer the main question. This step is presented in the last chapter. In the conclusion, I answer the research question. In the discussion, I approach the results from a theoretical perspective and elaborate on the significance and limitations of this thesis. The chapter ends with recommendations for further research.

1.3 Significance

Over the years, there has been increasing interest in cross-border collaboration and positioning. This appears in the high number of studies that have been conducted on regional co-operations, such as the following: *Thematic study: Cultural heritage and creative resources in the central Europe programme* by A.J. Wiesland, *OECD Territorial Reviews: NORA Region* by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and *Some ideas for European defense cooperation from the case study of the Belgian-Dutch Navy cooperation* by P.J. Parrein. Such studies demonstrate how regional co-operation is a topical policy issue and receives much attention from scholars and governments. There are many examples of regional co-operation, including the Baltic Cooperation and the European Union. The Baltic Cooperation comprises cooperation between the governments and parliaments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and concentrates on security policy, defense cooperation, energy, and transport.⁹ The European Union is a partnership between 28 member states and focusses on many fields, including social inclusion, health and creativity.¹⁰ For these partnerships, it is worth asking which policy fields actually lend themselves to the establishment of co-operations. This makes cross-border collaboration and positioning a relevant topic for elaboration. It is especially interesting to consider the Nordic co-operation as a case study, as the Nordic co-operation is one of the most comprehensive regional partnerships worldwide.¹¹ This thesis addresses the central and relevant question of transnational collaboration and positioning by exploring this example in-depth.

The Nordic co-operation is highlighted from the perspective of the Nordic countries. This perspective is considered to be a relevant concern as well. The Nordic co-operation is already addressed in many academic publications, including “The Rise of Nordic defense cooperation: a return to regionalism?” by Tuomas Forsberg, “Cross-border regions in Europe: Significance of drivers of regional cross-border co-operation” by Markus Perkmann and “Nordic cooperation in criminal policy and crime prevention” by Hannu Takala. Existing studies have yielded valuable knowledge about the Nordic co-operation, but none have focused on what the co-operation actually implies for the Nordic countries. My research fills this gap by considering the impact of the Nordic co-operation on the international cultural relations of the Nordic countries. It is particularly interesting to examine the cultural relations between the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, because these relations have not yet been addressed in academic or popular research. This thesis is the first to undertake an in-depth analysis of formal cultural relations between Nordic countries and the Netherlands.

1.4 Research method

This research was divided into two methodological phases. The first phase contained a literature study. The literature study was required to understand what the theory presupposes about the possible consequences of the increased Nordic cultural co-operation. The literature study concentrated on the concept of national identity and its relation to Nordic identity, because the Nordic identity is at the core of the international relations of the Nordic region and the national identities of the Nordic countries are at the core of their

⁹ “Baltic Cooperation,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia, accessed February 20, 2018, <http://vm.ee/en/baltic-cooperation>

¹⁰ “Policy Fields,” EACEA National Policies platform, accessed February 20, 2018, <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/policy-fields>.

¹¹ “About the co-operation,” Nordic Co-operation, accessed February 20, 2018, <http://www.norden.org/en/om-samarbejdet-1>.

international cultural relations. First, I consulted multiple academic articles and books to understand concepts surrounding national identity. The concepts are: nation, state, nation state, national (cultural) identity, culture as a connecting element, the other, representation and nation branding. Second, I reviewed academic literature on the Nordic co-operation and the Nordic identity to understand Nordic as a concept and to observe how it fits into academic literature on national identity. This provided an in-depth understanding of the Nordic identity and its possible relation with the national identities of the Nordic countries, which contributed to explaining the consequences of the Nordic co-operation at the end of the thesis.

The second phase contained a policy analysis of formal policy documents. I conducted a policy analysis, because the core aim of this research was to understand how the policy of the Nordic region regarding international cultural affairs is related to similar policies of the Nordic countries. I approached the policy documents as texts and performed a textual analysis of them.¹² The policy analysis was conducted in two steps.

First, I analysed policy documents to understand how the Nordic countries construct and arrange formal bilateral cultural relations with the Netherlands. The Netherlands was chosen as a case study of a foreign country because I had easy access to relevant information and there was no research yet on the cultural relations between the Nordic countries and the Netherlands. I consulted two types of policy documents to do so. I first looked at formal government policies on international cultural affairs of the Netherlands and the Nordic countries. I found the policies on the websites of the governments and, in some cases, on websites of executing organisations or cultural councils. I looked for characteristics of the specific policies and how the governments discussed the Nordic cultural co-operation. These formal policies provided helpful insights on how the countries intend to shape their international cultural exchanges and relations. Additionally, I analysed bilateral cultural policy agreements of Finland and Norway with the Netherlands, because policy agreements traditionally serve as an instrument for arranging bilateral cultural exchanges.¹³ These agreements were found in the Dutch treaty database. In the agreements, I looked for information about the content and the importance of the agreements for the cultural relations between Norway or Finland and the Netherlands. I used my analysis of the agreements and formal policies to describe how the individual Nordic countries arrange their cultural relations with the Netherlands.

Second, I carried out a policy analysis to illustrate how the Nordic cultural co-operation works in practice. The branding strategy and policy documents related to, or deriving from, this strategy were consulted. These documents were found on the internet. The policy documents offered the most concrete and relevant information on the Nordic cultural co-operation. In addition to these policy documents, a selection of webpages related to the branding strategy and branding activities were consulted. These webpages provided relevant information about the content and results of the cultural branding activities that had already been executed. In the policy documents and on the websites, I looked for information about the core, aims, objectives, focus areas, intentions and consequences of the co-operation and the executed activities. I specifically searched for implicit or explicit pronouncements about the roles, positions and interests of the Nordic countries within the cultural branding activities. My findings helped me describe how the renewed cultural co-operation of the Nordic countries, as announced in the *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region*, is reflected in practice.

¹² A. Mckee, *Textual Analysis: A Beginners's Guide* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 1, 4.

¹³ T. Minnaert, "Footprint or fingerprint: international cultural policy as identity policy," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 20:1 (2014): 104.

2. Theoretical framework

The Nordic co-operation is related to the Nordic identity. The Nordic identity is an identity of the citizens of the Nordic region. The co-operation constructs this identity but is simultaneously an expression of it. This places the Nordic identity at the core of the international relations of the Nordic region and makes it an important concept for elaboration. It is specifically interesting to consider what the existence of the Nordic identity implies for the national identities of the Nordic countries, which are also important for their international relations. The aim of this chapter is thus to analyse what the theory implies about the consequences of the increased Nordic cultural co-operation for the international cultural relations of the Nordic countries. It is relevant to highlight the Nordic identity according to theories on national identity.

In this chapter, I take three steps. First, I explain the theoretical concepts related to national identity. I pay specific attention to the importance of territorial borders and national culture in national identity. For this step, I consulted sources by leading academics in this field of study. I present this step in the first section, which includes four subsections. I start each subsection with a short overview of what will be discussed. In the first subsection, I focus on the concepts of nation and state. It is important to consider what nations, states and nation states are and what determines their construction, because an understanding of national identity derives from an understanding of what constitutes a nation, state or nation state. In the second subsection, I concentrate on the concept of national identity. In the third subsection, I examine national identity from an inward-looking perspective, because a national identity is defined by feelings of connection within the national community. In the fourth subsection, I concentrate on the outward perspective of a national identity, because a national identity is also defined in relation to the outside world.

Second, I use the theoretical concepts to consider the identity of the Nordic region. This step is presented in the second section and includes two subsections. In the first subsection, I examine how the Nordic region can be defined based on the theory about nation states, because this is needed to understand the context and environment of the Nordic identity. In the second subsection, I focus on Nordic identity. I consider what connects the Nordic community and what role other countries play in the construction of the Nordic identity.

In the last section, I present the conclusion. I indicate how the concepts around national identity can be used in the context of the Nordic region. Meanwhile, I explain how the Nordic identity is related to the national identities of the Nordic countries. This leads to a discussion of what the consequences of the increased Nordic co-operation can be for the Nordic countries.

2.1 Discussion of theoretical concepts

2.1.1 Nation state: a cultural and/or political unity

In this section, I discuss the concepts of nation, state and nation state. It appears that a national identity generally refers to the identity of people who live within a nation state as a border-defined territory. However, the relationship between the concepts of nation and state is complex. The nation and the state both concern an environment in which people are connected. However, the nation concerns an environment that unites a group of people with shared culture, while the state connects people with territorial borders.

With the construction of nations, it is important to consider what forms a nation and who is part of the nation. Professor of International Law and Diplomacy Gidon Gottlieb considers a nation a way to classify groups of human beings.¹⁴ Anthropologist, political scientist Benedict Anderson also approaches a nation as a

¹⁴ G. Gottlieb, *Nation against State: A new approach to ethnic conflicts and the decline of sovereignty* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1993), xi.

group of people. He defines it as an imagined political community that is inherently limited and sovereign, within which members have a shared cultural identity.¹⁵ The community of a nation is always connected by elements such as culture.¹⁶ National culture, like a standard language and common literature, has an important role in constructing the nation, because the nation is grounded in it. Connections can be created between people in a territory but also extend beyond the borders of a political nation.¹⁷

While the nation is based on feelings of togetherness, the state refers to public institutions in a territory. A state is a political entity with its own legal systems within certain territorial borders.¹⁸ It has embedded itself with an ensemble of constitutions and procedures that rule over a national territory, with a central authority that has the power over a nation.¹⁹ Generally, the community in a state is connected by politics, constitutions and borders. However, philosopher, sociologist and social anthropologist Ernest Gellner states that common culture can also connect people of a nation state.²⁰ This reflects the complexity of the nation and state concepts.

The relationship between the concepts of nation and state is often discussed by scholars.²¹ Some, like Anderson, say that the nation and the state are connected. He refers to a nation (feelings of connectedness within the community) and state (the existence of a sovereign and autonomous authority) in one definition.²² Others, like Gellner, say that the nation and the state are separate entities. “The state has certainly emerged without the help of the nation. Some nations have certainly emerged without the blessings of their own state.”²³ Hence, there is no unambiguous relation and understanding of the concepts nation and state.

2.1.2 National identity

In the interpretations of the nation, state and nation state, the concept of national identity is closely related. In this section, I focus on this concept. It appears that the concept of national identity is generally used in relation to the nation state as a political bond. National identity is the identity form that connects the national community of a nation state. However, a national identity is not the only layer of individual identity. It is questionable how the different identities are related.

Many scholars have tried to do define the concept of identity. Australian linguist Ruth Wodak defines identity as “the relationship between two or more related entities in a manner that asserts the sameness or equality.” An identity is shaped by commonalities between two or more persons.²⁴ There are different types of identities, and national identity is one of them. National identity is the layer that connects the community of a nation state and at the same time serves as a starting point for international relations.²⁵

The interpretation of Wodak of identity is focused on the relations between two or more entities. However, a person can have a relation with different entities and thus possess multiple identities, as Wodak states: “Individuals as well as collective groups such as nations are in many respect hybrids of identity, and thus the idea of a homogeneous pure identity on the individual or collective level is a deceptive and fiction

¹⁵ T. Minnaert, “Footprint or fingerprint: international cultural policy as identity policy,” 109; B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London/New York: Verso, 2006), 5-7.

¹⁶ A. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books of London, 1991), 43.

¹⁷ F. Meinecke, *Cosmopolitanism and the National State* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), 10; T. Minnaert, *Verbinden en verbeelden. De rol van nationale identiteit in het internationaal cultuurbeleid* (Blaricum: EZBook.nl BV, 2016), 7; T. Minnaert, “Footprint or fingerprint: international cultural policy as identity policy,” 109.

¹⁸ A. Shapira, & M. Tabory, *New Political Entities in Public and Private International Law* (Leiden: Nijhoff, 1999), 119.

¹⁹ N. Rose & P. Miller, “Political Power beyond the State: Problematics of Government,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 43:2 (1992): 176.

²⁰ E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 7.

²¹ T. Minnaert, *National identity in a changing international context* (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2015), 5.

²² B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5-7.

²³ E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 6-7.

²⁴ R. Wodak, *The discursive construction of national identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 11.

²⁵ L. Hansen & O. Waver, *European Integration and National Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), X.

illusion.”²⁶ The term hybrid refers to the possibility that different identities can influence each other. Individuals who share a national identity can differ in other identity forms, such as religion or political identity. At the same time, individuals from different countries can be connected by a shared religion, which links them more to people in other countries than to those with whom they share a national identity. Different identities can thus be conflicting or complementing.²⁷

2.1.3 Feelings of connection and belonging

A national identity is based on elements that connect the national community. In this section, I focus on the feelings of connection. The connection between citizens often derives from country borders, but it can be based on common culture as well. This often places national culture at the core of the national identity of a country, resulting in a national cultural identity. Of note regarding cultural identity is that national culture is contested and not so self-evident anymore.

Generally, the concept of national identity is applied to citizens of a nation state.²⁸ The national community is connected by the territorial borders, constitutions and procedures of a nation state.²⁹ However, it appears that these connections can also arise among people who are not part of the same state. A national identity can be shared among individuals who are part of a nation without a state or among individuals who are part of different states.³⁰ This thus shows that the feelings of connection can go beyond state borders and common culture can result in these feelings.

There is an interplay between national identity and culture. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall writes about the relationship between culture and a national identity. He speaks about national identity as a cultural identity, because he considers culture a crucial element in identity construction.³¹ He reflects on this importance of culture, noting that “the formation of a national culture helped to create standards of universal literacy, generalized a single vernacular language as the dominant medium of communication throughout the nation, created a homogeneous culture and maintained national cultural institutions.”³² National culture gives meaning to a nation, unifies people and forms the base for a national cultural identity.

However, a shift has been noticed in the idea of culture as a collective layer of national identity. Many cultural differences exist within national communities nowadays.³³ This is especially the case after globalisation in the 20th century, in which different migration waves have led to a degradation of the stability of national culture.³⁴ Every country contains more and more cultural groups, making it difficult to identify a unifying national culture, view national culture as a stable factor and make national culture the basis of a national identity.³⁵ Consequently, individuals experience difficulties identifying themselves with the cultural identity of a country while still needing this identity to shape their personal identities. The insecurity caused by globalisation drives individuals seek reaffirmation of their own identities. This process evokes nostalgic feelings and encourages nationalistic movements.³⁶

²⁶ R. Wodak, *The discursive construction of national identity*, 16.

²⁷ T. Minnaert, *Verbinden en verbeelden*, 34; T. Minnaert, *National identity in a changing international context*, 3.

²⁸ M. Guibernau, “Anthony D. Smith on nations and national identity: a critical assessment,” *Nations and Nationalism* 10:1 (2004): 134.

²⁹ T. Minnaert, *Verbinden en verbeelden*, 34.

³⁰ M. Guibernau, “Anthony D. Smith on nations and national identity: a critical assessment,” 134-135.

³¹ T. Minnaert, *Verbinden en verbeelden*, 7, 34, 35.

³² S. Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity,” 612-613.

³³ T. Minnaert, *Verbinden en verbeelden*, 37.

³⁴ Z. Bauman, *Culture in a Liquid Modern World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 34.

³⁵ T. Minnaert, *National identity in a changing international context*, 8.

³⁶ T. Minnaert, *Verbinden en verbeelden*, 38.

2.1.4 The other

The connection between community members is important for constructing a national identity, but confrontations with other countries are significant as well.³⁷ In this section, I focus on the notion of the other. It appears that nation states need confrontations with other countries to construct their national identities. Certain confrontations can take place via cultural exchanges. Two notions are relevant in this regard: representation and nation branding.

Minnaert explains how the concept of the other was introduced by political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who claim that a confrontation with the other is a necessary element in the construction of an identity.³⁸ Culture can play an important role in facilitating confrontations. The culture of a nation state makes the nation state unique among other nation states. It distinguishes one country from another and emphasises the contrast between countries, which is needed to construct an own identity.³⁹ When considering the importance of other countries in a national identity, it is relevant to examine the concepts of representation and nation branding.

According to Hall, a national identity is created via its representation: “It follows that a nation is not only a political entity but something which produces meanings – a system of cultural representation. People are not only legal citizens of a nation; they participate in the idea of the nation as represented in its national culture.”⁴⁰ A nation state is represented abroad via characteristics such as culture, and culture itself is represented through cultural exchanges.⁴¹ Cultural exchanges shape perceptions by other countries. These perceptions help to create national identity and thus international relations. However, it should not be forgotten that globalisation has made national culture less unifying. It becomes harder to define a national culture and to allow national culture to represent an entire nation state.⁴²

The representations of national culture in other countries construct a national identity and position the country abroad. This shows the interplay between representation and the second concept of nation branding. Representation implies that the receiver of the representation creates its own perception and image of a country. Nation branding, in contrast, aims to create and influence these perceptions. Nation branding refers to the application of branding strategies and tools by nation states to the creation and establishment of a strong and positive reputation among foreign countries.⁴³ It involves attempts to influence the perception of the image of a nation by actively feeding the image.⁴⁴ Nation branding shapes national identity, but it is also an important tool for representing and communicating the national identity to the world.⁴⁵ The relationship between nation branding and national identity demonstrates that national culture is also related to nation branding. National culture is often used to create the desired image, serving as input for national brand abroad. Language, literature, music and sports reflect the soul of a nation and represent the authentic and unique characteristics of a national identity.⁴⁶ National culture is part of ‘the otherness,’ and this otherness is exactly what makes a country appealing.⁴⁷ National culture is also a tool for communicate the nation to the

³⁷ A. Triandafyllidou, “National identity and the ‘other’,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21:4 (1998): 599.

³⁸ T. Minnaert, “Footprint or fingerprint: international cultural policy as identity policy,” 103.

³⁹ A. Triandafyllidou, “National identity and the ‘other’,” 595.

⁴⁰ S. Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity,” 612.

⁴¹ T. Minnaert, *National identity in a changing international context*, 6.

⁴² T. Minnaert, *Verbinden en verbeelden*, 8, 200.

⁴³ Y. Fan, “Nation branding: what is being branded?,” *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 12:1 (2006): 6.

⁴⁴ G. Paschadilis, “Exporting national culture: histories of cultural institutes abroad,” *The International Journal of Cultural Policy* 15:3 (2009): 285.

⁴⁵ S. Jansen, “Designer nations: neo-liberal nation branding – Brand Estonia,” *The Sociological Review* 14:1 (2008): 122; M. Aronczyk, “Living the Brand: Nationality Globality and the Identity Strategies of Nation Branding Consultants,” *International Journal of Communication* 2 (2008).

⁴⁶ K. Dinnie, *Nation branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 69, 111-112.

⁴⁷ G. Szondi, *Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding: Conceptual Similarities and Differences* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2008), 16.

world.⁴⁸ International cultural expressions and exchanges help the nation gain visibility and attention abroad.⁴⁹ According to Minnaert, there are several characteristics of branding that make nation branding more difficult in relation to international relations.⁵⁰ The first characteristic concerns the need for a clear defined 'other' to define your own brand. In international relations, it can be difficult to define the other, because the opposition is not always clearly defined. Characteristics that will appeal to one foreign country may be offensive to other countries. Additionally, managing nation branding activities can be difficult. The needs and desires of many different national actors must be taken into consideration and guided toward the same direction.⁵¹ A last difficulty concerns overcoming stereotypes.⁵² They can influence behaviour toward other places and people, making it more difficult to establish a desired image.⁵³

2.2 Analysis

In the previous subsections, the concepts surrounding national identity were discussed. I have demonstrated how a national identity is a layer of identity that connects the national community of a nation state as a territory with its own borders. Culture is important in the construction of a national identity and thus also in international relations, with a two-fold role. First, it defines what and who a nation state is, as it creates feelings of connection and belonging within the national community. However, academics question the extent to which culture can still fulfil its unifying role in modern times, due to the effects of globalisation processes. Second, culture creates an image of the nation state in foreign countries via representation and nation branding. While national culture is affected, it still is a tool for highlighting a nation state abroad and gaining an identity in the world. This identity is at the core of international relations.

The examination of concepts around national identity shows how national identity generally refers to a territory. However, the Nordic identity does not concern a territorial form of national identity. Thus, it is interesting to place the Nordic identity in the theory of national identity. In this section, I explain that Nordic can be considered a nation with its own Nordic identity. This identity seems to be constructed by the cultural connection between Nordic citizens and by confrontations with other countries.

2.2.1 Nordic identity

The Nordic region is an interesting case study for discussions on the nation, state and nation state. The region is often looked upon as a meso-level between a national and international level, united by multiple common characteristics but lacking a political bond.⁵⁴ The Nordic region can thus be considered a nation that transcends the territorial borders of a state and consists of multiple sovereign, territorial, defined nation states. The region proves that boundaries of a nation are undefined and flexible.

The Nordic nation is concerned with a collective group identity: the Nordic identity. Interestingly, the concept Nordic identity is presented as something self-evident by academic scholars. They use the concept, but do not attempt to define or concretise the Nordic identity. Regardless, the use of the concept demonstrates that the Nordic identity exists. It seems to be based on the individual Nordic nation states and is an identity between the national and international levels, making it an extra identity layer for Nordic citizens.⁵⁵ There are

⁴⁸ G. Szondi, *Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding*, 20.

⁴⁹ T. Minnaert, "Footprint or fingerprint: international cultural policy as identity policy," 106, 107.

⁵⁰ T. Minnaert, "Footprint or fingerprint: international cultural policy as identity policy," 108.

⁵¹ T. Minnaert, "Footprint or fingerprint: international cultural policy as identity policy," 108; A. Pike, *Brands and Branding Geographies* (Newcastle: Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies, 2011), 291.

⁵² T. Minnaert, "Footprint or fingerprint: international cultural policy as identity policy," 107.

⁵³ A. Pike, *Brands and Branding Geographies*, 293.

⁵⁴ N. Goyz, "Norden: Structures that do not make a region," *European Review of History* 10:2 (2003): 341.

⁵⁵ N. Goyz, "Norden: Structures that do not make a region," 341.

multiple ideas about the relation between the Nordic identity and national identities. The Nordic identity could be built into what it means to be Danish, Swedish, Norwegian or Finnish, which could be problematic for the national identities of the Nordic countries.⁵⁶ Alternatively, reasoning from the concept layered identity, the Nordic identity could co-exist with the national identities. To obtain better insights into these relations, it is valuable to consider what connects the Nordic citizens and how the Nordic identity is expressed to and in other countries.

2.2.2 Nordic culture connects

The Nordic co-operation is based on common ground between the Nordic nation states. The feelings of connection and belonging that officially form the core of the national identity of a nation state are at the base of the transnational Nordic identity as well.⁵⁷ A detailed insight into the content of this connection remains undiscussed in academic literature, but documents about the Nordic co-operation convey the impression that this connection primarily derives from common culture. Nordic culture is thus portrayed as a centrepiece of the Nordic identity. The Nordic countries share: 1) common history that goes back more than a millennium, 2) the ability to understand each other's languages and 3) common cultural expressions, such as Nordic cuisine, design, film and literature.⁵⁸ The way the Nordic region uses the concept of culture has similarities with its use in theories about national identity. Nordic culture unites the Nordic citizens and makes them feel that they belong to the Nordic nation. This makes it possible to call the Nordic identity a regional cultural identity.

Considering that Nordic culture is composed of cultural commonalities between Nordic countries, it is interesting that academics do not explicitly discuss the relation between Nordic culture and national culture. However, it is mentioned that the Nordic countries need their national culture to connect the national community and fulfil a role in identity construction.⁵⁹ This makes Nordic culture, as a composition of national cultures, an interesting concept. It calls into question whether Nordic culture affects the national cultures of the Nordic nation states. However, it appears that the influence of Nordic culture on the national culture of the Nordic countries is limited. The Nordic countries do not explicitly mention Nordic as harmful to their national cultures or identities. Other factors are identified as threats, such as migration waves and Europe.⁶⁰

2.2.3 Nordic as a trademark

The Nordic region explicitly concentrates its co-operation with other countries, making 'the other' important in constructing the Nordic identity. This makes it interesting to consider how the Nordic region and its identity are related to the concepts of representation and branding.

⁵⁶ M. Jalava, *The Nordic countries as a Historical and Historiographical Region: Towards a Critical Writing of Translocal History* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2012), 251.

⁵⁷ K. Lapintie, "Nordic identity revisited," 5; B. Aurstad, "Nordic identity – A question of Language Understanding?," 117; Brian, "Nordic Identity between "Norden" and Europe,"; P. Maassen, T. Nokkala & T. Uppstrom, *Rethinking Nordic Co-operation in Higher Education*, 24; M. Kuldkepp, "Nordic identity and the history of regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea area."

⁵⁸ The Nordic Council of Ministers, *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region*, 14; "The history of the Nordic Region," Nordic Co-operation, accessed December 21, 2017, <https://www.norden.org/en/fakta-om-norden-1/the-history-of-the-nordic-region-1>; "Language," Nordic Co-operation, accessed June 5, 2017, <http://www.norden.org/en/fakta-om-norden-1/language>.

⁵⁹ M. Gertsen, *Global collaboration: intercultural Experiences and Learning* (Macmillan Publishers: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 37.

⁶⁰ J. Vogt Isaksen, "Being Danish: paradoxes of identity in everyday life," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38:3 (2015): 534; R. Cohen, "Identity Crisis for Denmark: Are We Danes or Europeans," *The New York Times*, accessed March 8, 2018, last modified September 10, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/09/10/world/identity-crisis-for-denmark-are-we-danes-or-europeans.html>; D. Michael, "Swedish Identity and the Rise of the Sweden Democrats," *The World Post*, accessed March 8, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-j-michael/swedish-identity-and-the-_b_737031.html.

The Nordic region occupies a particular place in international attention as a group. It often operates as a unified region abroad, which causes the world to often approach the Nordic countries as a unit.⁶¹ This occurs, among other ways, through culture. In 2007, for example, the magazine *Monocle* published an article in which the Nordic countries were presented in such a way that the world could identify regionally Nordic cultural elements. Certain representations in foreign countries cannot be controlled by the Nordic region, but do create specific perceptions and stereotypes.⁶² Those perceptions contribute to the international image of the region and thus help create the Nordic identity.

The Nordic region also actively pools resources and benefits to promote Nordic as a common trademark via nation branding. It actively feeds, guides and communicates a desired image in other countries. The image of the region has become a distinct element in the collective identity of the Nordic region in relation to the surrounding world.⁶³ The Nordic identity is thus explicitly constructed in relation to other countries, while it also used to create an image in those countries.

The communication of Nordic as a brand in other countries leads to an interesting observation about Nordic countries. It can be assumed that the Nordic countries construct their national identities in relation to other countries, just like the region. However, 'the other' for the Nordic countries concerns not only non-Nordic countries, but also fellow Nordic countries. This means that the Nordic countries are involved in a co-operation with those whom they actually need for identity construction. This can be problematic, because the Nordic countries compete with each another in attracting international attention.⁶⁴

2.3 Conclusion

The results show that the theories on national identity can be used to explain the Nordic identity. The Nordic region is a nation with a regional 'national' identity in which culture plays an important role. The Nordic countries are thus concerned with a layered identity: the Nordic identity and their national identity. Nordic identity and Nordic culture are connected in two ways: the Nordic identity connects citizens via Nordic culture, while the identity also communicates Nordic as a trademark abroad via culture. The same applies to the national identities and cultures of the Nordic countries.

The essence of the Nordic identity is the connection between the Nordic countries. The feelings of connection and belonging are at the core of the Nordic identity and its co-operation. Cultural commonalities between the Nordic countries evoke these feelings. The Nordic identity is thus constructed by an element that also contributes to the construction of the national identities of the Nordic countries. Nordic culture can therefore not be approached in isolation from the national cultures of the Nordic countries. Despite this, Nordic culture does not seem to have a negative influence on the stable and unifying role of national culture. The impression is that Danish, Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian national culture can be part of a supranational Nordic culture without losing a role in connecting the community and constructing the identity. However, the possibility that Nordic identity does affect national culture, is not entirely eliminated by academics.

Nordic identity seems to generate more tensions in confrontations with other countries and international representation and visibility. The Nordic region is explicitly focused on confrontations with other countries. Other countries create a perception of the Nordic region via representations through, for example, Nordic cultural expressions. Meanwhile, the Nordic region actively creates desired perceptions and communicates these abroad. It actively brands itself in other countries and emphasises Nordic as a unit.

⁶¹ C. Marklund, "The Nordic Model on the Global Market of Ideas: The Welfare State as Scandinavia's Best Brand," *Geopolitics* 22:3 (2017): 635.

⁶² C. Marklund, "The Nordic Model on the Global Market of Ideas," 632.

⁶³ C. Marklund, "The Nordic Model on the Global Market of Ideas," 632, 633.

⁶⁴ C. Marklund, "A Swedish Norden or a Nordic Sweden? Image Politics in the West during the Cold War," in *Communicating the North: Media Structures and Images in the Making of the Nordic Region*, ed. by J. Harvard & P. Stadius (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 219-239.

Simultaneously, the Nordic countries have interests in their own international positioning as well. It is interesting to consider the extent to which Nordic makes a distinction between Nordic and Danish, Finnish, Swedish or Norwegian. The theory does not provide a clear answer, but it does illustrate that this distinction is important for the national identities and foreign relations of the Nordic countries.

The application of theory on national identity to the Nordic identity demonstrates two possible relations between the Nordic nation and sovereign Nordic nation states. From the idea that two identities can co-exist, Nordic may not affect the international relations of the Nordic countries. However, the theory also shows that it is also likely the Nordic identity is problematic for the Nordic nation states, especially in terms of international visibility and relations. Although the last option is the most expected, the theory does not provide an answer to how the Nordic identity is exactly related to the national identities. To investigate this, empirical research needs to be conducted and will be explained in the next chapters. I conduct a formal policy review of the Nordic countries and region to understand how the countries handle the concept of being Nordic and how the Nordic region deals with the sovereignty of the Nordic nation states. This analysis should demonstrate how the Nordic nation and the regional Nordic identity are related to the Nordic nation states and their national identities. Because national identity is at the core of international cultural relations of the Nordic countries, this analysis describes the possible consequences from a theoretical perspective.

3. The bilateral cultural relations of the Nordic countries

The international cultural activities of the Netherlands are guided by a self-containing framework for international cultural affairs. This policy is administered by two ministries: the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of Culture emphasises cultural collaboration. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs considers cultural policy an integral part of Dutch foreign policy and uses it as a tool to reach foreign policy goals.⁶⁵ The aim of the international cultural policy is to help “artists, cultural institutions and the creative sector to widen their market abroad, especially in neighbouring countries and emerging economies.”⁶⁶ The four specific objectives are to: 1) help Dutch institutions achieve international standards, 2) strengthen the international position of Dutch institutions and artists, 3) strengthen Dutch economic interests and 4) use art and culture to benefit foreign relations. The fourth purpose demonstrates the interest of the Dutch government in using cultural expressions to improve the image of the Netherlands in other countries and to support their interests abroad. The government concentrates on Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom, the United States, Italy, France, Spain, Brazil, Turkey, Russia, China, India, South Africa, Indonesia and Japan.⁶⁷ This list shows that none of the Nordic countries is determined as a priority area. Based on this, it can be stated that the Dutch government does not formalise bilateral cultural relations with the Nordic countries. The only exception to this statement is that the Netherlands has signed bilateral cultural agreements with Finland and Norway.

The international cultural policy of the Netherlands can be characterised by five dimensions: 1) the type of policy in which international cultural affairs are incorporated, 2) the ministry responsible, 3) the aims and target areas, 4) the recognition of culture as a branding tool and 5) the determination of focus countries. The explanation of these dimensions gives the impression that the Netherlands does not have formal bilateral cultural relations with the Nordic countries. However, this statement is solely based on the perspective of the Netherlands. For this reason, I will examine the perspective of the Nordic countries in this chapter. I use the five dimensions as a framework to investigate how the Nordic countries arrange their bilateral cultural affairs with the Netherlands and complement this analysis with the bilateral cultural agreements of Finland and Norway. These insights can be used to describe how the Nordic countries arrange their bilateral cultural relations with foreign countries in general and thereby understand how the multilateral Nordic cultural co-operation influences these bilateral cultural relations.

In this chapter, I take three steps. First, I examine the formal policies on international cultural affairs of the Nordic countries on the basis of the five elements and the cultural agreements of Finland and Norway. This step is covered in the first section. I found comprehensive information about the dimensions in formal policy documents of the Nordic countries, obtained from the internet. I consulted different types of policy documents for each country, because it appeared that the Nordic countries incorporate international cultural affairs in different policies. In the second section, I interpret the information presented in the first section. I present an analysis of what the policies imply about how the Nordic countries arrange their cultural relations with the Netherlands. In the last section, I present the conclusion. I indicate if and how the Nordic countries have formalised bilateral relations with the Netherlands and with foreign countries in general. I also elaborate on how the Nordic countries view the Nordic cultural co-operation.

⁶⁵ M. Wyszomirski, *International cultural relation: A multi-country comparison* (Columbus: The Ohio State University, 2003), 5.

⁶⁶ “International Cultural Policy,” Government of the Netherlands, accessed November 23, 2017, <https://www.government.nl/topics/international-cultural-cooperation/international-cultural-policy>.

⁶⁷ Government of the Netherlands, “International Cultural Policy.”

3.1 International cultural affairs

The Nordic countries arrange international cultural affairs differently. Denmark works according to an explicit international cultural policy, Finland and Sweden incorporate them in (national) cultural policy and Norway mentions them on the website of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Nordic countries are not an exception. A multi-country comparison of international cultural relations indicates that there generally are many differences between how countries arrange their international cultural affairs.⁶⁸

3.1.1 Denmark

The government of Denmark leads international cultural exchanges via a self-containing strategy for international cultural collaboration. The primary responsibility to set up and carry out this strategy is delegated to the International Cultural Panel, a cross-ministerial collaboration between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Business and Growth and the Ministry of Culture.⁶⁹

Since 2014, two strategies have been written in Denmark: 2014-2016 and 2017-2020. In both periods, the aim of the Panel has been to increase the cultural exchange of Denmark with foreign countries and to strengthen the internationalisation of Danish cultural life. The priorities are to: 1) develop and renew Danish arts and culture, 2) promote Denmark as a country, 3) further and promote cultural export and 4) further and promote intercultural dialogue.⁷⁰ The last priority indicates that spreading knowledge about Denmark in other countries and marketing the country abroad is an integral part of the strategy. Denmark considers cultural projects a way to promote tourism in Denmark and to enhance the international influence and reputation of Denmark.⁷¹ A Danish narrative is created to achieve this. The narrative is a theme for Danish international activities and should bring coherence to the activities.⁷²

In 2014-2016, Denmark concentrated the strategy on the BRICS-countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South-Africa) and the Middle East (the Levant, North-Africa and the Gulf States).⁷³ In 2017-2020, a focus is placed on European neighbours (the Nordic and Baltic region, the United Kingdom, France and Germany), the United States and Asia (China, Japan and South Korea). With respect to the Nordic co-operation, the Panel states that it encourages “Nordic partnerships wherever they are relevant and will enhance the impact of a given initiative. Particular attention will be paid to Nordic co-operation on relevant platforms so that Nordic efforts can be integrated into the work being done in the other geographic priority areas.”⁷⁴

3.1.2 Finland

The Finnish government considers international cultural affairs a significant part of national cultural policy. This policy is prepared by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, which also participates in the Nordic cooperation.⁷⁵ This ministry has the primary responsibility for international cultural affairs in Finland. It sets and implements common goals in cultural policy to develop bilateral and multilateral cultural cooperation and Nordic cooperation. However, it considers cultural actors responsible for the direct cooperation and cultural exchanges. The government does not guide the cooperation via agreements or programmes.⁷⁶

⁶⁸ M. Wyszomirski, *International cultural relation: A multi-country comparison*.

⁶⁹ The International Cultural Panel, *Strategy 2017-2020* (Copenhagen: Danish Ministry of Culture, 2017), 4.

⁷⁰ The International Cultural Panel, “Summary: A new Strategic Action Plan for 2014-16,” accessed May 25, 2017, http://english.kum.dk/uploads/tx_templavoila/Summary.pdf; The International Cultural Panel, *Strategy 2017-2020*, 5.

⁷¹ The International Cultural Panel, *Strategy 2017-2020*, 7.

⁷² The International Cultural Panel, “Summary: A new Strategic Action Plan for 2014-16”; The International Cultural Panel, *Strategy 2017-2020*, 7-8.

⁷³ The International Cultural Panel, “Summary: A new Strategic Action Plan for 2014-16.”

⁷⁴ The International Cultural Panel, *Strategy 2017-2020*, 9-10.

⁷⁵ “EU and international cooperation in arts and culture,” Ministry of Education and Culture, accessed June 6, 2017, <http://minedu.fi/en/EU-and-international-cooperation-culture>.

⁷⁶ Ministry of Education, *Strategy for Cultural Policy*, 29; Ministry of Education and Culture, “EU and international cooperation in arts and culture.”

The basis for the current Finnish cultural policy is the *Strategy for Cultural Policy*. This strategy was written in 2009 and updated for the period 2017-2025.⁷⁷ The target areas for national cultural policy are: creative work and production, inclusion and participation in arts and culture and cultural basis and continuity.⁷⁸ Internationalisation of the cultural field is not a target area, but it is mentioned as a relevant and important development: “the guiding principle for Finland is to take actively part in the work of international organizations, highlighting the viewpoints and needs of a small country and a small language area in larger international and global issues.”⁷⁹ Culture is also mentioned in the *Strategic priorities of the Foreign Service*: “external economic relations are promoted by showcasing Finnish (...) culture.”⁸⁰ The Finnish government does not specify with whom and where it wants to strengthen economic relations.

Finland signed an agreement with the Netherlands in 1988 to express the desire to “strengthen the friendly relations between their two countries and to this end to promote and develop cultural, educational and scientific cooperation.” They agreed to encourage visits by persons engaged in different art disciplines as well as exchanges of artists, ensembles, concerts and theatrical performances.⁸¹ The agreement also included an article in which both countries agreed to hold meetings to elaborate periodical programs. These intentions resulted in a programme for cultural co-operation between 1996 and 1999. However, this programme was the last element of the agreement. The countries intended to hold a meeting in 1999 to discuss future plans, but there were no signs that this follow-up meeting took place.⁸²

3.1.3 Norway

In Norway, international cultural affairs are a part of cultural and foreign policy. The Ministry of Culture holds the primary responsibility for the Nordic and other multilateral cultural co-operation forms. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinates the bilateral cultural co-operation and the promotion of Norwegian arts and culture in foreign countries.⁸³ Aims and objectives regarding international cultural affairs are solely mentioned on the website of the government.

The Norwegian government wants to help Norwegian artists access key arenas abroad and reach a wider audience. It desires to work “actively and strategically to gain access for Norwegian artists to important cultural events and institutions internationally.” The efforts of the government in international cultural activities are developed in co-operation with cultural organisations and institutions. These institutions also advise the Foreign Service on cultural issues.⁸⁴

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs considers international cultural activities as means to increase interest in and awareness of Norway. For this reason, activities to promote the Norwegian culture abroad are part of a long-term strategy to build a strong international reputation for the country. Abroad itself is not further specified, but the Ministry mentions the importance of cultural activities in the Arctic, entailing the Arctic Ocean and parts of Alaska, Canada, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Russia and Sweden.⁸⁵

⁷⁷ Ministry of Education and Culture, *Strategy for Cultural Policy 2025* (Helsinki: Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017), 10.

⁷⁸ Ministry of Education and Culture, *Strategy for Cultural Policy 2025*, 5.

⁷⁹ Ministry of Education, *Strategy for Cultural Policy* (Helsinki: Ministry of Education, 2009), 29.

⁸⁰ Foreign Service, *Strategic priorities of the Foreign Service* (Helsinki: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017), 6.

⁸¹ Koninkrijk der Nederlanden, “Culturele Overeenkomst tussen het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden en de Republiek Finland, 's-Gravenhage, 11 oktober 1988,” *Trajectenblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden* 159:1 (1988): 158-160.

⁸² Head of the Finnish Delegation & Head of the Netherlands Delegation, *Programme for cultural cooperation between Finland and the Netherlands for the period 1996-1999* (Helsinki, 1995), 6-12, 16.

⁸³ “International cultural cooperation,” Government of Norway, last modified June 17, 2016, accessed February 7, 2018, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/culture-sports-and-non-profit-work/innsiktsartikler/International-cooperation/id766539/>.

⁸⁴ “International cultural engagement,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, last modified December 26, 2015, accessed May 25, 2017, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/foreign-affairs/int-cultural-engagement/kultur/cultural-engagement/id2459963/>.

⁸⁵ “Arctic,” Wikipedia, last modified February 1, 2018, accessed February 6, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arctic>; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “International cultural engagement.”

The Norwegian government signed a cultural agreement with the Netherlands in 1955. The governments expressed their desire to promote intensive and friendly co-operation and exchanges in the fields of science, literature, arts, universities and schools. The governments acknowledged their support for knowledge exchange in the fields of 1) books, magazines and other publications, 2) lectures, 3) artistic exhibitions, 4) concerts, theatre performances, ballet performances and opera performances and 5) radio, television, films and other technical objects.⁸⁶

3.1.4 Sweden

The Swedish government considers international cultural affairs a significant part of general cultural policy. The Ministry of Culture coordinates these affairs.⁸⁷ The main objective in relation to international cultural relations is the promotion of intercultural and international cultural exchanges and cooperation.⁸⁸ The Swedish Arts Council describes why this is important: “It is just as important that Swedish culture can reach across borders as it is for Sweden to be open to inspiration from other countries. It enlivens audiences and cultural practitioners and can provide new knowledge and perspectives.”⁸⁹ For this reason, the Ministry of Culture emphasises the importance of quality, artistic integrity, sustainability and mutuality in international cultural exchanges. It does not mention specific countries that it finds particularly important.

Another reason why international cultural exchanges are important for Sweden is that international contacts contribute to an intercultural society. Intercultural exchanges are important for developing Swedish cultural life.⁹⁰ Culture is not mentioned as being important for marketing Sweden abroad in foreign policy.

3.2 Analysis

In the previous paragraph, I presented the types of policies in which Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have incorporated international cultural affairs, the responsible ministries, the aims and target areas, whether culture is recognised as a branding tool, whether the countries have determined focus countries and whether they have cultural agreements with the Netherlands. A review of these dimensions suggests that the governments of the Nordic countries have limited activity and involvement in bilateral cultural relations with the Netherlands. This interpretation is supported by the observation that there is a lack of a concrete policy base and guidance for relations with the Netherlands in Finland, Norway and Sweden. In Denmark, there is a lack of interest in bilateral relations with the Netherlands. In this section, I elaborate on these three arguments.

3.2.1 Insufficient base

The Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish governments have not established a formal policy foundation for relations with the Netherlands. This finding derives from two observations.

The Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish government have not set up explicit and self-containing policy frameworks for international cultural affairs, like the framework of the Netherlands. Instead, international cultural affairs are managed in a different way. With respect to Norway, this way remains unclear. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs declares that it wants to play a role in promoting Norwegian arts and culture, but

⁸⁶ “Cultureel Verdrag tussen het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden en het Koninkrijk Noorwegen, 's-Gravenhage, 18 mei 1955,” Overheid, accessed November 23, 2017, http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBV0004824/1956-05-14#Verdrag_2.

⁸⁷ “Culture in the central government budget,” Government of Sweden, last modified February 12, 2015, accessed February 7, 2018, <http://www.government.se/government-policy/culture/culture-in-the-budget/>.

⁸⁸ “Goals and vision,” Government of Sweden, accessed February 6, 2018, <http://www.government.se/government-policy/culture/objectives-and-visions/>.

⁸⁹ “Cultural Policy Objectives,” Kulturradet, accessed September 3, 2017, <http://www.kulturradet.se/en/In-English/Cultural-policy-objectives/>.

⁹⁰ Kulturradet, “Cultural Policy Objectives.”

does not specify how it envisions doing so or the policy through which it will work. In Finland and Sweden, the governments have incorporated international cultural affairs in general cultural policy, but they have done so in a very limited way. The ways these three governments handle international cultural affairs illustrate how they keep a distance from formal bilateral cultural relations, leading to the lack of a solid formal foundation for bilateral cultural relations with the Netherlands.

The insufficient base is also evident in the lack of meaningful bilateral cultural agreements. The bilateral cultural agreements between the Netherlands and Finland and Norway are not foundations for cultural relations. They are outdated, and the meanings of the agreements are lost. Additionally, no concrete follow-ups to these agreements have taken place, illustrating that the agreements are not a good basis for bilateral cultural exchanges with the Netherlands. This, again, illustrates that the Nordic countries do not ensure a base where formal bilateral cultural relations with the Netherlands can be built.

3.2.2 Absence of concrete guidance

The limited involvement and activity of Finland, Norway and Sweden in formal bilateral cultural relations with the Netherlands also derives from the fact that the governments do not provide a direction for bilateral relations with the Netherlands. This finding derives from three observations.

Content on international cultural affairs that is incorporated into national cultural or foreign policy remains surface-level and cannot guide cultural relations with the Netherlands. The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture describes the importance of international cultural activities, but has not formulated objectives or goals for international activities. The Norwegian government only states that it considers it important to help Norwegian artists in the international field but does not elaborate on specific aims or target areas. The Swedish Ministry of Culture goes slightly more in detail than Finland and Norway, but goals or priorities are still undefined in this country. Thus, the aims and target areas for international cultural affairs are formulated briefly and do not direct international cultural relations.

Finland, Norway and Sweden also do not specify enough where they want to carry out cultural activities. Instead of concentrating activities on selected countries, they approach all foreign countries as interesting sites for international cultural exchanges. This demonstrates the absence of guidance for international cultural relations with the Netherlands. What the Nordic countries do, however, is mention the multilateral Nordic cultural co-operation in their policies. A detailed elaboration of their vision on the Nordic co-operation is lacking, but it is clear that each country has a national body that is involved in the co-operation.

A last observation that proves the absence of a concrete guidance is the lack of a strategy to use culture for nation branding. Norway wants to use international cultural activities to enhance interest in Norway, but does not elaborate on how it plans to do so. A strategy for cultural activities that market the country abroad does not exist. Finland only mentions that Finnish international cultural expressions should promote economic relations, but no strategy guides these intentions, nor is there a strategy for relations with the Netherlands. Sweden does not elaborate on the importance of cultural activities to establish an international position at all.

3.2.3 Lack of interest

The previous observations show why Finland, Norway and Sweden are not actively engaged in formal bilateral cultural relations with the Netherlands. For Denmark, there is a different reason. The Danish government has made the explicit decision to not be involved in formal bilateral cultural relations with the Netherlands.

The Danish government provides a sufficient base on which formal cultural relations with the Netherlands could be built. This is in contrast to Finland, Norway and Sweden. By appointing a specific

governmental body that is responsible for and involved in international cultural affairs, the government demonstrates its active role and involvement in international cultural relations. This body has set up a self-containing strategy for international cultural co-operation. This strategy guides international cultural activities of Denmark because it entails objectives, principles and focus areas. In the strategy, much attention is paid to the contribution that national cultural expressions can make to establishing a strong international reputation, as well as the influence that these expressions have on the perceptions of foreign countries of Denmark. The International Cultural Panel has strategically chosen a selection of countries as places to concentrate international cultural activities, and the Netherlands is not on this list. The Danish government has thus consciously chosen to not put effort into strengthening its international relations with the Netherlands.

3.3 Conclusion

The results show that the governments of Finland, Norway and Sweden are not active in constructing bilateral cultural relations with the Netherlands. This is because these countries do not have a policy foundation upon which bilateral cultural relations with the Netherlands can be built. The policies they do have in regard to international cultural affairs do not give a direction for relations with the Netherlands. From the introduction, it appears that the Dutch government also does not support cultural relations with the Nordic countries. Thus, there is a lack of bilateral cultural relations between Finland, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands.

It appears that the Netherlands is not an exception. Generally, the governments of Finland, Norway and Sweden keep a distance when it comes to the formalisation of bilateral cultural relations with other countries. They admit the importance of international cultural activities for the international cultural field and reputation of their country, but none of them has set up a self-containing and guiding framework for international cultural activities. The governments are thus not actively working on their bilateral cultural relations. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the relations do not exist. Some governments see the actual cooperation and exchanges as a responsibility of the cultural field. This makes it likely that cultural exchanges take place on the level of the sector. It is likely that these countries do have bilateral cultural relations with foreign countries, but that the governments are not actively participating in the relations.

The lack of formal cultural relations between Denmark and the Netherlands can be attributed to a different reason. The Danish government recognises the importance of culture in international relations. It actively formalises bilateral cultural relations via a self-containing and guiding formal government policy that also includes instructions for cultural nation branding activities. Nevertheless, this does not have a positive outcome for relations with the Netherlands. Denmark focuses its strategy on the BRICS-countries, the Middle East, European neighbours, the United States and Asia. The Netherlands is not a geographic focus area, leading to an absence of formal, bilateral cultural relations between Denmark and the Netherlands. Again, this does not eliminate the existence of bilateral cultural relations on the level of the field.

The role of and attention to the Nordic cultural co-operation in the policies on international cultural affairs of the Nordic countries is generally low. The Finnish and Norwegian governments acknowledge the Nordic cultural co-operation by naming it but do not elaborate on how they position themselves in relation to it. The Swedish government does not mention the cultural co-operation at all. Thus, on a national level, the Nordic countries do not extensively comment on the Nordic cultural co-operation. This fact, in combination with the finding that the Nordic countries do not actively formalise cultural relations with other countries, gives the impression that there could be room for the Nordic cultural co-operation in Nordic countries. Denmark has an exceptional position, because the Danish government explicitly recognises the importance of the Nordic cultural co-operation, is open to it and is actively constructing international cultural relations.

4. The multilateral Nordic cultural co-operation

In the previous chapter, I illustrated the activity and the involvement of the governments of the Nordic countries in international cultural affairs. For each country, I examined five dimensions of their policies regarding international cultural affairs, complemented with the bilateral agreements of Finland and Norway with the Netherlands. I demonstrated that the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish government exercise restraint in formalising bilateral cultural relations with foreign countries such as the Netherlands. They also do not have an active role in using cultural expressions to establish an international position. The Danish government is strongly involved in international relations and nation branding, in contrast. These results raise the question of how the multilateral Nordic cultural co-operation is related to activity on a national level. Does Nordic intend to replace any international cultural activities of the Nordic countries, or will it be complementary? To investigate this, I elaborate on the multilateral Nordic co-operation in this chapter. Insights on this co-operation are needed to understand if and how the Nordic multilateral cultural co-operation could affect the bilateral cultural relations of the Nordic countries.

In this chapter, I take three steps. First, I present the relevant information about the Nordic cultural co-operation. This step is covered in the first section. The information was found in policy documents on the internet about the Nordic co-operation, namely the *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region*, the “Concept for joint Nordic cultural ventures” and various websites that discuss Nordic cultural activities. The names of these sources already demonstrate that the Nordic cultural co-operation is strongly focused on ‘the other.’ Second, I interpret the policies about the Nordic cultural co-operation. This step is presented in the second section. I present an analysis of what the information implies about the multilateral Nordic cultural co-operation and its relation with the Nordic countries. Lastly, I present the conclusion. In the third section, I describe the nature of the Nordic cultural co-operation and the implications for the Nordic countries.

4.1 Operationalisation of the Nordic co-operation

The ministers for Nordic co-operation launched a programme in 2014 to brand the Nordic countries globally.⁹¹ One of the arguments for this programme was that the outside world already defined the Nordic region as a unit. The ministers chose five specific branding areas. Nordic culture is one of them, because “for some time, characteristically Nordic cuisine, design, films, music and literature have been bringing the Nordic region international recognition. The successes, which come from all the Nordic countries, often share a distinctly Nordic element – a Nordic trademark.”⁹² Nordic cultural expressions, including Nordic Noir, Nordic Design, New Nordic Food and The Nordic Music Wonder, fascinate the outside world and are a unique trademark of the Nordic region.⁹³ The ministers thus expect that communicating Nordic culture to the outside world can strengthen the international competitiveness and influence of the Nordic region.

The strategy was launched for the interests of the Nordic region, but the ministers mention that common branding activities should also benefit the Nordic countries: “The role of co-operation in inter-Nordic and international affairs has to be politically relevant to the people of the Region, their MPs and governments. It must generate Nordic synergies, add value for all and lead to tangible political results (...) We will strive to ensure that Nordic co-operation on international issues complements the forms of co-operation that take place in other organisations.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ C. Marklund, “The Nordic Model on the Global Market of Ideas: The Welfare State as Scandinavia’s Best Brand,” 623.

⁹² The Nordic Council of Ministers, *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region*, 5, 8.

⁹³ The Nordic Council of Ministers, *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region*, 18.

⁹⁴ Nordic Co-operation, “The Nordic Region - together we are stronger.”

4.1.1 Geographical focus areas

There are two geographical areas where the ministers specifically want to reinforce a strong position and image for the Nordic region. The areas were selected based on two criteria. The Nordic countries should have global advantage there, and there is added value in presenting the Nordic countries as the Nordic region. The areas were selected in consideration of the Nordic countries and organisations in the Nordic co-operation. The first areas are regional neighbours. These are countries with whom the Nordic countries and/or the Nordic region already have collaborations and relations with and who have shown a growing interest in the Nordic region. They include the Baltic Sea area, multiple European countries, the United States and Canada. The second area concerns remote markets. Remote markets are countries that have relatively low knowledge about each Nordic country and that have increasing influence on the global development, including Brazil, Russia, India, China and South-Africa.⁹⁵

4.1.2 Implementation of the strategy

The determination of Nordic culture as a branding area is reflected in two ways: 1) financial support for cultural projects that brand the region and 2) a framework for the organisation of Nordic cultural ventures.

In 2015, the ministers for Nordic co-operation published a call for applications for cultural projects to boost the international profile of the Nordic region. A total of 23 applications were approved. One example is Arena New York, during which Nordic fashion is showcased. The project is led by the Norwegian Fashion Institute and carried out in partnership with Finnish Textile & Fashion, Iceland Design Center and Danish Fashion Institute, among other institutions. To date, the supported projects have all taken place in the geographical focus areas. They differ in content and focus, but all help to showcase the values and strengths of the Nordic region to the outside world.⁹⁶

The Concept for Joint Nordic Cultural Ventures is an initiative to implement the strategy. This concept presents an organisational framework for Nordic cultural ventures. The objective of a venture is to strengthen the interaction of Nordic cultural actors with the rest of the world, raise their international profile and the creative profile of the Nordic region. A venture can be self-containing, or it can add on to existing cultural events at the destination. Each venture is organised by a project group of local participants, the embassy representatives and representatives of locally-involved cultural participants. There are a few requirements to fulfil when organising a Nordic cultural venture. It must include different art forms that promote the Nordic cultural scene internationally, a minimum of four out of the eight Nordic countries/islands should be represented in the venture and there must be local interest and demand for a Nordic cultural venture. The Nordic Council of Ministers supports the funding of the ventures. It has made a central budget available for identifying, preparing and coordinating major international branding activities. Additionally, public, private, Nordic, national and local funds from the destination can be involved.⁹⁷

So far, two Nordic cultural ventures have been organised. Nordic Cool served as an example for the Nordic branding initiatives.⁹⁸ It took place in Washington in 2013. The Nordic Council of Ministers, the Kennedy Center, the Nordic embassies in the United States and multiple small-scale stakeholders were

⁹⁵ The Nordic Council of Ministers, *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region*, 19.

⁹⁶ "Boosting The Nordics – 23 new projects," Nordic Co-operation, accessed February 10, 2018, <http://www.norden.org/en/news-and-events/news/boosting-the-nordics-2013-23-new-projects>.

⁹⁷ "Concept for joint Nordic cultural ventures," Nordic Co-operation, last modified October 28, 2015, accessed July 9, 2017, <http://www.norden.org/en/nordic-council-of-ministers/council-of-ministers/the-nordic-council-of-ministers-for-culture-mr-k/declarations-and-statements/concept-for-joint-nordic-cultural-ventures>.

⁹⁸ The Nordic Council of Ministers, *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region*, 7; Embassy of Sweden – Washington, "Nordic Cool 2013," *Swedenabroad*, accessed June 13, 2017, <http://www.swedenabroad.com/en-GB/Embassies/Washington/Current-affairs/Nordic-Cool-2013-sys1/>.

involved, among others. For one month, more than 700 Nordic chefs, musicians, actors, designers, dancers, writers and signers promoted Nordic culture in Washington DC via branding-oriented events.⁹⁹ The program included a high number of cultural activities, such as a performance by the Icelandic band Of Monsters and Men, the premiere of the Sweden Royal Dramatic Theatre of Fanny and Alexander, the exhibition Are We Still Afloat by the Finnish artists Kaarina Kaikkonen, a Danish Lego exhibit and a cinematic Norwegian thriller. The majority of the events took place in the J.F. Kennedy Center, but there were also other locations. Activities to highlight the participation of Sweden were hosted in the House of Sweden, for example.¹⁰⁰ The festival was very successful, and a second cultural venture was organised in 2017.¹⁰¹ In 2017, the festival Nordic Matters ran in the United Kingdom. This international festival was initiated by the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Nordic embassies in London and national cultural agencies in the Nordic countries. Funding was provided by the Southbank Centre, the Nordic Council of Ministers, Nordic public arts funding institutions and private parties. The festival featured various Nordic performances, such as a floating textile installation by the Finnish-Sami artists Outi Pieski, a performance by the Swedish jazz vocalist Emilia Martensson with the Danish jazz bassist Jasper Hoiby and a lecture by the Icelandic author Sjon.¹⁰²

4.2 Analysis

In the previous section, I presented information on the Nordic cultural co-operation since 2014. I elaborated on Nordic culture as a branding area, the geographic focus areas and how Nordic culture is reflected in practice. In reviewing this information, I understood that the multilateral Nordic cultural co-operation is centred on a directed presentation of the Nordic nation abroad that gains attention for the Nordic nation states. This interpretation is supported by the observations that the co-operation is focused on the international presentation of the Nordic region, that these presentations are explicitly guided by formal Nordic bodies and that these bodies try to serve the interests of the Nordic countries. In this section, I elaborate on these three points.

4.2.1 Presenting the Nordic region to the surrounding world

The multilateral Nordic cultural co-operation is explicitly outward-focused. It entails cultural branding activities that should present the Nordic region to the surrounding world and establish a strong position in other countries. This makes the co-operation centred on confrontations with foreign countries.

Co-operation takes a central stage in the branding activities of the Nordic region. The requirements for organising a cultural project or cultural venture enforce a strong partnership between various Nordic stakeholders, illustrated by Nordic Cool and Nordic Matters. Co-operation is thus necessary to execute the cultural activities and the successes of certain events can probably be attributed to the co-operative character as well. After all, the size and the content make it impossible for a single Nordic country to organise. This evokes the impression that the ministers want to make co-operation a part of their desired international image.

⁹⁹ "Nordic cultural wave rolls over USA," Nordic Co-operation, last modified November 11, 2012, accessed February 10, 2018, <http://www.norden.org/en/news-and-events/news/nordic-cultural-wave-rolls-over-usa>.

¹⁰⁰ S. Merry, "Nordic Cool 2013 takes over the Kennedy Center," *The Washington Post*, last modified February 14, 2013, accessed June 13, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/gooutguide/nordic-cool-2013-takes-over-the-kennedy-center/2013/02/14/ea7ef062-6fd6-11e2-8b8d-e0b59a1b8e2a_story.html?utm_term=.cc8fe700b676; Embassy of Sweden – Washington, "Nordic Cool 2013."

¹⁰¹ Danish Arts Foundation, "Hot facts about Nordic Cool," *Kunst*, accessed June 19, 2017, <http://www.kunst.dk/english/press/news/hot-facts-about-nordic-cool/>.

¹⁰² "Culture ministers open Nordic Matters in London," Nordic Co-operation, last modified January 13, 2017, accessed October 5, 2017, <http://www.norden.org/en/news-and-events/news/culture-ministers-open-nordic-matters-in-london>; "Series-Nordic Matters," Southbank Center, accessed October 5, 2017, <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/festivals-seriesa/nordic-matters>.

Interestingly, this image derives from an interplay between external images and inner visions. The strategy is a reaction to an image of the region that is already widespread. Foreign countries already perceive the Nordic countries as a unit and have certain perceptions about the region. These perceptions derive from the fact that the Nordic countries are often represented abroad as a unified region. Because of this existing image abroad, it is a natural decision for the ministers to rely on this image by enhancing it internationally.¹⁰³ The ministers thus deploy their external image to strengthen their position, doing so with their own visions as well. They have deployed Nordic culture as a centrepiece of the branding strategy by considering Nordic Noir, Nordic Design, New Nordic Food and Nordic Music as unique characteristics of the Nordic region and its identity. They thus use features that they consider unique elements of the region, to strengthen their position and communicate a desired image abroad.

4.2.2 Guiding the international presentation of the Nordic region

The formal bodies of the Nordic region want to ensure that cultural branding activities are carried out in the way the ministers for Nordic co-operation have envisioned, a way that optimally contributes to achieving the aim of the strategy. They exert their control over the cultural ventures and projects in two ways.

Nordic bodies exert influence on branding activities. This first appears in the requirements that need to be fulfilled when one wants to organise a cultural venture. They give a clear direction to the cultural venture. For cultural projects, no requirements have been found, but it can be presumed that they exist and influence the type and content of the projects. This shows that the Nordic bodies keep control over the international cultural branding activities, even though they assign the responsibility to carry out these activities to the Nordic cultural actors. Additionally, it is expected that the Nordic Council of Ministers and multiple other Nordic and national bodies exert their influence on the activities via funding. Detailed requirements for funding are not found, but it can be assumed that they exist and are linked to the requirements for organising a cultural venture. Because these parties provide funding, it is likely that they have an interest in what kinds of activities are supported and thus will try to exert influence, particularly because funding for Nordic initiatives will lead to less funding for national initiatives.

The ministers exert control over not only what activities are organised, but also where they are organised, through the determination of geographic focus areas. Determining focus countries demonstrates that the ministers have a clear 'other' in mind a clear where they want to brand the region. It is a strategic way to coordinate where Nordic stakeholders organise their cultural branding activities. The size of the remote markets makes it beneficial to enter as a unified region, because it offers more visibility and attention than if the Nordic countries entered alone.

4.2.3 Serving the interest of the Nordic countries

The ministers for Nordic co-operation pay much attention to the interests of the Nordic countries in the multilateral branding efforts. They do so consciously and unconsciously.

The ministers explicitly acknowledge that Nordic is composed of sovereign Nordic countries that have their own interests. This appears in the aim of the strategy and the statement that the ministers "strive to ensure that Nordic co-operation on international issues complements the forms of co-operation that take place in other organizations."¹⁰⁴ It illustrates that the ministers try to keep the countries satisfied and autonomous.

¹⁰³ C. Marklund, "The Nordic Model on the Global Market of Ideas," 633.

¹⁰⁴ Nordic Co-operation, "The Nordic Region - together we are stronger"; The Nordic Council of Ministers, *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region*, 9.

The ministers serve national interests indirectly as well, in two ways. First, they leave space for the contributions of the Nordic countries to the Nordic branding initiatives. The common Nordic cultural activities are less common than expected. Concepts such as Nordic Design and Nordic Music seem to have a common character, but they are actually constructed from cultural expressions of the Nordic countries. This demonstrates how the Nordic countries stay individual within common activities. Additionally, the detailed descriptions of cultural branding activities, such as Nordic Matters and Nordic Cool, demonstrate that Nordic activities actually consist of contributions from the Nordic countries. Specific attention is paid to the origin of each expression that is part of the Nordic initiative. Newspapers and magazines exemplify the origin of each cultural expression as well. A second way that the ministers serve national interests is by ensuring that the Nordic initiatives do not take place at the expense of national initiatives. The Nordic activities have a complementary character. It can be assumed that the majority of the events are set up for the strategy and aim to brand the Nordic region. The requirements for organising a Nordic cultural venture make it difficult for a Nordic cultural venture to be incorporated into existing initiatives of the Nordic countries.

4.3 Conclusion

Nordic cultural co-operation is increased due to the Nordic branding strategy and is now concentrated on establishing a strong position in foreign countries. The branding strategy is a reaction to perceptions that foreign countries already have of the Nordic region. This strategy has turned Nordic into a trademark and encourages Nordic actors to communicate this trademark abroad via Nordic cultural ventures and projects. The new co-operation is thus focused on confrontations with other countries. The region has a specific interest in branding itself in remote markets and regional neighbours, which partly overlaps with the focus areas of Denmark. The cultural expressions that should market Nordic in those countries form an important dimension of the Nordic identity. The Nordic cultural co-operation thus encourages the construction of the Nordic identity in confrontations with other countries, while this identity is also emphasised internationally to strengthen international relations.

It is interesting that the Nordic cultural co-operation seems to be an equation of the interests of the Nordic countries. The strategy is launched and guided for the benefit of the Nordic region, but the ministers preserve the autonomy of the Nordic countries as well. They ensure the maintenance of national initiatives, and within the Nordic initiatives, they make a distinction between Danish, Finnish, Swedish or Norwegian elements in Nordic culture. Hence, the countries seem to maintain their national culture and can still use national culture to construct national identities. This could declare why Nordic countries do not mention Nordic cultural co-operation as harmful in their policies. It seems that the Nordic co-operation does not pose a threat on a national level, which is particularly important for Denmark.

However, the ministers do more than not posing threats. The co-operation also provides opportunities for the Nordic countries. The Nordic co-operation offers the countries access to countries that are too large to enter alone and more frequent access to countries where they are already present. In other words, the co-operation facilitates confrontations with other countries. Moreover, the Nordic cultural co-operation offers Nordic countries more national visibility and attention in those countries. Because of the explicit recognition for the national cultural contributions to the Nordic cultural ventures and projects, the Nordic cultural co-operation helps the Nordic countries to promote themselves abroad. These opportunities can be used to construct and express a national identity.

Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that Nordic culture will always be the core of the activities. The Nordic region will be the first identifier that the receiving countries will see. Another point that might be problematic on a national level is that Nordic cultural ventures are funded by parties that normally fund

national cultural activities. They have probably retracted money for Nordic projects from the budget for national projects, so fewer financial resources are available for national cultural initiatives.

The results of this chapter demonstrate that in Nordic policy, formal bodies extensively elaborate on one of the two roles that Nordic culture can fulfil in constructing the Nordic identity. Nordic culture is used to communicate Nordic as a trademark to other countries and thus explicitly has an outward function. However, the ministers do not go into detail when it comes to the connection that Nordic culture establishes within the Nordic community. They also lack attention to the implications of Nordic branding and the use of Nordic culture in foreign relations for the Nordic countries and their bilateral cultural relations. This demonstrates that in policy, the Nordic region and culture are considered self-evident and important to communicate to the outside world. A detailed discussion of the inward role of Nordic culture as a force that connects is missing.

5. Conclusion

The central question of this thesis was: what are the consequences of the increased Nordic cultural co-operation for the bilateral cultural relations of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden with foreign countries? This question has been answered in three steps. First, I focused on what the theory implies about the consequences. The concept of national identity took a central stage in this analysis. Second, policy documents of the Nordic countries were analysed to understand how the Nordic countries arrange formal cultural relations with foreign countries, specifically with the Netherlands. Third, I researched the operationalisation of the increased Nordic cultural co-operation by analysing Nordic policy documents. The outcomes of these steps illustrate that consequences of the increased Nordic cultural co-operation for the formal, international cultural relations of the Nordic countries are limited.

5.1 Conclusion

The governments of the Nordic countries deal with international cultural relations in different ways. The Danish government is explicitly on a national course. It finds its international cultural affairs important and tries to direct them via a concrete and self-containing strategy. This strategy includes detailed aims, geographic focus areas and guidelines to market Denmark abroad via national cultural expressions. Finland, Norway and Sweden, in contrast, are less involved in certain affairs. The governments recognise the importance of international cultural affairs and the role of culture in international relations, but leave the formalisation of international cultural relations somewhat in abeyance. They have not set up a guiding self-containing strategy, like Denmark. Instead, they have slightly incorporated international cultural affairs in foreign or national cultural policy and assigned the responsibility for execution of cultural exchanges and nation branding via culture to the cultural field.

The ministers for Nordic co-operation put efforts into a topic from which Finland, Norway and Sweden remain distant in the execution. Since 2014, the ministers for Nordic co-operation have been actively involved in the international cultural affairs of the Nordic region. This co-operation contributes to construction of the Nordic identity, while the identity is at the same time reflected in the co-operation. In the shifted co-operation, the ministers actively guide Nordic international cultural activities via a self-containing branding strategy. This strategy is an anticipation of the fact that foreign countries already look at the Nordic countries as a unified and intensively co-operating region. Nordic cultural ventures and projects should strengthen this image and the competitiveness of the Nordic countries, as well as increase opportunities for the Nordic region to exert international influence. Cultural affairs are thus an area where the involvement of Nordic formal bodies diverges from the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish governments.

Interestingly, the ministers for Nordic co-operation guide the international cultural branding activities of the Nordic region in a way that does not block the path of the Nordic countries. This is especially important for Denmark, since Denmark is active in feeding, guiding and communicating a desired image in the same countries as the Nordic region. Instead of blocking the path, the Nordic cultural activities can be an added value for the Nordic countries in multiple ways. It first appears that the Nordic countries obtain access to remote markets and can more frequently enter neighbouring countries because they enter as the Nordic region. The confrontations that derive from these accesses can be used in the construction of a national identity. Second, the Nordic countries have the opportunity to follow their own path in the remote markets and neighbouring countries. This is because in the Nordic cultural projects and ventures, there is specific attention to the contributions of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Also in external communication it

is emphasised which cultural activity originates from which Nordic country. This attention evokes the impression that Nordic culture does not overrule the national culture of the Nordic countries, but that it is only constructed of national cultural expressions. The attention also ensures that foreign countries can see differences between the Nordic countries. The Nordic countries can thus still use their national culture and confrontations with other Nordic countries to construct their national cultural identities. A third reason why the Nordic cultural co-operation can be an added value for the Nordic countries, is because the emphasis on national cultural contributions leads to the possibility of presenting a national identity abroad. Nordic cultural activities thus ensure that the receivers of the activities know that the region consists of autonomous nation states with own national identities.

The Nordic co-operation primarily seems to have positive implications, but it will not solely produce positive results. The unified Nordic region is centralised and emphasised in Nordic international cultural activities. Even though the contributions of the Nordic countries are recognised, neighbouring countries could still shift their attention and interest from the Nordic countries to the Nordic region, while remote markets might directly approach the countries as the Nordic region. Another possible problem concerns funding. Since multiple funding bodies on a national level allocate funding to Nordic cultural ventures and projects, there could be less funding available for national cultural (branding) activities. For Denmark, there is also the possibility that Nordic cultural activities create a different image of Denmark in the countries that Denmark and the Nordic region both prioritise, than how Denmark envisions itself. Hence, despite Nordic offers the Nordic countries nation branding opportunities in remote markets and neighbouring countries, it is not guaranteed that this leads to more and stronger bilateral cultural relations with these countries.

However, it is expected that these tensions will be limited. Nordic formal bodies guide Nordic cultural activities in a way that there is much attention to the autonomy and interests of the Nordic countries and that the activities are complementary to national initiatives abroad. This illustrates that the ministers explicitly anticipate the importance of national sovereignty of the Nordic countries within the Nordic co-operation. They demonstrate their willingness to hand in a bit of the image of a unified Nordic region to keep the Nordic countries satisfied. Consequently, Nordic will not interfere with the bilateral cultural relations of Denmark with foreign countries, but probably offer opportunities to reinforce them. For Finland, Norway and Sweden, Nordic cannot interfere with their international cultural relations, because their governments do not formalise them. What Nordic does, in contrast, is offering these governments the opportunity be more involved in international cultural affairs, which these countries also find important. Without putting aside possible tensions, it can thus be concluded that the consequences of the increased Nordic cultural co-operation for the bilateral cultural relations of the Nordic countries are limited.

5.2 Discussion

5.2.1 Theory versus policy

The theoretical framework did not exactly make clear how the Nordic identity is related to the national identities of the Nordic countries. Reasoning from the concept of hybrid identity, they could co-exist. However, the focus of the Nordic region on international representation and visibility made me expect that this relationship would be tense. However, the first scenario appears to be true. In this thesis, I have demonstrated that the Nordic identity and the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish identities are hybrid, which means that they can co-exist. Formal policy shows that the ministers of Nordic co-operation are aware of the possible tensions that the Nordic idea can evoke on a national level. They stress that Nordic should not block the path of the national activities of the Nordic countries. This seems to work, because the Nordic countries do not consider the Nordic co-operation as a threat in their policy. It seems that the Nordic culture does not overrule

the national cultures of the Nordic countries, but moreover that Nordic does not interfere national representation and nation branding activities. This all demonstrates that the Nordic identity leaves enough space for the construction and dissemination of national identities. This is important for the Nordic countries to construct and reinforce international cultural relations.

What I also did not expect is that the Nordic identity explicitly refers to national identities. The focus of the Nordic region on its international branding made me think that Nordic would show as little as possible that it consists of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. However, in policy, the opposite appears. A great emphasis is placed on the contributions of the Nordic countries to the Nordic initiatives, demonstrating that Nordic is explicitly constructed of the Nordic countries. The essence and success of the Nordic identity seems to be that it exists of autonomous nation states.

There is an important remark to make regarding this result. The finding that the Nordic identity and the national identities can co-exist derives from the analysis of policy documents. However, it could be expected that formal bodies of the Nordic region write down their policy in a way that is not a hindrance on a national level. The ministers have an interest in making it appear that they take into consideration the Nordic countries. The same applies for the Nordic countries; it would be a surprise if they explicitly mentioned the Nordic cultural co-operation as a threat in their policy. The question is thus whether the real situation is as rosy as it is presented in policy. It is possible that in Nordic policy documents, an image of the co-operation and its implications for Nordic countries is presented as more favourable than it actually is.

In this respect, it cannot be guaranteed either that Nordic culture does not threaten national culture and its role in constructing a national identity. Nordic policy documents and academic literature illustrate that the co-operation does not threaten the ability of the Nordic countries to construct a national identity in confrontation with other countries. In doing so, Nordic policy makers and academics take the concept Nordic culture for granted, but they do not go into detail on this concept. Although it seems that Nordic culture does not threaten national culture, it should be kept in mind that this is not latterly confirmed in Nordic policy documents or academic literature.

5.2.2 Significance

In this thesis, I have explored the fundamental question of transnational cross-border collaboration and positioning by examining the Nordic co-operation as a case study. The Nordic co-operation shows that culture is a policy field that lends itself to multilateral collaboration. It is an element that connects different countries, which qualifies it for emphasis in international relations. Moreover, this research has demonstrated that the establishment of multilateral relations with and multilateral positioning in foreign countries can be beneficial for the participating countries. As a single country, it is difficult to compete with large markets or to be approached as an equal co-operation partner. Being part of a regional cross-border partnership offers more visibility and an equal position. At the same time, this thesis has demonstrated that these positive influences can only happen when the central body succeeds in respecting the autonomy and sovereignty of the participating countries.

This research also contributes to the lack of knowledge about the cultural relations between the Netherlands and the Nordic countries. It has appeared that cultural exchanges between the countries are currently not led by official government policy. Regarding Denmark, this is because the Netherlands and Denmark do not prioritise each other. For Finland, Norway and Sweden, this is due to a lack of policy on their side and a conscious decision of the Netherlands. In spite of this current lack of relations, it is possible that bilateral relations will arise in the future. The three Nordic countries are currently not equal co-operation partners for the Netherlands, since they are not formally concerned with cultural relations. Now that Nordic

has increased its activity in this field, the Netherlands is faced with a region that is conducting similar activities as itself. It may be interesting for the Netherlands to be more related to the Nordic countries.

5.2.3 Limitations

These findings are solely based on desk research. No interviews were conducted with members of the Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish government or the ministers for Nordic co-operation. Hence, this research remains speculative and does not show if the situation as it is presented in Nordic policy is the same in practice. Field research would likely shine a different light on how the Nordic countries experience cross-border cultural collaboration and thus result in different outcomes.

A second limitation is that the bilateral cultural relations of the Nordic countries with foreign countries were explained through one foreign country. It is unsure whether the character of their international bilateral cultural relations would have appeared the same if another foreign country had been chosen. Although the third chapter provides insights on how the Nordic countries shape formal cultural relations, a complete perspective on these relations was not provided.

Lastly, it should be taken into account that this research only focused on formal cultural relations. If the cultural relations between actors in the field had been taken into consideration, different results would have been found. This thesis thus does not provide a complete picture of the cultural relations.

5.3 Recommendations

In this thesis, I have explored cross-border collaboration and positioning through formal regional cultural partnership of the Nordic countries. The conclusion that cross-border cultural co-operation can be beneficial for the Nordic countries does not mean that all cross-border co-operations are beneficial for participating countries. It is therefore recommended to take a closer look at other established or potential multilateral co-operations. One co-operation that may be interesting is the collaboration and positioning of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Like the Nordic countries, these countries are often approached as a unified region. An exploration of the existing or potential formal cultural co-operation between these countries and the possible positive and negative consequences would provide valuable information for the overarching question of this thesis.

Another valuable addition to the existing research on cross-border collaboration and positioning would be to approach this research from another field. In this thesis, I have concentrated on the consequences of multilateral co-operation for the cultural relations of countries. Because culture is only one of the fields that can be affected by the Nordic co-operation, it would be interesting to research the economic, political or social consequences for the Nordic countries.

This thesis has primarily delivered insights on the outward perspective of the Nordic identity and demonstrated that the connection between the Nordic countries is generally taken for granted by academics and policy makers. It would be interesting to investigate this connection in greater detail with other types of research. Researching the inward perspective would deliver valuable information about the Nordic identity.

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