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Policy framing of international student mobility in the Nordic countries

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ABSTRACT

Student mobility in the Nordic countries has traditionally been characterized by cultural cooperation and egalitarian values. Yet, the region has not been isolated from international trends towards emphasizing excellence and competition in the global knowledge economy. Policy framing is here used as an analytical lens for analysing national policy documents on international student mobility over a 20-year period. The analysis finds that the Nordic countries have become increasingly different in how international student mobility is framed. In both Denmark and Finland, the economic frame has become prominent, yet containing somewhat different kinds of ambitions and concerns. In Sweden and Norway, the framing is still predominantly educational. The article challenges the assumptions of the Nordic countries as a cohesive region, and provides a critical exploration into how justifications for international student mobility include important national translations.

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Introduction

In the past 20 years, globalization, internationalization, the knowledge economy and competitiveness have become prominent concepts in national policy debates. While higher education has always been an international endeavour, in the last 20 years the number of international students has risen substantially. Between 1998 and 2019, there was an annual average of 5.5% growth in the number of full degree international mobile students; in 2019, 6.1 million students were enrolled in higher education abroad for a full degree (OECD 2021). In addition, many students undertake parts of their higher education abroad as exchange students. The global international student market has been marked by increased competition and view of students as a source of revenue (Kälvermark and van der Wende 1997; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004; Verbik and Lasanowski 2007). This is a rather unequal market, where countries such as USA, UK and Australia are highly marketized and have traditionally been among top receiving countries, despite increased competition for this position (de Wit, Ferencz, and Rumbley 2013; Meiras 2004), while the situation

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for non-anglophone countries remains more challenging (see, e.g. de Wit, Minaeva, and Wang 2022).

In the European context, international student mobility is a well-established activity. There is the ERASMUS scheme for credit mobility, supported by the EU, and considerable work towards the European Higher Education Area that would facilitate degree mobility. International student mobility in Europe has not been driven merely by an economic rationale. While countries like the UK are among the top receiving countries concerning global student mobility, in other parts of Europe student mobility has traditionally not been associated with commodification and revenue seeking. The Nordic region is often characterized by the existence of a specific welfare state model, which also has implications for how higher education is organized (Fägerlind and Strömquist 2004). The educational model is associated with equity and participation (Antikainen 2006). Nevertheless, the Nordic region has also been changing, and more strategic approaches to internationalization have been identified (Gornitzka and Langfeldt 2008). Higher education reform trajectories in the Nordic countries have become increasingly diverse, challenging whether a Nordic model for higher education is a relevant description (Christensen, Gornitzka, and Maassen 2014). These developments make it pertinent to explore whether the egalitarianism-oriented policy orientations concerning student mobility in the Nordic countries are standing strong or whether these have also become challenged in this context.

The article addresses the following questions: How similar or different are the Nordic countries in how they address the issue of international student mobility? To what extent and how has the economically oriented framing of international student mobility become visible in the Nordic countries? International student mobility is a highly relevant case for examining changing norms and values in Nordic higher education, it is a policy area that by its nature is international and strongly exposed to international trends. We focus on about 25 years of policy developments in four largest Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden; and examine policy framing of both credit and degree mobility. Analytically, the article employs the concept of policy frames to unveil the justifications for international student mobility. Frames provide information about the values and principles underpinning a specific preference, the goals of a policy, and the specific plans to achieve these goals. While earlier studies have analysed policy developments in individual countries in the Nordic region (see, e.g. Gornitzka and Langfeldt 2008; Nokkala 2007; Nokkala 2008, among others), our aim here is to take stock in a more comparative manner and in this manner also emphasis the similarities and differences within the region as a whole.

Analytical framework

Policy framing takes its basic starting point from the argument that issues are not independent of actors, and that a problem definition is an essential aspect of the outcomes that can be expected (Daviter 2007). This means that observed issues are placed into a 'context that gives them meaning', where policymakers apply their particular interpretative lens on how an issue is to be conceptualized (Zahariadis 2003, 88). Problem definition for policies is neither not just a mere statement of neutral facts, nor does it only take place in the agenda-setting phase – issues also become renegotiated during

the policy process (Weiss 1989). A frame then consists of specific information about the values and principles underpinning a specific preference, the goals of a policy, and the specific plans to achieve these goals (Zahariadis 2003, 91). Framing thus consists of cognitive (this is what the issue is), normative (this is why it is important) and causal (this is how solutions will help to solve it) elements (Mampaey and Vukasovic 2016). Framing is not necessarily only an approach to analyse specific episodes of agenda-setting or decision-making, it can also be used as a conceptual tool to both analyse renegotiations and contestations regarding issue definitions during the whole policy process. It can also function as a means to examine potential shifts over time in the dominant frames in policy outputs. It is the latter perspective that is being employed here, as focus is on different frames employed in major policy documents within a specific issue area over a period of time. We focus on the problem definition, justifications, and the reasoning concerning relevant solutions in the area international student mobility.

Internationalization and student mobility can be seen as a rather well-established theme in higher education policies in most countries. The rationales for international student mobility are closely related to rationales for internationalization of higher education, as student mobility is often an important component of internationalization policies. A distinction is often made between four types of rationales for internationalization: educational, cultural, economic and political (de Wit 2002; Knight 2004; Sin, Antonowicz, and Wiers-Jenssen 2021; Van der Wende 1997; Wang 2022), which we employ here as distinct *a priori* identified frames for international student mobility. *Educational frame* emphasizes how exchange of ideas has an academic value. Outgoing students bring new ideas upon returning home, and incoming students are often seen as a source of 'internationalization at home'. Introducing an international dimension to teaching is also linked to overall quality enhancement. For small countries, there may also be an instrumental side to this as they may need to compensate for deficits in diversity and breadth in the domestic provision of higher education. *Cultural frame* emphasizes the value of intercultural skills necessary to operate in an increasingly global society. Given the increasingly globalized world, higher education graduates need to exhibit understanding of other cultures and languages. Cultural rationales can also have an underlying economic pay-off in the long run, as this cultural competence can contribute to economic development, but this is not necessarily highlighted as an explicit aim. Instead, this rationale emphasizes solidarity with countries and exchange of cultural norms across borders. *Economic frame* emphasizes economic growth and technology development. On a global scale, this has been one of the main justifications for internationalization and student mobility decades ago (Knight and de Wit 1995). In this kind of frame, student exchange becomes an investment, both to economic relations and to competitiveness. Mobility can also mean more direct economic benefits, through tuition fees or local job creation (Meiras 2004). Finally, education may also be seen as a dimension of foreign policy and thus having a *political frame*. In this frame, education is a means for strategic alliances, a means to exercise soft power (see, e.g. Lomer 2017 for an analysis of soft power justification in UK policies for international student mobility). Student mobility concerns the creation of new ties between countries, and it contributes to mutual understanding. Student mobility can also become a means of country branding, to some extent touching upon cultural rationales.

These frames are also deeply embedded in the priorities of society and its educational system, and one can expect several frames to be visible at any point of time (Wang 2022). For example, a short-term cultural frame (intercultural competence) can have long-term consequences (competitiveness), and alternatively, a long-term educational frame (academic quality) may also promote short-term economic frame (more market-oriented thinking about student services). We take these four as a starting point to analyse policy framing in the Nordic countries and focus on the frames that become activated when the following is being discussed: what student mobility is expected to contribute to (the problem), why it is considered important and relevant as a solution (justifications) and how student mobility as a solution is explained (the solution).

Research setting and methodology

From the outside, the Nordic region is viewed as a cohesive region with relatively homogeneous ethnicity and religion, political democracy, participatory and consensus-oriented approach to politics, focus on human rights, equality and rule of law and a high standard of living (Christiansen and Markkola 2006). While a Nordic model for higher education is often referred to, recent trends concerning university governance and funding seem to challenge these historical patterns (Christensen, Gornitzka, and Maassen 2014), which is also where our analysis takes a starting point in.

Qualitative methods were applied to analyse dominant frames expressed in national-level policy outputs in the last approximately 25 years. This time frame was selected as it was around mid-1990s that substantial policy debates concerning internationalization began in the region. The analysis has its main focus on major White Papers or equivalent. The specific form of documents, how comprehensive they are, and how often they are published, varies between the countries. Supplementary to these analyses, we rely on existing studies and secondary data.

Qualitative content analysis is employed, and documents were coded to identify the 'problem' student mobility is addressing (this includes whether student mobility is a goal in itself or is presented as a solution to an identified problem), why this is an important problem (justifications), and how student mobility as a solution (if this is the case) is being presented (e.g. whether there is emphasis on specific forms of mobility, selected regions, or durations, etc). We examine both credit and degree mobility as distinct activities. The analysis then examines these findings through the lens of the previously identified policy frames, also having sensitivity towards possible sub-categories, hybrid categories and/or new categories that can emerge in the data. Moreover, the individual frames can also contain several arguments. For example, an economic frame includes both emphasis on international economic competitiveness as a knowledge economy, as well as tuition fees as a source of revenue. In Table 1, we present examples of categories we look for in our analysis. Note that these are examples based on our analytical reasoning and that in our empirical analysis we do expect a more complex and nuanced picture. For example, while for example quality in higher education may be a 'problem' that international student mobility is expected to solve, quality can also become a justification in other instances. In other instances, there may not be a specific problem that student mobility is expected to contribute to, or justifications might be implicit. Here, we expect that this analytical approach helps to uncover some of these inconsistencies and possible changes over time.

Table 1. Examples of coding categories.

	Examples of problems (‘This are our problems to solve’)	Examples of solutions (‘This is how we aim to solve this’)	Examples of justifications (‘This is why it is important’)
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Economic competitiveness – Limited local funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Attracting best students – Int. students as customers; orientation towards markets with fee paying students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Normative arguments concerning rates of return, value and competitiveness
Educational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of diversity – Capacity issues – Academic quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mobility as an academic norm (incoming/outgoing) – Internationalization at home – Emphasis on quality institutions for exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Normative arguments concerning the academic value of internationalization
Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Need for intercultural competencies in a globalized world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mobility as cultural enrichment – Diversity of home/destination countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Normative arguments concerning intercultural skills and global solidarity
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Political threats, alliances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Specific strategic priority countries for collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Normative arguments concerning mutual understanding and strategic international cooperation

National framing of international student mobility

The development of Nordic countries has been marked both by a history of shared values, but also distinct policy trajectories in recent decades. Historically, analysis of student mobility identified the Nordic region frequently operating as a coherent region (Nyborg 1996). The region has a well-established regional system for intra-regional student mobility – through historical linkages and traditions for free movers in degree mobility, a credit mobility programme (Nordplus) and a regional structure that manages this (the Nordic Council of Ministers). More recent student mobility debates in the Nordic countries now have a more global outlook.

To provide some context for the national case analysis, we first present some data on the overall patterns. In all the Nordic countries, the share of incoming international full degree students varies considerably between Bachelor’s and Master’s level (OECD 2021), and in all of the countries the share is higher on Master’s level. The share of international students on Bachelor’s level varies between 2% and 3% (Norway, Sweden) and 6% (Denmark, Finland), while on Master’s level the share varies between 7% (Norway) and 20% (Denmark), with Finland and Sweden in between (11% and 12%). There is also a considerable share of international students on doctoral level. In our analysis, we primarily focus on students on Bachelor’s and Master’s level, as Doctoral education in the Nordic countries is often discussed in conjunction with research training rather than ‘regular’ international student mobility. The share of national students who travel abroad for their full degree varies between 2% in Denmark and 6% in Norway. See Table 2 for an overview of the four Nordic countries in this analysis.

Concerning credit mobility, several schemes are employed. ERASMUS is a well-established scheme and provides an opportunity to compare across the four countries (DG EAC 2020). To get an overview that has not been impacted by the pandemic, we use data that is from the period before the pandemic (see Table 2). In all the Nordic countries the number of incoming students is considerably larger than outgoing students. It should be noted that ERASMUS only covers a part of all the students undertaking credit mobility

Table 2. Mobility patterns in the Nordic countries.

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
Share of international students, full degree, bachelor and master*	6%	6%	2%	3%
	Bachelor 20% Master	Bachelor 11% Master	Bachelor 7% Master	Bachelor 12% Master
Share of degree mobility abroad**	2% of all	4% of all	6% of all	3% of all
ERASMUS, number of incoming students***	4291	7588	6359	8155
ERASMUS, number of outbound students***	2705	4193	2578	3745

*International or foreign student enrolment as a percentage of total tertiary enrolment, in 2019, Source: OECD Education at a Glance 2021 p. 222, Table B6.

**Percentage of national tertiary students enrolled abroad, Source: OECD Education at a Glance 2021 p. 222, Table B6.

***Annex 15 – KA103/107 Higher education student mobility under Call 2018, calculated total numbers of study mobility, excluding traineeships (programme and partner countries), Mobility periods summary, Erasmus+ Annual report 2019.

in the Nordic countries. The share varies somewhat between age groups and countries. For example, for credit mobility in 2020, the share of ERASMUS students is 77% for incoming students in Finland, and 61% for outgoing students,¹ but the share is not as high in other countries. Student support in the Nordic countries allows to conduct mobility periods through bilateral agreements as well as credit mobility organized by students themselves and funded through regular national grants and loans. In addition, some students also use the Nordplus programme.

Denmark

Traditionally, internationalization and degree student mobility were not high on the agenda for Danish higher education governance. Nevertheless, the ministry played an important role in setting up and providing administrative and financial support to institutional participation in Nordic and European exchange programmes during the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. COMETT, ERASMUS and Nordplus). The administrative infrastructure was extended in 2000, when Cirius – the Danish Centre for International Cooperation and Mobility in Education and Training, was established. The role of Cirius was to coordinate Danish participation in international programmes across various educational levels. In mid-1990s, the ministry introduced financial incentives to facilitate mobility (taximeter grant) (Maassen, Nokkala, and Uppstrøm 2005).

From 1994, the student loan scheme through Danish Education Support (SU) was extended to also include students studying abroad, first for three years, later extended to four years (Bjørsted 2010). From 2008, it has been possible to obtain under specific circumstances a grant that also covers tuition fees – for master level and exchange students (Bjørsted 2010). In 2013, an additional loan option was added to cover tuition fees. The public support for mobility is also important for credit mobility, and about 70% of the students obtain regular grants/loans for credit mobility (Eurostudent 2019).

More strategic focus and introduction of tuition fees

During the early 2000 s, the Danish ministry was working with a more strategic approach towards student mobility, in light of a major reform of the sector in 2002 that made Danish institutions self-owning entities. In 2004, the ministries² issue a policy paper 'Enhanced Internationalisation of Danish Education and Training' (UVM 2004). It states clearly that the aim is not to provide an entirely new course, but instead

'internationalisation is more about attitudes, visions, innovation and better utilisation of existing resources rather than making new appropriations' (UVM 2004, 9). The main stipulated aims concern international competitiveness, avoiding brain drain *from* Denmark and Danish enterprises being 'vanguards' of the knowledge economy. Indirectly, the document argues for brain drain towards Denmark. The demands of globalization were argued to require a proactive stance. The framing is rather hybrid, where economic frame has a prominent place. Increased incoming degree mobility is presented as an inherent good – bringing home international experience, international students in Denmark bring 'opportunity for mutual enrichment', pointing also to a cultural and educational frame. To achieve this, education should include an international dimension, and there is an emphasis on more English-language programmes to attract 'highly qualified foreign students and researchers' (UVM 2004, 12). In general, stronger competition is expected to enhance quality and in this manner be beneficiary for Danish students, as well as for attracting increasing number of foreign students. Outgoing mobility is mentioned, but not a major focus in the document. There are also several arguments within the economic frame. Much of the document takes a starting point in an increasingly globalized context, where education has a role to assure Denmark's competitiveness: 'education being the key to growth and welfare for individuals, enterprises and society alike' (UVM 2004, 7). Given that at the time Denmark had experienced an imbalance in those who come and stay vs. those who return abroad, there is also a visible concern that too few international students stay after their studies. While not a core of the document, two other issues are quite clearly economically framed: opportunities for Danish institutions to engage in online markets; and international competition on paid-for markets, where education is specifically referred to as a service. Competition here is framed as a means for higher quality. While economic and to some extent educational frames for degree mobility dominate in this policy paper, there is also a hint political frame as internationalization is also linked to various supra/inter-national bodies and international cooperation.

In 2005 the Danish parliament decided to introduce tuition fees to non-EU/EEA students. The stated rationale was to not pay for other countries' students' education. In parallel, there were also incentives introduced to attract the best international students to Denmark. The introduction of fees led to more strategic behaviour by the universities concerning which markets to orient towards (Mosneaga and Agergaard 2012). This marked an important milestone in Nordic higher education.

In 2007, a decision was reached to use 90 million DKK for internationalization, and on this occasion, a status report was published (Universitets- og Bygningsstyrelsen 2007). The status report reiterates many of the points from the previous strategy in pointing towards the importance of internationalization. It also takes a more explicit point of departure in international cooperation, particularly the Bologna Process; compliance with Bologna is presented as a 'competitive advantage' on an international educational market, pointing towards economic justifications. Moreover, it is noted that the share of international students, while higher than in Sweden and Norway, is still below OECD average. A solution for this is a stronger emphasis on global marketing of Danish higher education (Universitets- og Bygningsstyrelsen 2007). Cirijs developed a separate national strategy for that in 2007, with an aim to support institutional efforts in this area (CIRIJS 2007).

In 2013, a new internationalization agenda was launched. The agenda was launched into two parts – first concerning sending students abroad (launched in 2013), and in the second part about attracting more students to Denmark (launched in 2014). The first part (UFM 2013) starts with an introductory vision statement: Denmark is presented as a responsible participant in solving global challenges, and, as an interconnected global economy with considerable export activity. The underlying problem is linked both to international competitiveness and excellence, while this is not explicitly stated. The problem in the document is thus not an existing challenge but rather the necessity to take advantage of the opportunities. The stated aim of student mobility is to obtain intercultural competencies. Three main aims are presented. First aim is to send out more students to study abroad, as the share of Danish students going abroad is too low. This is both the case for degree and credit mobility, and the aim is to increase both. Here, educational and cultural frames are quite explicit, e.g. ‘The stay abroad must first and foremost contribute with relevant academic education for the individual but also provide experiences with other cultures’ (UFM 2013, 6). The plan suggests both simplification of the process and assuring that all would have the opportunity, independent of their means. The second aim is to facilitate internationalization at home, by creating international learning environments. While this document has a stronger emphasis on outward mobility, Danish export of education and the goal of attracting talented (and fee-paying) students nevertheless gets attention also here. The strategy notes that the number of students from non-EU/EEA countries had been reduced and it was necessary to reverse this trend. Emphasis is particularly on BRICs countries and the so-called ‘next eleven’ cluster of emerging countries, suggesting hints of an implicit political frame while it is not spelled out entirely. The third aim is related to language competencies, where justifications are primarily associated with the needs of a more globalized labour market. Specific emphasis is on non-English speaking countries, with particular focus on high-growth countries, suggesting also an underlying political and economic frame. Overall, the strategy for outgoing students has a more academic and cultural emphasis, yet this has an underlying focus on how this all can contribute to the Danish economy. Thus, while educational frame is presented, it does not have a value on its own, it is a means for something else.

The second part of the new internationalization strategy focused in incoming student mobility (UFM 2014). This document mirrors the previous in that it starts with a specific vision and then outlines two specific goals. The vision part has both an academic and economic frame, summarizing the two main goals of the whole strategy:

‘We will only be [among the best] if we can attract and educate the most talented from all over the world, and subsequently get them to stay and take jobs in Denmark (...) Economically, there is a strong benefit to attract the most talented young people from all around the world’. (UFM 2014)

In other words, brain drain is not a problem, it is the solution. The first goal is to attract the best international students. This is first presented from an academic frame – as a part of enhancing quality and relevance: ‘Highly-qualified international students are both a benefit to the Danish students’ academic development and their goals of obtaining international experiences, and also help to raise the quality of the Danish educations by contributing new knowledge and insight.’ (UFM 2014, 8). The strategy does distinguish credit

and degree mobility, noting that very few exchange students remain after their studies, but even the few who do, generate economic benefits for Denmark. To attract the best and brightest, the strategy suggests among other things new scholarships, provide support through private foundations, provide better information and marketing, a more strategic and flexible tuition fee policy for institutions and a number of measures to make the bureaucratic processes around relocation easier. The second goal is focused on keeping the talent that has come, clearly building on a skilled migration theme. It is noted that one year after graduation, only half of the international full degree graduates still remain. The framing for this is clearly economic – this is necessary for the Danish labour market and a good economic decision for Denmark. In July 2014, agreement was reached on a new grant programme for Master students to attract talented students to Denmark. The agreement included DKK 25 million in the period 2015–2017 and has specific focus on disciplines of strategic importance to innovation capacity. The target group is primarily non-EU/EEA students.

From growth to contraction

More recently, a debate that has (re)emerged concerning internationalization is that too few international students stay after their studies, and in some programmes, new cap is introduced for how many international students can be admitted. Additionally, the number of English-speaking programmes has been reduced. In June 2021, the ministry launched an initiative³ to further reduce the number of English-speaking programmes in areas where few students remain in Denmark after their studies. This more restrictive emphasis represents a clear trend over several recent years and is also associated with the rise of stronger neo-nationalist sentiments (Brøgger 2021). The overall frame for the debates is clearly economic, yet not from a competitiveness argument, but from a public expenditure argument.

In sum, from the initial emphasis on aiming to attract more students, Denmark is now actively aiming to reduce the number of international students who travel to Denmark, at least those who do not stay in Denmark after their studies. The cultural and educational frames earlier visible in debates of internationalization at home have largely disappeared. The political frame remains implicit in that there are specific priority countries that are often mentioned, but it is not necessarily specified why these are a priority. Thus, the view of student mobility as an inherent good seems to have disappeared from the political debate. Both degree and credit mobility seems to be viewed as a vehicle for attracting labour force. In cases where it does not function as such and students return home, it is viewed as an undesired cost.

Finland

While the beginning of internationalization policies in Finland can be traced to the 1980s, it was initially focused on research production, and attention to education was added to this at a later stage. During these initial periods, internationalization was primarily conceived as staff and student exchange (Saarinen 2012, 242). Around 1993, Finland also went through recession, and the subsequent discussion in relation Finland's accession to the EU also brought discussions about internationalization to the forefront (Nokkala 2007, 26). Finland became a part of COMETT in 1990 and ERASMUS in 1992. Initially the

debates largely concerned educational quality and international attractiveness of the Finnish system. In the second half of the 1990s, the number of English-speaking master programmes increased rapidly (Saarinen 2012, 242). While the development plans until 1993 barely mentioned internationalization, the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) was established already in 1991 (Nokkala 2007, 26). In 2017, a new actor was formed, as CIMO merged with Finnish National Board of Education, resulting in EDUFI – Finnish National Agency for Education.

Student aid for outgoing degree mobility students is provided to full-time programmes comparable to those qualifying for financial aid in Finland (KELA 2021). This means that students should study on a full-time basis, there is academic progress and the student is in need of financial assistance. The amount received depends on a number of conditions (age, living situation, civil status, responsibility for children). Support is not provided for programmes that are offered through distance learning, to courses offered by a registered company, and to language courses, among else. A requirement is that the institution must be recognized by public authorities. In addition to the grant, it is possible to also take a student loan. International students in Finland in general are not eligible for student support, unless they have been Finnish residents and have come to Finland for another purpose than education.

Finnish education export: first steps

The 2001 internationalization strategy was presented as a follow-up to EUs Lisbon Strategy from 2000. The problem formulation emphasizes ideas of competitiveness. It is framed both in economic terms, but also as a form of global and European positioning, thus having an undertone of a political frame. Quality is an important underlying concern. Yet, arguments associated with quality become somewhat circular – quality is both the justification and the problem. In the follow-up of this strategy, the question of tuition fees was discussed but not at the time adopted (Nokkala 2007, 27–30; Opetusministeriö 2005).

In this period, Finland also actively started to develop its education export strategy, in other words, an explicit strategy to bring in fee-paying international degree students. In the 2003–2008 development plan, specific and ambitious aims are stipulated – within a decade the number of international students (degree and credit mobility) is to be doubled. In the 2005 discussion note on tuition fees, it is noted that internationalization is now a key element of plans for national competitiveness, while also retaining its cultural emphasis:

‘International co-operation is in higher education a value in itself, because internationalisation can contribute to the quality of education and research, raise national innovation base and support intercultural understanding.’ (Opetusministeriö 2005)

While noting this, the document then makes a point of emphasizing education export as an important growth sector in US, Australia and UK, and notes growing international demand, among others from China and Africa. At the same time, Nordic cohesion is noted, as initial discussions of tuition fees had ended because other Nordic countries did not have such fees. Given that Sweden and Denmark had at this point initiated discussions on fees to non-EU students, this became a discussion in Finland as well. Tuition fees were primarily viewed as a means for additional revenue.

In parallel to developing this education export strategy, Finland was also working on a global education strategy, which emphasized a range of cultural goals of global responsibility and addressed the Millennium Development Goals (Opetusministeriö 2006), the main aim concerned the global dimension in educational offerings (Opetusministeriö 2007). In the 2007–2012 development plan, internationalization chapter emphasizes global competitiveness and work-related immigration (Ministry of Education 2007, 42). In 2009–2011, a range of documents were presented that followed up the global education strategies (Opetusministeriö 2010). This suggests that Finland has had a relatively high policy output activity concerning student mobility. The number of mobile full degree students more than doubled between 2000 and 2009, while Nordic student mobility was dwindling (Garam and Korkala 2011, 35).

Education to become nationally significant export

In 2009, a new internationalization strategy was issued, visualizing the expected reality for 2015. At the time, the sector was going through substantial autonomy reforms which were at the time also proposed as enhancing quality and attractiveness of Finnish higher education. The basic problem was that the ‘attractiveness of Finland as a business, work and living environment must be increased’ (Ministry of Education 2009). Internationalization is presented as a means for societal renewal, promotion of diversity, international networking, competitiveness and innovativeness and improvement of well-being, competence and education of citizens, suggesting several overarching frames. While educational frame is emphasized and the cultural frame is also present (i.e. global responsibility and the national dimensions of internationalization and mobility), the document also emphasizes the importance of education export which are foreseen to be ‘nationally significant exports’ (Ministry of Education 2009). Thus, there is a clear focus on full degree students and an overarching economic frame.

In 2010, the education export strategy was launched, based on the work of a working group (Opetusministeriö. 2010), suggesting a clearly economic view of educational activities. In the presentation of the strategy, internationalization and student mobility are clearly framed as an economic activity, in need of marketing and product development.

‘Education export is part of the global service economy (...) The implementation of the education export strategy consists of improving networking, productisation, quality, marketing development, forming an educational export cluster and activating the higher education institutes as exporters.’ (Ministry of Education and Culture 2010, 3)

The term ‘education-based economy’ is used, as a means to mark ambitions regarding increased share of education export by 2015. Education is portrayed as a part of a wider ecosystem of businesses who in this manner can provide their clients ‘overall solutions’. In addition, the plan pushes educational institutions to be more strategic in their thinking concerning education export:

‘Speeding up the exportation of Finnish educational know-how requires that the sector operates in a cluster-like manner. The special feature in the Finnish cluster should be diverse cooperation and solutions developed and tendered to meet the customer’s needs’. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2010, 12)

A core driver behind this education export thinking was the success with PISA and general education. Finland was also among the countries with the largest share of foreign language study programmes in Europe (Saarinen 2012, 236).

In this period, Finland also explored options for introducing tuition fees. The initiative was first introduced as a pilot programme, being a subject to considerable national debate concerning 'who pays' for the cost of education for international students (Välilä and Weimer 2014). Sources for inspiration were both an academic capitalism thinking, as well as marketized EU field, as higher education is advocated as being a private good (Weimer 2013). During the pilot, in 2013, a new internationalization report was published by the working group (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2013). The strategy followed up in the government adopted 'Team Finland' strategy which yet again called for enhanced education exports, in line with the tuition fees being tested out at the time.

In 2017, a new overarching internationalization strategy is presented (Ministry of Education and Culture 2017). The strategy suggests specific flagship programmes to highlight world class research as well as high quality education. The document is written in a language emphasizing clients and products: 'The Global Education Brand Finland study that is underway is examining Finnish strengths and the possibilities for turning these into products and marketing them, and the requirements for further building the education brand'. The joint marketing suggestions are maintained, given the 'fierce competition' internationally.

At the same time, there are also strong indications that the growth in education export has not really materialized as expected. The introduction of tuition fees led to a reduction in student numbers from non-EU/EEA countries. In 2018, 74% of the 1372 students who were fee-paying were also receiving grants, in the range of 10–100%, and only 277 students paid the full fee.⁴

In 2019, a new report suggested that the number of outgoing mobile students should double by 2030 – with particular emphasis on credit mobility, emphasizing in particular the disadvantaged groups, in this manner presenting a very different image from the frames visible in the debates about incoming students (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2019). A 2021 education policy report that outlined key priorities until 2040, emphasizing how educational export was also a part of overall educational expansion. In addition to economic arguments, the policy also emphasizes that 'exporting the competence of higher education institutions and research institutes and other international activities can also strengthen Finland's role in solving sustainable development challenges and the global learning crisis' (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021, 36). The policy also includes new ambitious targets – the number of international students should triple by 2030 and there is also a desire to retain 75 percent of the students, indicating a continuously expansive agenda.

Overall, the Finnish discussion on internationalization and student mobility has heavily been focused on the issue of education export. In that sense, the Finnish debate seems to be rather dominated by economic rationales and a focus on incoming degree mobility, and an attempt of a conscious construction of education export from this perspective. Given how these texts also emphasize Finland as a context of a Nordic welfare state, this communication seems to have some form of a dissonance built into it. While education as such is described from a view emphasizing the quality and academic value of

education, it is also framed as an export article. This emphasis has a clearly expansive agenda in recent years, especially with a growing emphasis on retaining more of the incoming degree students as well.

Norway

Until the 1970s, internationalization in Norwegian higher education was mostly equivalent to Norwegians undertaking a full degree abroad. Outward mobility was seen as a tool to compensate for scarcity of capacity in the domestic educational system, and public financial support was available for educations in high demand in the Norwegian labour market, such as medicine and graduate engineering. Norway has traditionally had a very high outward mobility rate compared to most other countries. In the 1950s, up to 30 percent of the student population was enrolled in HEIs abroad. With capacity growth in domestic institutions, the proportion decreased and has stabilized around six per cent of the total student body. This is still a high proportion compared to most European countries. Adding credit mobile students, the proportion of outward mobile students is annually close to 10 per cent.

An important prerequisite for the high outbound mobility rate is a generous funding scheme provided by the State Educational Loan Fund (Lånekassen). Norwegian citizens are entitled to grants and subsidized loans for studying abroad on the same terms as domestic students. In addition, they are eligible for additional funding to cover (parts of) tuition fees, language courses and travel expenses. Initially, funding for student mobility was provided only for certain study programmes and in certain countries (mainly in Europe and North America), but has been extended to more study programmes and more countries. This opened for substantial changes in student flows, such as high numbers going to Australia from the 1990s. In contrast to neighbouring countries, Norway has not introduced tuition fees in public higher education. Combined with increasing number of courses in English, this has resulted in a substantial growth in the number of incoming students the last two decades (Wiers-Jenssen 2014, 2018).

The Ministry of Education has been relatively active in promoting internationalization and student mobility. A centre for internationalization of higher education (SIU) was established under the Ministry of Education in 2004 to support HEIs in their internationalizations coordinate and facilitate international academic cooperation and student exchanges. Under different names, this centre has played a central role in administering mobility programmes and promoting Norway as a study destination ever since.

Educational and political frames for mobility

Norway has a tradition for incoming students from low-income countries. The roots for this can be traced back to 1962 when the first scholarship programme for disadvantaged countries was introduced. From 1990 (St. meld. nr. 40 1990–1991), this support was restructured as the Quota Scheme – where students would receive support in the form of a loan which was in turn converted to a scholarship if the student returned to their home country. Support for students from low-income countries was initially viewed as a means for capacity building in these countries. More specifically, it was development aid policy rather than higher education policy. The aim was that students should return to their home countries, and brain drain was to be avoided. Up to the turn of the

millennium, substantial parts of incoming students came from low-income countries. Over time, students from European countries have slowly become the largest group of full degree incoming students. The Quota Scheme was in 2006 replaced by other programmes, based on institutional cooperation and partnerships rather than support for individuals. The rationales for the new programmes are educational more than capacity building oriented. They focus on shorter sojourns in Norway, rather than full degrees and a broader spectre of countries are targeted, not only low-income countries but also so-called 'strategic partners', suggesting a more hybrid frame.

While initial concerns for internationalization had to do with domestic capacity issues, over time the Norwegian higher education system grew and from the 1980s, outward mobility was seen not just as a necessity to compensate for limited domestic supply, but as an important supplement to Norwegian higher education offering something different (St. meld nr 19 1996–1997, 16). Justifications refer to capacity and diversity: 'It will still be a need for education abroad as a response to lack of capacity in some subject fields. But education abroad as a supplement and alternative to education in Norway is more important' (St. meld nr 19 1996–1997, 16). Regarding capacity, a White Paper on scaling of HE system that was published a couple of years later noted that having sufficient capacity in all areas domestically was not sustainable, and it would be more feasible to pay for capacity abroad in fields like medicine, veterinary studies and psychology (St. meld 36 1998–1999). Thus, at this point, capacity and diversity were not only a challenge but also a conscious policy choice. However, this was not explicitly framed as an economic rationale, despite the fact that Norway was saving money by sending students abroad rather than providing sufficient capacity domestically.

In the 1996–1997 White Paper on study abroad, student mobility was discussed within the framework of internationalization, though the term internationalization was hardly used at the time. The stated purposes were nevertheless to enhance the number of mobile students, with a particular focus on credit mobility: 'the ministry refers to an agreement that a more substantial increase the number of students at Norwegian higher education institutions who would go to study abroad periods is desirable.' (St. meld nr 19 1996–1997). An important dimension in the White Paper is discussion of policy tools for how to change student choice of destination. Changes in the funding scheme were expected to facilitate a wider geographical scope of destination countries.

Quality as the overarching theme

A higher education reform called the Quality reform was introduced with a White Paper in 2001 and put into practice from 2003. The reform was considered the Norwegian follow-up to Bologna Process, which enabled standardization of credits and study programme structure following the 3 + 2 structure. The White Paper included a whole chapter on internationalization, stating that the main purpose of internationalization was to enhance quality: 'International exchange and development of knowledge is important for the development of quality in education' (St. meld nr 27 2001, 38). Thus, internationalization was conceptualized as an important premise for enhancing quality in Norwegian higher education, pointing towards an educational frame. The Ministry of Education had high ambitions, aiming to be on the forefront of academic cooperation and exchange. The main focus was on facilitating credit mobility, particularly within the framework of the ERASMUS programme. HEIs were expected to offer all students an opportunity to study

abroad as a part of their Norwegian degree, but also to facilitate for incoming full degree students and exchange students from developing as well as developed countries.

Marketization of HE on a global scale is viewed as a challenge as Norwegian degree students are being targeted for economic purposes. Further, it is pointed out that Norwegian students who go abroad for a full degree are not providing value to Norwegian HEIs (St. meld nr 27 2001, 39). The economic rationale of mobility, seen from the perspective of the Norwegian government, is rather downplayed as education is still seen as a public good.

A White Paper on internationalization in education was published in 2009 (St.meld. nr 14 2008–2009). Here, internationalization is both defined as a means to quality but also as an end in itself. It presents internationalization as a means to benchmark own knowledge. At the same time, cultural rationales remain: ‘The goal of increased internationalization of education should not only be justified by Norwegian interests alone. As important is the role that education plays in intercultural understanding and solidarity with people in countries who have worse future outlook’ (St.meld. nr 14 (2008–2009), 7). Both cultural, educational and political frames can be identified, while economic ones remain comparatively less in focus. The overarching emphasis is on internationalization as a means for improving quality and relevance – essentially pointing towards an educational frame as the dominant frame. Yet, a form of usability orientation can be identified as well:

With an ambition of increased student mobility, this should be done in a manner where different concerns are balanced. This concerns a purposeful and reasonable resource use, where concern to the outcomes for the individual student and also concern for Norwegian higher education institutions are taken into account’ (St.meld. nr 14 2008–2009, 11)

A long-term ambition of increasing outward mobility to 50 per cent of the student population is expressed. Facilitating for incoming mobility, including full degree and credit mobility, is seen as an important tool for *internationalisation at home*, meaning that also individuals (students and staff) who are not internationally mobile, are to be exposed to international impulses.

A White Paper on quality in higher education (Meld. St. 16 2016–2017), underscores the benefits of student mobility for quality enhancement in Norwegian higher education, and repeats high ambitions of increasing outward mobility, largely rehashing previous policy priorities where educational frames are predominant.

Policy for student mobility during the pandemic

A new White paper on international student mobility was published a few months into the COVID-pandemic, in the autumn of 2020 (Meld. St. 7 2020–2021). Challenges due to the pandemic were addressed in the preface only, despite substantial decline in mobility patterns, outbound credit mobility in particular. Regarding outbound mobility, the paper mostly signalled business as usual; stressing quality as the main rationale and upholding that half of Norwegian students should be internationally mobile during their studies.

The main aim of this White paper is to contribute to a cultural change in the higher education sector, making student mobility an integrated part of all study programmes. The governments’ ambition is that half of students in Norwegian higher education are to have a sojourn abroad (Meld. St. 7 2020–2021, 10)

Credit mobility is the main focus, though an awareness is also expressed that longer stays abroad have better potential for developing competencies like language skills and intercultural competence. As such, the discussion also includes references to a cultural frame.

Regarding inward mobility, a new turn is observed; the White paper suggests developing a more active policy for attracting international students. The rationales for this are partly economic. 'If international students stay and work in Norway, they constitute a positive contribution to Norwegian economy and working life' (Meld. St. 7 2020–2021). However, also concerns about brain drain are again expressed, and it is underscored that new policy must take into account that incoming students come from the Global South as well as highly developed countries.

In sum, in the Norwegian context, student mobility has gone from being a means to compensate for limited domestic capacity to be defined as an important tool for enhancing quality and relevance of Norwegian higher education. There is a strong focus on credit mobility and the interests of higher education institutions. The framing has been predominantly educational, though other arguments have also been put forward. Cultural frames are present, and political rationales are seen in the priorities of different geographical regions. The economic frame has traditionally been downplayed, but signs of such frames can be identified in the latest policy documents. At this point, these are nevertheless not the dominating frames.

Sweden

Already in the Higher Education Act of 1977 (Högskolelagen 1977, 218) it was stated that a general goal of education was to promote understanding for other countries and for international conditions, outlining a need for intercultural competences, and where diversity through mobility and openness for other cultures was important. From 1992 Swedish students could go on exchanges through the ERASMUS-programme, through a decision in the parliament in 1991 (Utbildningsdepartementet 1991). These are early examples of a cultural frame, as enhancing international student mobility and global understanding was seen as a norm and a good. In the late 1990s, the International Program Office (Internationella Programkontoret for utbildningsområdet) was established, with a mission to 'strengthen the quality of Swedish education by providing opportunity and conditions for participation in international cooperation'.⁵

In Sweden, all students who study are entitled to a student loan and grant, given that their annual income and total wealth does not exceed a certain amount (Studiestödsförordningen 2000). Due to increased international cooperation, the loan and grant system also applied to students who study abroad from 1989 and onwards (Utbildningsdepartementet 2005). However, it is mainly the regular student support students can bring with them abroad (CSN 2021). In some cases, students studying abroad are also entitled to a travel grant, which varies with distance. Additionally, students can ask for a loan to cover tuition fees, with an upper cap of approx. €5800 a year until 2021, and from 2022 the upper yearly cap have been extended to about €11,500. However, the total cap of what a student is allowed to borrow to cover tuition fees is the same in both years, about €35,000 in total during the study time (CSN 2022). Hence, in Sweden only moderate support for covering tuition fees is provided.

Strengthening the educational frame

Since the beginning of 2000s, the concept of internationalization has been broadening to encompass all activities which contribute to adding an international dimension to higher education (Utbildningsdepartementet 2005). From this point onward the strategy for internationalization is said to be built on two main reasons: ‘to promote cultural understanding and to promote the quality of education’ (Utbildningsdepartementet 2005, 57). This would correspond to cultural and educational frames. However, an additional justification becomes visible.

Knowledge of and understanding of other countries contributes to developed respect for and tolerance towards other cultures as well as ones understanding of the need for international solidarity work. International cooperation can contribute to new perspectives and angles of approach in higher education, and thus to a higher quality in education. The quality of higher education is crucial for Sweden’s competitiveness and for Sweden to be attractive study country.’ (Utbildningsdepartementet 2005, 57)

The cultural frame is clearly visible, which also was the original argument for internationalization of higher education in general, before mobility programmes between universities were developed. The educational frame constitutes the second part of the argument for internationalization, but as this is not just to promote quality in Swedish higher education, it also refers to competitiveness of Swedish higher education. Although in transiently referred to, the economic frame is partly present within the educational frame, as competitiveness is mentioned within the more overarching argument for internationalization built on enhancing quality of education.

The strategy is formalized in five key objectives (Utbildningsdepartementet 2005, 59–66):

1. Sweden shall be an attractive country of study for foreign students
2. University graduates must be attractive in the labour market, both nationally and internationally
3. Universities and colleges shall actively work with internationalization to promote quality of education, and understanding of other countries and international relations
4. Obstacles to internationalization must be removed, both nationally and internationally
5. The monitoring of universities’ international activities shall be developed and improved

Quality is often referred to: ‘A basic precondition for being an attractive country of study is to offer high-quality education’ (Utbildningsdepartementet 2005, 59). Further, by providing quality education Sweden will be able to attract more foreign students and international academics who want to teach in Sweden, and make graduates more employable internationally. The underlying argument here is that fostering quality education will also lead to a competitive edge for Sweden, built on the assumption that all students in the global higher education market seek quality and if Sweden has high quality education they will come to Sweden. Simultaneously, the argument of quality is also linked to the cultural frame (Utbildningsdepartementet 2005, 64):

Internationalization is an important aspect of educational quality. An internationalized education gives students a knowledge of and familiarity with international conditions and a readiness to work in an international context.

However, the cultural frame is clearly closely linked to the educational frame. The educational frame is at the forefront to the policy debate in this document, with the cultural frame and the economic frame looming in the background, as substitute arguments.

The main focus in this document is on incoming and outgoing student mobility, as quite few Swedish students take a full degree abroad. In the policy document, full degree students are mentioned as 'free movers', those applying abroad without being part of an exchange programme. One of the arguments for the parliamentary bill in 2005 is that the number of outgoing mobile exchange students have stagnated during the latter half of the 1990s, at about 3000 students a year (Utbildningsdepartementet 2005, 49).

In the parliamentary bill of 2005, there is also a concern of study programmes losing their particularity, increased internationalization should not lead to streamlining of study programmes: 'It is important to emphasize that the internationalization of higher education must not imply an alignment of educations' (Utbildningsdepartementet 2005, 33). This statement is linked to Sweden adapting to the Bologna 3 + 2 system quite late, in 2007, following the parliamentary bill of 2005. With the bill, the former lower-level degree, the three-year 'kandidat' was defined as equivalent to bachelor, and a new two-year master was introduced. However, as a compromise, earlier degree types were kept, leaving Sweden with two undergraduate degrees, a two-year Högskoleexamen and a three-year Kandidatexamen, in addition to two graduate degrees: a one-year Magisterexamen and a 2-year Masterexamen. Another important change was to while both Kandidatexamen and Magisterexamen was the formal requirement for admission to PhD-level programmes prior to the implementation of the bill, after implementation only students who had a Masterexamen were qualified for admission to PhD-level studies (Utbildningsdepartementet 2005, 128). These changes can to some extent be seen as reinforcing the educational frame, as the argument is linked to creating a transferrable and transparent system which is compatible with the rest of Europe.

Indications of the economic frame

The parliamentary bill of 2009 only described minor changes to Högskolelagen (law on higher education), but these changes would prove to be quite significant for student mobility. The most important change was to propose tuition fees for students coming from outside EU/EEA. Sweden had experienced a significant rise in incoming students over a five-year period prior to the bill, and as a consequence the conservative government proposed to introduce tuition fees, as well as application fees for students from abroad. The main argument is that 'it is necessary for universities and colleges to market themselves and compete on equal terms with the best foreign universities' (Utbildningsdepartementet 2009, 18). They argue that the fee exemption which free higher education constitutes is problematic:

First, Swedish universities should compete mainly by providing high-quality education quality, not by offering free education. Secondly from a socio-economic perspective, it is doubtful about Swedish tax funds should be used to offer free education without restriction to a growing number of students from outside the EEA. (Utbildningsdepartementet 2009, 18)

The argument continues to state that an introduction of fees for students outside the EEA 'would increase the freedom of Swedish universities and colleges to act in the global

education market and provide opportunities for individual higher education institutions to profile their educations to attract the best students' (Utbildningsdepartementet 2009, 18). Hence, linked to the proposed tuition fees is a focus on marketing of Swedish higher education in a global setting. This is clearly part of an economic frame, as the focus is solely on the benefits of competition and global recruitment.

A pendulum back to educational frame?

In recent years there have been no new parliamentary bills, but the government commissioned a major public review of Swedish internationalization policy, which published two documents in 2018. The first document (SOU 2018: 3), points to challenges in the internationalization policy. While the number of mobile students from Sweden (primarily credit mobility) has been stable during the last decade, the share of incoming students did decline quite drastically after the introduction of tuition fees for students from outside EEA, and has not yet recovered.

Several reasons are presented for institutions to emphasize internationalization. The first reason is a general argument of quality enhancement, as internationalization increases the quality of research, through research collaboration, while in education internationalization is linked to exchange of experiences and knowledge, by which quality of education is raised. Additionally, having had an exchange-experience may make students more employable (SOU 2018:3, 17). The second set of arguments are linked to the societal level, where particularly research cooperation is stressed. This can contribute to further development of knowledge intensive economies, can lead to science diplomacy, and in turn lead to better bilateral relations as well as more cooperation through the EU. This in turn can open for more developmental aid as part of the internationalization scheme. There is also an economic side to this. Higher education institutions are viewed as important parts of the innovation system, and by attracting researchers, experts and foreign students who stay after their studies, a country can increase its international competence, contributing to development of innovation and economics in general (SOU 2018:3, 17). This was followed up by a concluding review, SOU 2018: 78, which states that there is

'a strong mutually reinforcing connection between the quality, the internationalisation and the visibility or attractiveness of higher education institutions. Even though the quality of Swedish research and higher education is high, Swedish higher education institutions are not very visible in many other countries. As a result, the quality of higher education and research cannot fully contribute to internationalisation by attracting students and researchers'. (SOU 2018:78, 35)

These public reviews display once again that there are several policy frames visible at the same time. The most prominent argument is still quality, which implies an educational frame, though the economic frame is also very visible, as the notion of competitiveness is very prominent. However, there is a change from earlier, as the way to quality is no longer through students, but rather through recruiting prominent international scholars. Cultural frames for internationalization seem to be downplayed, they are still present as part of the argument but no longer a key justification. While these documents do not have the same status as parliamentary bills, they nevertheless provide an indication of dominant frames in the policy debates.

This overview indicates that Sweden has had shifting policy frames over time, from a strictly cultural frame, on to an educational frame during the build-up of exchanges within EC/EU, an economic frame as a response to high influx of students from abroad to Sweden and then there are signs of a swing back to a primary focus on an educational frame, with the economic frame looming behind.

Concluding discussion

We started our analysis with two questions – whether Nordic countries were similar or different in how they address the issue of international student mobility, and whether the economic frame had also gained prominence in the Nordics. The analysis illustrates how the Nordic region is not as cohesive as may seem from the outside, and that these differences have become more prominent in recent years. We also find a more prominent economic frame, yet this frame is not equally present in the four countries, and it contains different elements. An important element of this is the introduction of tuition fees to non-EEA students. We outline both points in the coming paragraphs.

Internationalization and student mobility clearly are on the agenda in all four countries. All the countries have grants and loans for outgoing students, yet it varies how generous this support is. From an international comparative perspective, nevertheless, one could argue that there is support in place, some of the countries are merely more generous than others. All of the four countries also have active and well-established agencies with an aim to support institutions in engaging internationalization activities and participating in various international programmes. While national variations remain, one could argue that the infrastructure for facilitating international student mobility is rather well developed in all four countries. With this in mind, when we discuss the Nordic model for higher education, is there also a Nordic ‘model’ for student mobility? Our analysis thus shows that there are a number of important differences in how these four Nordic countries address the issue of international student mobility, and that these differences have been growing in the period we have examined in this article. The view of international students as a source of revenue is the issue where the countries have made distinctly different choices.

Until the mid-2000s the general principle in the Nordic countries were the principles of egalitarianism, applicable also to incoming international students. Generous loan and support schemes were therefore available both to local and international students (Carlsson et al. 2009). Yet, this has changed in recent years. While grants and loans for local students to study abroad have been maintained, the view on incoming international students has changed in three of the four countries. Tuition fees to non-EEA students have been introduced in Denmark, Finland and Sweden. In countries like Denmark and Finland especially, incoming mobile degree students are to a much larger extent subject to a calculative logic of costs and revenue, rather than broad values of egalitarianism, even if this is also associated with quality arguments. In a sense, in the Danish case some of this calculative logic was present also in the beginning of 2000s, but has become much more prominent in recent years. This has also been the case in Finland. Moreover, while Norway clearly stands out as it has not introduced tuition fees, there have also been changes in the Norwegian context, as the Quota programme, which provided scholarships for students from developing countries, was cut. When the Quota programme

was cut, some of the argumentation was associated with quality – by shifting away from individual students towards more institutional partnerships. As such, introduction of tuition fees to non-EEA students marks a watershed moment for the Nordic region as it challenges many of the traditional core values of the region.

Concerning outgoing students, the countries seem more similar. All four countries have established a stronger focus on credit mobility, rather than degree mobility. Credit mobility is often associated more with cultural and educational frames and thus the frames are often distinctly different than those of degree mobility (in particular concerning incoming students). Though, indirectly this also often has an implicit economic frame, as employability and long-term economic development is important. In our analysis, political and cultural frames can also be found, yet they are not the dominant frames. While cultural frames often remain visible in some parts of the documents, these can also sometimes come across as ceremonial, and it would seem that overall, these frames are on the decline in all the countries. The political frames are less visible, and can primarily be identified in the ways in which some of the countries focus on particular strategic partnership countries for cooperation.

The educational frame is clearly visible in Norway and Sweden, in particular, through the strong focus on quality of education which seems to be the dominant means to operationalize this frame. Here, the countries also show different variations of the same theme. In Norway, the educational frame remains predominant to this date. While the educational frame is to some extent supplemented or linked to competitiveness of Norway as a country, these links remain rather indirect. One possible explanation/speculation is of course that Norway can afford to do this, and that the higher education sector is not in a situation where they would be dependent on fee-paying students as a source for revenue. This is a rather different context than Denmark and Finland where the sector has faced comparatively severe cuts in public funding. The educational frame is also visible in the Swedish context, albeit with a somewhat different national lens – as Sweden did introduce tuition fees and quality of education is as much a way of thinking about competitiveness of the higher education system, than mobility being the means to enhance quality. Similar sentiment can also be found in Finland, where quality of education is viewed as an important basis for development of education export; and Denmark, where some of the documents emphasize a combined quality and competitiveness argument. Thus, with the exception of Norway, while educational frames remain visible these can over time become more hybrid, including also a competitiveness argument.

The economic frame seems to be most visible for incoming students and it is clearly the area where differences between the Nordic countries are now more pronounced than they were earlier. This concerns both whether countries have opted for introducing tuition fees, as well as the specific operationalization of the economic frame. Finland is closest to the conceptualizations of education export as a source of income, yet the reality has not been close to the expectations. The debate about incoming degree (and credit) students in Denmark is not so much about education export but instead has a focus on retaining talent (Mosneaga 2015). Student mobility is a means for recruiting talented workers, presenting a rather calculative approach. While issues with brain drain and developmental aid have been considered in the other Nordics, in Denmark it would seem there is an explicit emphasis on attracting as much talented workforce as

possible. More recently, a similar emphasis on retaining talent has also emerged in the Finnish context, suggesting that the economic frame does not only concern export but also local societal concerns.

In her analysis of internationalization discourses in Finland, Nokkala (2007) identified three central discourses: internationalization as individual growth, as rethinking of the university and as a means to open up the country. Yet, as she argues, all these discourses shared a normative underpinning of internationalization as an inherently positive process. A similar observation can be made here. Internationalization is not only perceived as normatively desirable, but also frequently associated with quality. However, it is often less clear whether one is a contributing factor to the other, or if internationalization equals quality. These debates are highly visible in both Sweden and Norway concerning justifications for international student mobility of all kinds, and it is also the Finnish underpinning goals of education export. Why and how quality and student mobility are related is much more difficult to identify in our data. A possible explanation for this quality emphasis is that this represents a means for strengthening the profile of education by borrowing from a research logic.

While we observe a clearly growth-oriented agenda for mobility in Norway, Sweden and Finland, more recently Denmark represents a contrasting case. The Danish case shows that after long periods of growth and positive emphasis, international student mobility has become constrained, especially when political priorities change and public spending becomes an issue. Arguably, the approach of 'what is in it for us' has been visible in Danish justifications for international student mobility from the early 2000s, it has merely led to a more inward-oriented and restrictive response in recent years.

What are the implications of this analysis? A core contribution from this analysis is to maintain nuance when we discuss marketization and economic justifications concerning student mobility and higher education in general. We have observed how economic frames in different countries mean very different things. While some interpretations of an economic frame suggest a global market of students as consumers, others may instead point towards cost-benefit analysis and increasingly nationalist sentiments. This means that even in countries that are comparatively similar, it is important that any policy borrowing is conducted with care. Our analysis also shows how complex it is to construct student mobility as a viable economic endeavour – even when having considerable policy support. In other words – it may be naïve to assume that if public budgets become squeezed, international students are a quick fix to increase the income of local higher education institutions.

Notes

1. <https://www.oph.fi/en/statistics/international-mobility-finnish-higher-education>
2. The policy paper was presented jointly by The Danish Ministry of Education and The Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation
3. https://ufm.dk/en/newsroom/press-releases/2021/a-new-political-agreement-limits-spending-on-foreign-students-from-the-eu?set_language=en&cl=en
4. https://minedu.fi/artikkeli/-/asset_publisher/valiraportti-eu-maista-tulevien-opiskelijoiden-maara-kasvoi-eu-eta-alueen-ulkopuolelta-tulevien-maara-vaheni
5. From mission statement, available on closed down website (<https://news.cision.com/se/internationella-programkontoret>) as the office was closed down in 2012.

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