

Nordic added value in Nordic research co-operation

Concept and practice

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Executive summary

Background and aim

The principle of “Nordic added value” has been used since the 1990s as a means of articulating the political significance of Nordic co-operation and guiding funding decisions. In the Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers, the concept is part of a policy-oriented framework that justifies joint efforts at the Nordic level rather than undertaking activities solely at the national level. At the same time, the concept is operationalised in different policy areas of Nordic co-operation, both in the implementation and evaluation of activities. The concept has been perceived as somewhat unclear and lacking a unified definition, creating a challenge for its use in practice.

This report examines the concept of Nordic added value in Nordic research co-operation that is facilitated and funded by NordForsk under the Nordic Council of Ministers. Nordic added value is the key guiding principle of Nordic research co-operation from the implementation of research programmes to the evaluation of funding applications and monitoring of research impact. The report aims to enhance the understanding and operationalisation of the concept by examining it from both conceptual and practical perspectives. The report answers the following questions:

- What is the history of the concept “Nordic added value” in Nordic co-operation and Nordic research co-operation?
- How do different stakeholders of Nordic research co-operation define and operationalise the concept in practice?
- What are the challenges and possible solutions for defining or clarifying the concept of “Nordic added value” in Nordic research co-operation?

Methods

The methodological approach of the study is a combination of literature review, expert interviews and participant survey. The literature review covers relevant literature, reports, steering documents, websites and other sources of

the Nordic Council of Ministers, NordForsk and other Nordic institutions. The expert interviews encompass 17 semi-structured interviews conducted with members of NordForsk programme committees. The data collected through an online survey consists of responses from 79 researchers, who participated in NordForsk-funded projects between 2018 and 2022.

Findings

The idea of Nordic added value refers to strategic co-operation on areas where a Nordic approach generates added value for the countries and peoples of the region. It links to both socio-cultural and economic values and is based on target-oriented management, where the success of a joint effort is judged against pre-defined goals. However, the concept is not static and its meaning has evolved alongside the trends in Nordic co-operation. At policy level, the principle of Nordic added value can today be defined as *the positive effects of joint Nordic efforts that strengthen the Nordic region as a cultural and historical community, and as a locally and globally competitive and sustainable welfare society*.

Several challenges link to the operationalisation of "Nordic added value" in practice. **First**, different Scandinavian concepts and their English translations, such as *nordisk nytta* ("Nordic benefit/advantage/usefulness") and *nordiskt mervärde* ("Nordic synergy"), have been used at different times and in different contexts to articulate the idea of joint Nordic effort, contributing to the ambiguous character of the recently more established English translation of "Nordic added value". **Second**, value-based concepts are usually ambivalent as efforts to define values often end up at a very abstract level. **Third**, the simultaneous operationalisation of Nordic added value in different policy areas of Nordic co-operation inevitably generates different meanings, or alternatively leads to relatively simple understandings of the concept. **Fourth**, the interpretation of Nordic added value varies from person to person making it difficult to identify comparative indicators to assess the added value of joint activities.

An examination of the practical level of Nordic research co-operation revealed that both science experts and researchers perceived Nordic added value as a largely clear concept and no particular challenges were identified in its operationalisation. At the same time, there were significant differences in the understanding of the concept. Four different ways of discussing Nordic added value emerged from the data:

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

- **Nordic added value as a contested concept:** Nordic added value may convey *essentialising and prescriptive connotations* of Nordic similarities, uniqueness and exceptionalism.

Attitudes, experiences and support for NordForsk as a facilitator and funder of Nordic research co-operation were found to be very positive among experts and researchers. Increasing the visibility and awareness of Nordic research funding was seen as a particular challenge for NordForsk.

Recommendations

The report shows the flexible, changing and adaptive nature of the concept of Nordic added value, meaning that the principle cannot be used in a static and normative manner throughout different sectors of Nordic co-operation nor within Nordic research co-operation. The report lays out four recommendations for the future use of Nordic added value that aim at contributing to the continuation and renewal of Nordic research co-operation:

1. Strategic Nordic needs and high scientific quality

- The combined objective of facilitating high-quality research and creating Nordic added value requires the identification of particular Nordic needs and strategic areas of expertise when designing research programmes.
- The dual role of Nordic research co-operation as facilitating both high-quality research and strengthening the Nordic community needs to be more openly recognised.
- Collaboration with non-Nordic partners contributes to ensuring research excellence but requires a better recognition of the added value that the participating countries contribute to and receive from the collaboration.

2. Balance between strict criteria and flexibility

- Nordic added value is not a static concept and its operationalisation must strike a balance between clear guidelines and flexibility.
- It is important for researchers to reflect on Nordic added value to ensure the renewal of Nordic research co-operation.

3. Symmetric communication

- A holistic understanding of Nordic added value should be promoted in communication with different stakeholders and across research programmes.
- Discussion of the objectives of Nordic co-operation and more comparative knowledge of Nordic added value in the different institutions would be beneficial.

4. Review of evaluation methods

- Nordic added value is primarily a qualitative concept. Qualitative monitoring of research impact would therefore be beneficial alongside existing quantitative practices.
- The relative and multidimensional character of Nordic added value needs to be considered in the different stages of project evaluation and assessment.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Co-operation between the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) and the autonomous areas (the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland) is often considered as a pioneer of regional co-operation. Nordic co-operation is generally seen as being based on the shared history of the Nordic countries, their similar culture and language, and their shared values of democracy, the rule of law, trust, equality, freedom of expression and the welfare state. For a long time, official Nordic co-operation was seen as having an intrinsic value in itself, but as the world around the Nordic region has changed, the rationale for the continued need for operating at a Nordic level has had to be defined and articulated. For this, the "Nordic added value" principle has become essential as the justification and guiding principle of official Nordic co-operation organised around the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

In essence, the idea of "Nordic added value" refers to strategic co-operation in areas where a Nordic approach generates added value for the countries and peoples of the region. Although the concept has remained marginally discussed in the present day, the principle stems from a need to reweigh and redefine the continuing relevance of joint Nordic action after the end of the Cold War. In this context, the concepts of *nordisk nytta* (often translated as "Nordic benefit/advantage/usefulness") and *nordiskt mervärde* (often translated as "Nordic synergy") were introduced to define and articulate the rationale of operating at a Nordic level in the

face of accelerating European integration and the desire to improve the quality and competitiveness of the Nordic region. In parallel with these Scandinavian terms, the English-language translation "Nordic added value" has become increasingly used over the last decade.

Although these concepts have been prominently used to maintain the legitimacy and significance of joint Nordic action, they have been considered ambiguous and lacking an established definition. This presents a challenge in various policy areas of official Nordic co-operation, where such concepts need to be operationalised in order to assess and evaluate the funding of various projects and activities as well as their outcomes.

This report examines the concept of Nordic added value in the context of Nordic research co-operation that is facilitated and funded by NordForsk under the Nordic Council of Ministers. Realising Nordic added value is one of NordForsk's key objectives in addition to facilitating effective and trustful research co-operation in the Nordic region and ensuring that NordForsk-funded research has the highest international quality.¹ In practice, however, there is a need to advance the understanding of the concept, as it is an intricate part of different stages of research co-operation, from the implementation of research programmes to the evaluation of funding applications and monitoring research impact.²

This report responds to the need to enhance our knowledge about ways to define and articulate the relevance of Nordic co-operation through the idea of "Nordic added value". This report has been produced as part of the research activities of the

ReNEW Reimagining Norden in an Evolving World university hub, funded by NordForsk, and carried out at the Centre of Nordic Studies at the University of Helsinki.

1.1 Aims and objectives

The aim of this research report is to enhance the understanding and operationalisation of the concept of Nordic added value in Nordic research co-operation. The study approaches the concept with a humanistic social-science-research approach, examining the concept in the context of broader historical and socio-political developments around the rationale of operating at a Nordic level. In this respect, the research focuses on official Nordic co-operation, especially after the end of the Cold War. In addition, the study looks at the ways in which different stakeholders involved in collaborative Nordic research activities operationalise and define the concept. The key stakeholders in this study are identified as the science advisors and experts who are members of NordForsk's programme committees and participate in the development of Nordic research programmes and evaluation of the Nordic added value in research applications, and NordForsk-funded researchers who have a need to define, articulate and assess the Nordic added value in all stages of their research projects.

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- What is the history of the concept "Nordic added value" in Nordic co-operation and Nordic research co-operation?
- How do different stakeholders of Nordic research co-operation define and operationalise the concept in practice?
- What are the challenges and possible solutions for defining or clarifying the concept of "Nordic added value" in Nordic research co-operation?

In this study, concepts are considered as inconclusive and receiving their meanings through historical contestations.³ Change is thus a central basis for the contemporary understanding of concepts. Another point of interest in this study concerns how the meanings of social or political concepts shift when they are translated from one language to another.

This study focuses on the conceptual dimensions of Nordic research co-operation and does not aim to cover the comprehensive history of Nordic co-operation or Nordic research co-operation.

1.2 Material and method

The report is structured around two pillars: concept and practice. These two perspectives form the basis for a comprehensive understanding of the idea of Nordic added value. The material used in the study consists of:

- **literature review:** a review of relevant literature, reports, steering documents, websites and other sources of official Nordic co-operation, NordForsk and other Nordic institutions;
- **expert interviews:** data collected through semi-structured interviews with members of NordForsk programme committees (as of May 2022); and

- **participant survey:** data collected through an online survey sent out to researchers who have participated in NordForsk-funded research activities between 2018 and 2022.

The report is divided into five chapters. **Chapter 1** introduces the rationale, aims and method of the study. **Chapter 2** looks at the history of the concept of Nordic added value. **Chapter 3** presents the findings from the expert interviews and **Chapter 4** the results from the participant survey. **Chapter 5** summarises the findings from both the conceptual and practical investigation and concludes by discussing the possible future steps in efforts to define Nordic added value.

Chapter 2: Concepts of Nordic co-operation

2.1 The value of Nordic co-operation

Nordic co-operation is considered one of the most extensive forms of regional collaboration in the world, but the political significance of Nordic co-operation has been continuously debated and reinterpreted over time and place. Nordic-level co-operation includes both formal and informal modes of organisation. Official Nordic co-operation is organised around two organisations: the Nordic parliamentary assembly the Nordic Council, founded in 1952, and the Nordic Council of Ministers, the co-operation forum of Nordic governments founded in 1971, which consists of several individual ministerial councils. Informal co-operation at a Nordic level, in turn, has traditionally built on various networks and other forms of interaction across the region.

From a historical perspective, Nordic relations have been characterised by both disintegration and co-operation through an alternating history of rivalry and unification.⁴ The current co-operation around the current regional structure of the five independent nation-states was created in the post-World War II period, when joint Nordic institutions began to emerge. This history, however, has also been characterised by failed attempts to form co-operation schemes, which, on the other hand, have pushed Nordic co-operation forwards, prompting the development of new solutions.⁵

The history of Nordic co-operation can be divided into four key periods that have been formative for the development of Nordic co-operation.⁶ These are:

1. the first years of the Nordic Council after its establishment in the 1950s;
2. the collapsed plans for a Nordic customs union around the 1960s and, a decade later, the establishment of the Nordic Council of Ministers;
3. the European Union debates during the first half of the 1990s; and
4. the rise of "the Nordic brand" in the new millennium.

A key feature in these formative periods has been the presence of the European Community and European integration, especially from the late 1980s and 1990s onwards, as a competitor and a regional alternative to Nordic co-operation.⁷

Alongside the continuous development of Nordic co-operation, the essential features and historical foundations of "Nordicness" have also been subject to constant deliberation and debate, ranging from its secondary character in relation to the European or wider international economic, political or security framework to positive connotations of the Nordic countries as a cultural, linguistic and historical community.⁸ This means that any attempts to examine the concepts of Nordic co-operation must also start from the basic assumption that concepts do not have fixed or objective meanings, but are open and constantly evolving in relation to the prevailing social and political context. Following this premise, the concept of "Nordic added value" has also been argued to be a "floating signifier", that is, a symbol or a concept that does not have an agreed meaning but is open to different meanings in different contexts.⁹

In order to better understand the concepts of Nordic co-operation in the context of Nordic research co-operation, this chapter provides an overview of the ways in which the political relevance of and need for a joint Nordic effort has been conceptualised in relation to the broader framework of Nordic co-operation at different times. The period from the end of the Cold War to the present day is particularly relevant to this analysis.

Origins of the idea

The end of the Cold War and the acceleration of the integration of the European Union (EU) that followed has been an important juncture in the development of Nordic co-operation, but also in the ways in which Nordic co-operation has been justified and articulated in order to maintain its political legitimacy, credibility and significance.¹⁰ Still in the 1980s, the place and status of Nordic co-operation has been largely taken for granted and joined by the idea of Nordic values as the common democratic foundations of the Nordic societies.¹¹ The Nordic countries are often seen as having a special relationship because of the similarity of their societies and cultures, as well as their shared values.¹²

In the 1990s, however, the rationale of operating at a Nordic level needed to be reweighed, redefined – some say even reinvented – when Finland and Sweden joined the EU in 1995. Denmark had joined the EU already in 1973, but the accession of Finland and Sweden put the Nordic region in a new situation, as the region was now divided more clearly into EU and non-EU countries, while Norway and Iceland remained as members of the European Economic Area (EEA). In the light of EU integration, Nordic co-operation was thus placed in a new context and a crisis emerged for the Nordic countries in their image as a distinctive region. In other words, this change constituted a turning point in the ways in which “Nordicness” was articulated as old narratives of Nordic co-operation had lost their foundation.¹³

Already before the mid-1990s, a lively debate on the future of Nordic co-operation had taken place. While some had proposed a strengthened Nordic union as an alternative to the EU, others envisioned reinvigorated Nordic co-operation within the EU framework.¹⁴ The reweighing of Nordic co-operation in this new context also called for a need to articulate Nordic co-operation more clearly in order to evaluate the funding activities of the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers and to demonstrate the positive accumulative effect of Nordic effort.¹⁵ This led to *nordisk nytta* being introduced as a basic principle of Nordic co-operation in 1995.¹⁶

The idea of *nordisk nytta* (“Nordic benefit/advantage/usefulness”) was first introduced as a guiding principle for renewed Nordic co-operation in the report *Nordiskt samarbete i en ny tid*, published in February 1995.¹⁷ In the report, written by a prestigious joint working group of the Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers, Nordic co-operation was discussed in the aftermath of the EU referenda within the context of the Nordic region. The report contained proposals for the objectives, content and form of Nordic co-operation as a whole in a period of change.

The reform report of 1995 defined the principle of *nordisk nytta* through activities that

- could otherwise be undertaken at the national level, but where concretely positive effects are generated through common Nordic solutions;
- manifest and develop a sense of Nordic community; and
- increase Nordic competence and competitiveness.¹⁸

By the definition given in the 1995 reform report, the principle of *nordisk nytta* was defined as the positive accumulative effect of Nordic co-operation.¹⁹ As a case of target-oriented management, the success of any activity executed at an official Nordic level would thus be assessed by definition by fulfilling the three predetermined goals of Nordic solutions, Nordic solidarity and Nordic capabilities.²⁰ The three predetermined effects of joint Nordic effort reflected both socio-cultural values (sense of Nordic community, competence) and economic values (competence, competitiveness). Competence was addressed from both an economic and a socio-cultural perspective, the latter through the realisation of competence in such a way that it produces value-based benefits.²¹

The term *nytta* has roots in the ethical theory of utilitarianism. The term is usually translated into English as utility, but in colloquial language, it is most often discussed in terms of usefulness. The principle of utility refers to an action or property in any object, whereby it produces benefit, advantage, pleasure, good or happiness.²²

The adoption of *nordisk nytta* as the principle of official Nordic co-operation in 1995 expresses an ideological reorientation of how Nordic region-building should be planned and operationalised in the context of the EU debate.²³ Furthermore, it echoes the political rhetoric of Nordic co-operation in the 1990s, which was increasingly shaped by demands for results and efficiency, especially through ambitions to improve Nordic competence and competitiveness.²⁴

Nordisk nytta was not initially subject to any significant debate but featured prominently on the agenda later that year when it was used as a yardstick to evaluate the relevance of Nordic institutions. Produced by a joint Nordic working group and the PA-Consulting Group, a report titled *Nordisk nytte* was published in October 1995. The aim of the report was to find areas in which Nordic funding should be prioritised over national alternatives and now also common European action.²⁵ The need for the evaluation stemmed from the challenges that the EU had created for the Nordic countries by limiting the amount of available funding and forcing cut-backs on forms of co-operation.

In the report, the principle of *nordisk nytta* was operationalised in the evaluation of activities of the 47 Nordic institutions at the time. The relevance of these institutions was examined on a three-tiered

scale of *nordisk nytta*, assessing whether the Nordic benefit they generated was high, medium or low. As a starting point for the investigation, the working group had chosen three dimensions in which *nordisk nytta* was evaluated. These were:

- the preconditions for an activity to be regarded as Nordic;
- the identifiable positive effect on cost-efficiency; and
- the quality of the results in terms of both the development of Nordic community and Nordic competence and competitiveness.²⁶

The impact of the report was visible already the following year when it led to significant cuts in Nordic activities and the discontinuation of several institutions. Furthermore, based on the report, a greater degree of financing was now directed at specific projects instead of permanent Nordic institutions.²⁷

In the aftermath of these substantial changes, the concept of *nordisk nytta* came under scrutiny and was condemned in particular by the Nordic ministers for culture.²⁸ The closure of Nordic institutions on the basis of what was deemed a narrow application of the concept provoked reaction, as these institutions were deemed to be central to the formation of the infrastructure for Nordic co-operation. The *Nordisk nytte* report was criticised for being strongly economy-oriented, as many members of the working group behind the report had links to the Nordic finance ministries. It was also unclear whether all three requirements for an activity to be characterised according to the principle of *nordisk nytta* should be met simultaneously.²⁹ At the same time, however, there was support for the de-bureaucratisation and increased efficiency of Nordic co-operation.³⁰

Creating a high Nordic profile

In the late 1990s, the term *nordiskt mervärde* emerges alongside *nordisk nytta* in steering documents of official Nordic co-operation, and from 1999 onwards it becomes integrated in the basic statutes for Nordic institutions. Although the term *nordiskt mervärde* translates into English literally as "Nordic added value", in the 2000s, the term was commonly translated into English as, for example, "Nordic synergy".³¹

Despite the adoption of a new term to articulate

the continuing need for joint Nordic action, attempts to define *nordiskt mervärde* have been pointed out to often end up in the same points that characterise *nordisk nytta*.³² At the same time, however, *nytta* and *mervärde* evoke different connotations that should not be overlooked. Unlike *nytta*, the dictionary definition of the term "added value" is "an improvement or addition to something that makes it worth more".³³ The concept of "added value" is also more familiar from the field of economics. "Added value", or alternatively "value added", derives from Marxian economics referring to the value of the labour created by the worker, which the employer or owner leaves unpaid. Another distinct reference to the term can be found in fiscal theory in the concept of "value added tax", which means a consumption tax that adds value at each stage of the supply chain.³⁴ On the other hand, references to "Nordic values" can also be seen as embedded in the idea of *nordiskt mervärde*, evoking connotations to the values on which Nordic societies are claimed to be based.³⁵

At the turn of the millennium, other similar terms were also increasingly in use to describe and justify joint Nordic action. These include concepts such as *nordisk dimension* ("Nordic dimension"), *nordisk bredd* ("Nordic breadth"), *nordisk nivå* ("Nordic level"), *nordisk förmedlingspotential* ("Nordic mediation potential"), *nordiska lösningar* ("Nordic solutions"), *nordisk samhörighet* ("Nordic togetherness") and *nordisk kompetens* ("Nordic competence").³⁶ The prominent emergence of such concepts can be seen as reflecting a growing importance of finding ways to articulate the meaning of Nordic co-operation.

While in practice it is not often easy to pinpoint differences between *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt mervärde*, the adoption of the concept *nordiskt mervärde* links prominently to another recent key juncture of official Nordic co-operation, namely the rise of "the Nordic brand", as the introduction of the term *nordiskt mervärde* in official Nordic co-operation has been argued to illustrate a redirection of Nordic co-operation from ideological identity construction towards a more practical type of co-operation. Furthermore, it has been linked with the desire to improve the quality and competitiveness of the Nordic region and the ambition to create a high Nordic profile in the global context.³⁷

In the new millennium, Nordic co-operation has been prominently discussed in terms of branding and the rhetoric of "New Nordicism", which refers

to the reinvention of "the Nordic" as a global brand and "as a trademark to be used on global markets."³⁸ In recent decades, the Nordic countries have become increasingly successful in terms of their national performance, clustering in the top of numerous global rankings in terms of, for example, economic competitiveness, education, gender equality, prosperity, transparency, quality of life, peace and happiness.³⁹ As the Nordic countries have emerged as "models" with best practices to share, "Nordicness" has also increasingly become a resource for commercial and cultural branding.

In the 2000s, the Nordic Council of Ministers has also used branding as a way to reclaim visibility for the Nordic region. The 2005 report *Norden som global vinderregion*, commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers from the Danish think tank Mandag Morgen, has been held as significant in redefining the purpose of the Nordic Council of Ministers towards branding the region based on its set of allegedly distinctive values.⁴⁰ This change has contributed to the increased will to present the Nordics as a united front to the outside world.⁴¹ In the 2000s, the Nordic countries also launched a joint Nordic globalisation policy to seek solutions to global challenges, leading to an increasing need to emphasise the Nordic region as an independent collective actor in the global arena.

In this context, the added value of joint Nordic effort has also been further developed, adding an alleged fourth dimension – activities that strengthen the Nordic international influence – to the definition.⁴² The principle of "Nordic influence" has been defined as a prominently "outward-looking vision" with a focus on "extra-regional relations and the new desired outcome of Nordic regionalism."⁴³

The outward-looking vision for Nordic co-operation with an emphasis on the Nordic brand and influence in international arenas has not, however, been beyond criticism. The so-called rhetoric of "New Nordicness" has been criticised for focusing too heavily on promoting the region in simplistic, prescriptive and essentialising terms, rather than focusing on regional integration, interaction and the creation of a Nordic community. This means that the global success of the Nordic brand has transformed the rhetoric and ambition of Nordic co-operation from creating a cultural or political community to the creation of attributes or qualities that can be used in global markets.⁴⁴ This essentialisation of "the Nordic" has also been pointed out to impact the relationship between Europe and the Nordic region by constructing the

Nordic not as an alternative to Europe, but as higher-ranking and superior.⁴⁵

A decline or a renaissance of Nordic co-operation?

In the present day, Nordic co-operation has been argued to be characterised by a tension between "the decline of Nordic co-operation" and the so called "Nordic renaissance". This has put the Nordic region at a crossroads "where the role of the region is debated against the background of the persistent economic crisis in Europe and an increasingly challenging geopolitical situation."⁴⁶ This also means that the rhetoric of Nordic co-operation continues to evolve and receive a wide range of meanings.

Today, "Nordicness" may invite a reflection on a range of beneficial features such as democracy, welfare, pragmatism and openness. In addition, the positive connotations attached to Nordicness draw from the success of the national performance of the Nordic countries. This success has also translated into new initiatives for Nordic co-operation, especially in the field of foreign policy and defence policy.⁴⁷ In the public debate, "the Nordic renaissance" has also been supported by a strengthening of a pan-Nordic discourse, following especially the Swedish historian Gunnar Wetterberg's proposal for a united Nordic Federation in his 2010 report *The United Nordic Federation*.⁴⁸

On the other side of the coin, there has also arguably been a continuous decline of Nordic co-operation in the traditional key areas of welfare, law and culture.⁴⁹ The adjective "Nordic" may also be associated with negative associations such as arrogance, self-righteousness or xenophobia.⁵⁰ Despite continuing political and public support, the political relevance of Nordic co-operation has been questioned, particularly in the 2010s.⁵¹ For example, the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers have struggled to achieve prestige and political and juridical relevance against EU and European integration.⁵² The Nordic Council of Ministers has also channelled funds to various programmes rather than to permanent Nordic institutions.

Apart from the political dimension, the lack of common public sphere, including common associations, newspapers and media, has also been identified as a particular challenge that may potentially influence the capacities of ensuring a common Nordic effort. Furthermore, it is often claimed that

Nordic citizens understand each other's languages more poorly today than they did previously, which is also said to be detrimental to the construction of a common Nordic identity and sense of belonging.⁵³

This tension is also reflected in official Nordic co-operation, highlighting both its added value and the challenges it faces. Over the last decade, the Nordic countries have faced internal and external challenges that have created tensions between the Nordic countries, but which have also been seen as a signal for a need for more intensive co-operation.⁵⁴ Many of these challenges are characteristically global, such as the climate crisis, the refugee crisis, financial crises, pandemics as well as geopolitical tensions and security policy challenges. In particular, increased immigration, the rise of exclusionary nationalism and populism, and the consequent favouring of national priorities have posed challenges for the EU and international co-operation more widely.⁵⁵

The current guideline of official Nordic co-operation follows the Vision 2030 programme, which was adopted by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2019. According to the declaration *Our Vision 2030*, the Nordic region will be the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030, meaning that all co-operation realised under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers must serve this purpose. The vision is linked to three strategic priorities: "a green Nordic Region", "a competitive Nordic Region", and "a socially sustainable Nordic Region". These three strategic priorities respond to many pressing challenges such as climate change, pollution and threats to biodiversity, and challenges facing democracy, integration and inclusion, but also emphasise the Nordics in a global context.⁵⁶ Based on these priorities, the definition of the added value of Nordic co-operation is associated with social sustainability and well-being that are, by their nature, fostered by equality and balance in social, economic and environmental conditions.⁵⁷ Consequently, what could be proposed as a novel principle of "Nordic sustainability" strikes a clearer balance between an outward-looking vision for the Nordic region and the more locally impactful added value of Nordic co-operation.

Operationalisation of the concepts today

As discussed above, over the last three decades, the political legitimacy and significance of Nordic co-operation has been articulated through the

concepts of *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt mervärde*, and their various English-language translations. The meanings of these concepts have evolved in parallel with the development and rhetoric of Nordic co-operation. At the same time, it is evident that the conceptual framework of Nordic co-operation is not standardised due to the presence of several similar concepts as well as the increasing use of English as the language of Nordic co-operation.

A cursory look at the ways in which Nordic co-operation is currently articulated reveals that various concepts are in simultaneous use. In the Scandinavian languages, the terms *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt mervärde* are often used in parallel, almost as synonyms, yet a hierarchy of meaning can be identified between the two concepts. For example, in the statutes of Nordic institutions, contribution to *nordisk nytta* is represented as the overarching goal of Nordic co-operation whereas *nordiskt mervärde* is expressed in more practical terms as the outcome of activities, while still maintaining the terms' sociocultural and economic dimensions. For example, the Swedish-language statutes of NordForsk from 2014, which are very similar to those of other Nordic institutions, state:

All of NordForsk's activities should aim for a high Nordic profile and contribute to the Nordic benefit [den nordiska nyttan] so that the activities create a Nordic added value [ett nordiskt mervärde] beyond the purely technical results of co-operation.⁵⁸

In English, the term Nordic added value is commonly used as a translation of both *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt mervärde*, thus blurring the subtle distinction between the two Scandinavian terms.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the concept of Nordic added value is not always used in the same format. For example, instead of using Nordic added value as an established concept, the English-language steering documents of official Nordic co-operation state as of February 2023 that the focus of Nordic co-operation is on "areas where a Nordic approach generates *added value* for the countries and peoples of the Region."⁶⁰ In the Scandinavian language versions of the same webpage, *mervärde* is used as a translation of "added value".⁶¹

In those Nordic organisations that prominently use English, the concept "Nordic added value" is regularly used to state the purpose of joint activities. Aside from NordForsk, which will be discussed later in detail, the concept is visible, for example,

in the communication of other Nordic research co-operation organisations such as Nordic Energy Research and the Nordic e-Infrastructure Collaboration (NeIC). For example, in 2021, NeIC developed its own description of Nordic added value in order to better evaluate and communicate the added value provided to the Nordic region through NeIC projects.⁶² Another example of the use of the term in English can be found in the context of NordRegio, which is an international research centre for regional development and planning. NordRegio defines the contribution of its activities to the creation of Nordic added value through the facilitation of co-operation between Nordic stakeholders.⁶³

European Added Value as a conceptual relative

Taking into consideration the established English translation, Nordic added value cannot be fully considered without looking at it in relation to the European context and the concept of "European Added Value" (EAV), which provides a comparative perspective in efforts to define Nordic added value.

The concept of European Added Value, or alternatively "EU added value", has been used for decades to justify joint European action and the relevance of European funding in various areas. Although the phrase "European added value" first emerged in the early 1980s, references to the added value of EU action are more prominently linked with the introduction of the subsidiarity principle of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty – the principle that decisions should be dealt at the most immediate or local level.⁶⁴ In general, EAV constitutes what the EU stands for: "that the sum of the actions taken together will lead to better overall results for the participants than their individual actions can yield, and the belief that stronger collective action and shared sovereignty will therefore be beneficial for the Member States and their citizens."⁶⁵

The increasing use of EAV has also been linked more broadly to the value turn of modern governance, which can be traced to:

- the reform movement "New Public Management";
- modern business economics; and
- intensified search of common moral foundations in pluralistic and increasingly secular societies.⁶⁶

In the European context, the intensified search of

common moral foundations refers to the declining importance of official religion as a source of cultural cohesion in Europe and the consequent demand to find other unifying principles, often propagated under the name of values. The broad framework of New Public Management (NPM), on the other hand, refers to the new forms of management that have followed the neoliberal tenet to privatise and convert a national economy into a market economy by transferring market principles to the public sector.⁶⁷

Despite emerging as a fashionable buzzword, especially in this millennium, and remaining an ongoing point of discussion in the 2020s, EAV has also been called out for lacking conceptual clarity. Instead, it has been called a multifaceted term with different meanings for different stakeholders. Within the EU context, attempts to define EAV have linked the concept varyingly to, for example, EU principles of subsidiarity and proportionality or complementarity and additionality, economic theories and economies of scale and political arguments, including the promotion of EU values such as peace, democracy, solidarity, security, or the rule of law.⁶⁸

Discussions around EAV can provide some clarity and tools to understand the concept of Nordic added value, such as through the value-turn of modern governance or the framework of NPM and the international branding of the Nordic region as part of efforts to capitalise the improved global reputation of the Nordic countries. European and Nordic co-operation can also essentially be regarded as manifestations of regionalism, but at the same time it is important to remember that Europe and the Nordic region have their own regional histories, rationales and identities. It is therefore critical to understand some of the key differences between Nordic and European co-operation.⁶⁹

A key difference between Nordic co-operation and the EU is their models of governance. Unlike the EU, the Nordic regional governance model is not supra-national, rather the supreme authority for decision-making remains at the national level to ensure that regional agreements and regulations are not superior to national laws. Nordic co-operation has traditionally been characterised by strong norms of consensus and compromise, and a strong commitment to accommodation.⁷⁰ This has been an important element in the continued political support for Nordic co-operation, because the lack of a supra-national element instills a sense of trust at the national level as processes can be with-

drawn from without serious political or economic consequences.⁷¹ Moreover, Nordic co-operation has traditionally enjoyed public support in contrast with growing euroscepticism in Europe. In a 2017 survey conducted by the Nordic Council of Ministers, more than 90% of Nordic citizens viewed Nordic co-operation as important.⁷²

Nordic regional identity does not compete with national identities either, but has commonly been considered to complement them, making the Nordic dimension an important element in the formation of nation-states and national narratives throughout the region.⁷³ Alongside official Nordic co-operation, informal regional networks and interaction have been seen as characteristic of the Nordic region. These intra-Nordic contacts have been described as a "cobweb", in which the numerous delicate threads form a strong net.⁷⁴

One particular difference that has been highlighted between the principles of Nordic added

value and EAV is the informal dimension that has been noted as lacking at the European level but being present at the Nordic level.⁷⁵ The lack of informal dimension has been noted as constituting a relevant tension at the European level as the European parliament has expressed worries against "excessively economic interpretations" of the concept and fears it being "hijacked by the advocates of maximum growth".⁷⁶ Highlighting the dynamic and flexible nature of EAV, the European parliament has stressed that the concept should thus not be limited only to advanced co-operation between Member States, but should also contain a certain "visionary" aspect. Furthermore, it has been argued that the notion of "cultural value" added should not be forgotten since any object or initiative that takes place under the auspices of the European Union inevitably contributes to the dynamic, knowledge-based society characterised by economic and social cohesion, competitiveness, high employment, security and stability, and the preservation of common heritage.⁷⁷

2.2 The added value of Nordic research co-operation

Although research co-operation has a long history in the Nordic region, formalised research co-operation that takes place through NordForsk under the Nordic Council of Ministers was not established until the mid-2000s.⁷⁸ The debate on the need for formal Nordic research co-operation dates to the 1980s and 1990s, when growing aspirations for more coherent research co-operation began to emerge due to the new role of research as a strategic resource for improving competition and economic growth at the national level.⁷⁹ However, the acceleration of European integration is a significant driving force in the development of Nordic research co-operation. As part of the Lisbon Strategy in the early 2000s, the EU presented a vision for a common European Research Area (ERA) aiming to make Europe the world's leading competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010.⁸⁰ The introduction of the ERA consequently led to a vision of an established Nordic research and innovation area as a regional contribution to the ERA, which would allow Nordic co-operation to be prioritised, have a better competitive advantage for EU resources, and support the development of the Nordic region as one of the most attractive

regions in the world for education, research and business.⁸¹

In 2004, a joint ministerial declaration by the Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research (MR-U) and the ministers for industry led to the establishment of the Nordic Research and Innovation Area (NORIA). The idea was developed in two reports that the MR-U had commissioned in 2002, the white paper *NORIA: White Paper on Nordic Research and Innovation* written by the Finnish professor and former Minister of Culture and Science of Finland Gustav Björkstrand, and the report *A Nordic Dimension in National Research Environments – Nordic Research Institutions under National Responsibility* written by the Swedish professor and Secretary-General of the European Research Council Expert Group Dan Brändström. In parallel with the two papers, a strategy report for Nordic innovation *Nordic Strength, National Benefit and Global Excellence: Proposals for a Nordic Innovation Policy Co-operation Programme 2005-2010* was also presented, demonstrating the growing political ambition to make the Nordic region an international leader and, in certain areas, a leading region in research, higher education and

innovation.⁸² According to the white paper, the establishment of NORIA was driven by both regional competitiveness and economic interdependence.⁸³

Following the establishment of NORIA, new regional institutions for research co-operation were also established: the Nordic Innovation Centre (NICE) in 2004, NordForsk in 2005 as well as Nordic Energy Research. With the aim of developing co-operation between research and industry across the Nordic region and engaging with the EU, the establishment of these institutions has been seen as a contribution to the renewal and enhancement of Nordic research and innovation co-operation.⁸⁴ The development of Nordic research co-operation has also notably been supported by the globalisation agenda of Nordic co-operation, with its calls for joint Nordic activities in research and innovation, education, climate and energy as well as welfare and health issues.⁸⁵ In addition, the development of a global knowledge society, in which economies are moving towards more knowledge-intensive modes of production, has been driving an increased focus on research and development as a key enabler of growth and progress.⁸⁶

NordForsk

NordForsk is a Nordic research funding organisation that operates under the Nordic Council of Ministers within the responsibility of the MR-U.⁸⁷ NordForsk funds and facilitates cross-sectoral Nordic co-operation on research and research infrastructures. It supports research in the Nordic region by bringing national research groups together and enhancing the quality, impact and efficiency of Nordic research co-operation. This is seen as supporting the Nordic region in becoming a world leader in research and innovation.⁸⁸ NordForsk is located in Oslo together with Nordic Innovation and Nordic Energy Research as well as the Nordic e-Infrastructure Collaboration (NeIC), which is a joint initiative between the Nordic countries and facilitates the development and operation of advanced e-infrastructure solutions in areas of joint Nordic interest.⁸⁹

NordForsk is funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the national research funding organisations of the Nordic countries. NordForsk's three primary funding instruments are research projects, Nordic Centres of Excellence and Nordic University Hubs. It has regular calls, averaging six

per year. NordForsk's programmes are developed in partnership with national research funding organisations through the so-called open invitation mechanism. Through this mechanism, national research funding organisations can propose new Nordic programmes or the continuation of existing programmes based on jointly identified common Nordic priorities. There needs to be funding from at least three Nordic countries for NordForsk to be able to issue a call for proposals, but ultimately the decision to establish new programmes or calls is made by the NordForsk board.⁹⁰ National research funding organisations contribute at least two-thirds of the programme funding. Over the years, NordForsk has also had several programmes involving non-Nordic partner countries such as the Baltic countries, the United Kingdom, and Japan.

NordForsk's key stakeholders are national research councils, universities, and other research-funding bodies. All of NordForsk's programmes have a programme committee appointed by NordForsk. A programme committee consists of a chairperson and members representing each partner funding the programme.

To be eligible for funding, researchers applying for NordForsk-funding must always be comprised of partners from at least three countries or two countries and one autonomous area. NordForsk's funding decisions are based on a scientific evaluation, after which the programme committees draw up the recommendation on the funding proposal. The funding proposal is based on the scientific evaluation, the Nordic added value of the projects and a strategic assessment of which projects will best fulfil the programme objectives.⁹¹

NordForsk's current organisational performance has been evaluated as excellent since 2018.⁹² NordForsk has been seen to be developing into a relevant and useful platform for initiating Nordic research collaboration. Some of the current challenges noted in reference to NordForsk's organisational performance are its governance model, portfolio steering, impact assessment, strategic communication and, most relevantly, the use of Nordic added value.⁹³

Looking for a direction in Nordic research co-operation

Nordic research co-operation was institutionalised in the mid-2000s through the establishment of Nordic research institutions. As discussed above, this era also constitutes a significant juncture for Nordic co-operation in terms of the rise of the Nordic brand and the new Nordic globalisation agenda. It is therefore not surprising that in the early years of NordForsk, the justification of Nordic research co-operation was guided by the target-oriented principle of *nordiskt mervärde*, emphasising that Nordic co-operation cannot be prioritised simply because it is Nordic, but only if it increases the quality of the knowledge that is produced without substantial costs.⁹⁴

References to other concepts of Nordic co-operation can also be found in discussions held in the early years of NordForsk. In attempts to find a common vision for the research community, existing concepts were seen as inadequate. *Nordisk nytta*, for example, was viewed among science experts as "paralysing", "inward-looking" and "restrictive". As an alternative, the concept of "Nordic strength" (*nordisk styrka*) was proposed, constituting a more dynamic and outward-oriented vision for Nordic research co-operation.⁹⁵

Nordic strength, or alternatively the plural "Nordic strengths", was used sporadically in NordForsk's operations in the following years. In 2008, for example, the concept was prominently explored in the NordForsk policy brief *Branding the Nordic Research and Innovation Area*. The purpose of the policy brief was to create a branding strategy to profile the Nordic region in the global market and attract foreign investment in research and innovation. The strategy outlined in the report was heavily based on the idea of Nordic strengths, which were seen as providing the basis for the dimensions of the brand identity. Through a consultation of Nordic experts and international research and innovation professionals, the specific "Nordic Strengths" (NB capitalised) that were identified in the policy brief were a highly qualified workforce, technologically advanced user communities and a Nordic tradition of inventiveness and collaboration based on the values of reliability and trust in people, companies and public institutions. In the branding strategy, the idea of Nordic strengths

can thus be argued to build on both sociocultural and economic values in a similar manner as the principles of *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt mervärde* by covering both "the general level that ties the region together and the concrete and specific that attracts investors."⁹⁶

Nordic added value is established as the polestar of Nordic research co-operation

In a closer examination of NordForsk's conceptual framework, it is important to note that NordForsk is one of the few Nordic institutions whose official language is English instead of the Scandinavian languages. This decision was made because of the key involvement of Baltic observers in NordForsk's activities from the outset, as well as because English is the natural language of communication in research co-operation.⁹⁷

The English-language term "Nordic added value" becomes central to the agenda of Nordic research co-operation at the turn of the 2010s. Although it can be considered as a direct translation of the *nordiskt mervärde*, the novel way of translating the concept is worth noting because it appears in a context where Nordic co-operation is analysed in relation to European research co-operation. Furthermore, the translation seems to appear for the first time in official Nordic co-operation in the context of the research policy area, making research and innovation an important area for conceptual change.

The new way of translating the principle can be found in the 2008 report *The Nordic Research and Innovation Area (NORIA) and synergies with the European Research Area (ERA)*.⁹⁸ In the report, however, the concept does not appear in a similar format as it does today, as the idea is expressed through constructs such as "added value", "added value by Nordic research co-operation" and that research co-operation "adds value". Similar constructions can also be found in the NordForsk strategy for 2011–2014 and NordForsk's call texts for programmes until the mid-2010s.⁹⁹ Professor Gunnel Gustafsson, who was the director of NordForsk from 2010 to 2018 and has been a board member since 2005, confirms that during her time at NordForsk, Nordic added value or other concepts were never really discussed, but

terms such as *nytta*, *mervärde* and *styrka* were considered more as synonyms with each other with natural and self-evident meanings.¹⁰⁰

Nordic added value appears as an established concept for the first time in the 2011 policy brief *Rethinking Nordic Added Value in Research*. The report, conducted by the science consultancy firm Technopolis and Erik Arnold, was part of a series of three policy briefs that described and analysed Nordic research co-operation in a European context at the research policy, strategy and research-performing levels. The report was preceded by the new strategy for Nordic research co-operation presented by the MR-U in 2011. Driven by the new globalisation agenda of the Nordic Council of Ministers and the need to address major societal challenges by way of research and innovation, its aim was to intensify research co-operation, as the improvement of research-based knowledge was seen as an important basis both for the stimulation of development and growth through various objectives, including the further refinement of NORIA, as well as to support the central role of NordForsk.¹⁰¹

Arnold's report analysed the concept of "Nordic Added Value" (NB capitalisation) in light of the development of the ERA in which Nordic added value also became closely discussed in relation to the concept of European Added Value (EAV), which has also been used as the primary policy justification within the ERA. Therefore, it is evident that what had previously been translated alternately as "benefit" or "synergy" had now become translated as "added value" in relation to the corresponding European concept rather than relying on the previously used translations. The establishment of Nordic Added Value as a specific concept was also enhanced by the capitalisation of each of the three words ("Nordic Added Value") and the novel use of the abbreviation "NAV". Furthermore, the report uses "Nordic added value" somewhat anachronistically as a translation of the 1995-term *nordisk nytta* despite the fact that other sources have held EAV and *nordisk nytta* as different types of concepts because they do not contain the same words in their formulations.¹⁰² Nevertheless, the report signifies harmonisation in the way in which the rationales for joint Nordic and European efforts are expressed.

Apart from the divergent translations, Arnold's report also draws attention to the fluidity of concepts and the changes in their definition over time and in different contexts. For example, the report defines "Nordic Added Value" in the 1995

context as more ideologically characterised by referring to the more traditional aim of maintaining a common Nordic cultural identity. In contrast, the report mentions the innovation report *Hele Norden som base: Utredning om nordisk erhvervs/naeringsrettet innovationssamarbejde* from 1998 as an example of a more economically oriented context of discussing Nordic added value.¹⁰³ Due to the new MR-U strategy of 2010, the *Rethinking Nordic Added Value* report saw Nordic Added Value as having acquired a new definition in the context of research co-operation, emphasising above all competence and competitiveness by creating critical mass for success and expertise, developing platforms for international co-operation, creating the profile of a leading knowledge-based region, enhancing the ability of the region to attract talent and investments, strengthening the Nordic region and its efforts in EU programmes and initiatives, and creating a model for Europe in transnational research co-operation.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, the report underlines that Nordic added value had an informal dimension as well, based on trust, experience, shared history, geography and to some degree on cultural similarity.

The informal dimension was highlighted in the report as a particular difference in relation to European added value, which in the field of European research co-operation was emphasised as lacking.¹⁰⁵ In contrast to EAV, Nordic added value was also noted to be expressed through variable geometry, with thematic priorities coming from the Nordic countries. Nordic co-operation was also seen as focusing on creating good framework conditions for research rather than using research as a tool to achieve security policy, economic or other strategic objectives.¹⁰⁶ Whereas European research programmes have traditionally been thematically broad and industry-oriented, Nordic co-operation has also tended to focus on research-oriented projects, strategic programmes, research training and promoting mobility.¹⁰⁷

Despite extensively discussing the idea of Nordic added value, the definition of the principle in the 2011 report does not notably differ from the existing definitions of the concept or its Scandinavian counterparts.¹⁰⁸ While the report emphasises the notions of competence and competitiveness, it also positions the informal aspects of co-operation and good research conditions as offering particular Nordic added value instead of only highlighting research as means to achieve specific strategic objectives.

The operationalisation of Nordic added value today

The concept of Nordic added value has been notably integrated into NordForsk's activities since 2015. It has become incorporated in strategy papers and call texts for research programmes laying emphasis on research that has a focus on areas where joint Nordic action adds value to national initiatives.¹⁰⁹ Since 2018, the concept has been further integrated into the ways in which Nordic research co-operation is articulated. The same year, the MR-U adopted six principles for future Nordic research co-operation, one of which calls for a clearer focus on Nordic added value based on the priorities of the Nordic countries.¹¹⁰ The effect can be seen in the definition of Nordic added value in NordForsk's call texts in which Nordic added value becomes more comprehensively defined on a programme-by-programme basis and through various examples. As examples of added value, a typical call text mentions the building of critical

mass, networking, sharing data, infrastructures and resources, and enhancing scientific excellence as well as creating societal impact and contributing to research-based policymaking. In more recent call texts, the definition of Nordic added value has been further extended to cover Nordic added value as a precondition for research, building on unique Nordic phenomena such as geographical, climatic, cultural, linguistic or social phenomenon, or on uniquely Nordic data or collections.

Today, Nordic added value is used as the key justification and evaluation criteria in Nordic research co-operation, and Nordic added value created through NordForsk is also increasingly communicated. As stated in the most recent strategy for 2019 to 2022, NordForsk's primary goal is to facilitate effective and trustful co-operation in the Nordic region that is of the highest international quality, and to deliver Nordic added value.¹¹¹ This mission is reflected in all activities, from the development of new programmes to the design of calls for proposals, the assessment of

Table 1: Definition of the Nordic added value in Nordic research co-operation

Added value generated because the **research collaboration is taking place** in the Nordic region.

Added value generated because the **research can only be carried out** in the Nordic region

Added value is produced when research activities:

Help to build critical mass and/or expertise at the Nordic level in important disciplines or research areas.

Enhance cost-effectiveness by sharing infrastructure or data or harmonising systems for utilising data and other resources in the Nordic region.

Lead to regional mobility and networking among the Nordic countries.

Enhance scientific quality and expand the number of high-quality scientific publications through Nordic co-operation.

Increase the chances of success for Nordic researchers in EU research activities or other international research co-operation.

Lead to more results and stronger, quality-assured conclusions as a basis for shaping the statutory framework or rationalising and improving the public administration;

Promote the creation of innovations, patents or other solutions that help to enhance industrial development and co-operation in the Nordic region.

Added value is produced when research activities:

Build on particular strengths of Nordic researchers, and when the research is carried out by groups with unique expertise.

Address needs that are unique to the Nordic countries in light of our similar social structures, institutions and institutional culture, and shared cultural heritage;

Focus on e.g., geographical, climatic, cultural, linguistic or social phenomena in the Nordic region.

Utilise data from uniquely Nordic registries.

grant applications and impact reports. Elaborating on how research co-operation leads to Nordic added value, the NordForsk website states:

The entire framework for Nordic cooperation is rooted in the idea that together we are stronger, that we can achieve more by working together, and that what we achieve will be better for the inhabitants of the Nordic countries and the rest of the world.¹¹²

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

1. added value generated because the research collaboration is taking place in the Nordic region; and
2. added value generated because the research can only be carried out in the Nordic region.¹¹³

Under these two categories, research activities that generate added value are defined as shown in Table 1.

Since 2022, calls for project proposals have included a hyperlink to NordForsk's website with a definition of Nordic added value, in similar way as defined in Table 1. In this way, although a more standardised definition of Nordic added value has been integrated into the programme calls, some continue to provide a detailed description of Nordic added value in relation to the thematic focuses of the programmes.

As part of its monitoring activities of research impact, NordForsk follows the results and effects of NordForsk-funded research including Nordic added value. NordForsk defines research impact as both academic impact and societal impact. Academic impact refers to the enhancement of scientific quality and the building of critical expertise, among others. Societal impact refers to the contribution of research to society and the economy, benefitting individuals, organisations and nations. In addition, as part of project monitoring and reporting activities, NordForsk assesses how the research projects have created Nordic added value. NordForsk currently gathers data about research impact from the reporting system Researchfish, in which NordForsk-funded projects are expected to report at least once per year.¹¹⁴ The Nordic added

value that the NordForsk-funded projects create is currently evaluated quantitatively based on the categories presented in Table 1.¹¹⁵

Although NordForsk has devised its own definition of Nordic added value, the most recent evaluation of NordForsk from 2022 highlights that the concept lacks an established definition and poses a particular challenge, which makes the concept somewhat unclear and anecdotal.¹¹⁶ The concept has also been noted not to be widely known among researchers and therefore not easily addressed in applications. Moreover, researchers allegedly do not find it easy to report Nordic added value created in the projects. Based on interviews conducted as part of the evaluation, one of the most important forms of Nordic added value for researchers was networks, referring to both new partnerships among researchers and institutions as well as to the fortification of existing networks.¹¹⁷ Similar results have also been presented in previous NordForsk user surveys.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, more systematic studies and evaluations of research programmes and projects have been proposed as a solution to gain a deeper understanding of the concept.

On this basis, the evaluation proposes a redefinition of the concept, in which Nordic added value would be more clearly divided into preconditions and results, outcomes and benefits. As a precondition, Nordic added value would refer, for example, to the research team or the topics to be addressed, while results, outcomes and benefits would refer to the highest international quality and the development of the Nordic research environment and the Nordic countries.¹¹⁹

2.3 Towards a definition of Nordic added value – Challenges and solutions

Historical and present-day usage of concepts of Nordic co-operation from the end of the Cold War period to the present day have been discussed above. Although these concepts have often been used without difficulty as the guiding principle and political justification for Nordic co-operation, it is clear that they have sparked debate and reflection on their definition and use from time to time. Furthermore, when put into practice in various policy areas, such as research co-operation, they give rise to further deliberations. How, then, should we try to understand and define Nordic added value in the crossroads between policy and practice? Examples from other policy areas and regional contexts shed light on this challenge.¹²⁰

The enigma of value-based concepts

Looking at the definition of the various concepts and translations of Nordic co-operation, one can conclude that they are fundamentally value-based concepts as they enduringly manifest both sociocultural and economic values. However, value-based concepts are typically described as being ambivalent and enigmatic. Discussions of values also often end up at a very abstract level and the ambiguity of values is commonly present in efforts to define or articulate them for various purposes.¹²¹ In a similar manner, concepts used to justify Nordic co-operation have been called out as vague, weak and lacking unified definitions.¹²² For example, despite their self-evident role in Nordic co-operation, the question of what makes Nordic values exactly “Nordic” is often considered difficult due to the challenges of defining a “real” difference between Nordic, European and Western values.¹²³

Another key reason for the enigmatic character of value-based concepts is the evident tension between policy and practice. Although the idea of Nordic added value may be defined as the rationale for joint action in political speeches and steering documents, when such concepts become defined as the target of activities, they enter the realm of concrete action.¹²⁴ The attainment of such target-oriented action requires the operationali-

sation of concepts in different organisations and among different stakeholders, which often reveals rather than clarifies the ambiguities involved. This issue has been discussed in the context of Nordic cultural co-operation, where the same concepts have also been prominently operationalised in the assessment of funding applications,¹²⁵ and in the context of higher education regionalism, where Nordic added value has been defined as a “floating signifier” – an open and evolving concept with multiple meanings.¹²⁶

Clear directives and mandates are often demanded from those who are subject to governance, but at the same time, it should not be forgotten that unclear objectives also have many advantages and provide a high degree of flexibility for operational activities. This is a common dilemma and paradox in any discussion of target-oriented management.¹²⁷ For example, in reference to the EU, it has been noted that EAV has been used to justify almost every kind of objective.¹²⁸

Limited available strategies

Nordic institutions have been noted to have limited options to navigate this complex web of concepts. As a result, most Nordic institutions are often satisfied with a relatively simple understanding of concepts and what they entail.¹²⁹ Nordic institutions have been argued to have two strategies at their disposal when trying to interpret concepts of co-operation. These are:

1. restructuring of the conceptual hierarchy; and
2. broadening of meaning.¹³⁰

Restructuring of the conceptual hierarchy refers to attempts to create hierarchies between different concepts, such as in statutes, in which concepts receive their meaning in relation to each other. This is evident, for example, in the statutes of Nordic institutions in which *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt mervärde* are articulated in reference to each other. In Nordic research co-operation, the prominent emergence of the English-language term “Nordic added value” at the turn of the 2010s, in turn,

blurs this distinction. Furthermore, the adoption of the English-language formulation “Nordic added value” demonstrates how concepts of Nordic co-operation can also take shape in reference to conceptual relatives outside the Nordic region, in this case EAV.

The broadening of meaning, in turn, relates to the relative freedom of Nordic institutions to define and operationalise Nordic added value.¹³¹ In the context of research co-operation, this strategy can be seen in the creation of sector-specific examples of activities that generate added value. In addition, this strategy can be seen as being employed in attempts to categorise or rearrange categories that are defined as generating Nordic added value as in the recent NordForsk evaluation.¹³²

Challenges in the practical application of concepts

The presence of several similar concepts makes it difficult for various actors and stakeholders to understand their meaning and communicate them with each other.¹³³ The interpretation of concepts may vary from person to person and also over time.¹³⁴ This leads to a certain asymmetry in the ways in which the idea of Nordic added value is communicated to different stakeholders, such as national funding organisations, science advisors and researchers. In practice, this may lead to situations where the information provided to applicants is based on a broad definition of a concept, while the experts assessing applications may rely on a narrower definition of the same concept, leading to a situation in which the applicants and the experts interpret the concepts differently. Consequently, it has been considered important to strike a balance between clear guidelines and criteria, and a degree of flexibility in interpretation.¹³⁵

The lack of a normative definition raises questions as to how the need for funding or the Nordic added value created through various activities should be assessed or evaluated in the absence of comparable indicators. While *nordisk nytta*, *nordiskt mervärde* and Nordic added value are ways to articulate and demonstrate the positive accumulative effect of Nordic effort, it has been commonly noted that in practice, it is not easy to measure the extent of this effect.¹³⁶ In the 1990s, for example, debates around *nordisk nytta* highlighted the difficulty in quantifying or measuring the criteria for *nordisk nytta* given the lack of hard data and quantitative evidence. Consequently,

it was stressed that initiatives should primarily be based on qualitative considerations, making *nordisk nytta* above all a qualitative concept.¹³⁷

In the European context, the use of EAV as an operative measuring instrument has also been deemed challenging, as the concept can be used to justify almost any kind of objective. In order to use it as an operative measuring instrument, the formulation must however be subject to constraints, making it more quality-conscious and exacting. Several European attempts within various policy areas to establish rigorous interpretations of the concept of EAV have been informed by the same ambition between the ambiguous character of the concept and the exacting needs linked with its operationalisation.¹³⁸

Mutual complexity of concepts

An additional challenge related to the issue of defining Nordic added value is the evident presence of many different concepts and translations that have been used to describe the rationale of Nordic co-operation. Concepts such as *nordisk nytta*, *nordiskt mervärde* and Nordic added value have emerged at different times and in different contexts to articulate the positive accumulative effect of joint Nordic effort. While the content of these concepts has changed over time and the concepts do not necessarily mean the same as what they did decades ago, they continue to be used concurrently and may carry different meanings and connotations for different people.

This means that the concepts inevitably overlap to some extent and there may even be attempts to put them into a hierarchical order.¹³⁹ For example, when looking at the contemporary use of the Scandinavian concepts *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt mervärde*, it is evident that a hierarchy of meaning exists between them although they have emerged in different times and contexts. Whereas *nordisk nytta* refers more readily to the broader benefit or usefulness of operating at a Nordic level, *nordiskt mervärde* is articulated in more practical terms as the outcome of joint Nordic effort. In a similar vein, it has been noted that one meaning or use of a concept does not exclude the other, but that different interpretations can be laid on top of each other.¹⁴⁰

It is also evident that these concepts have been translated differently in different times as

English has gained prominence as a language of Nordic co-operation. While Nordic added value has become the somewhat established English-language translation for the guiding principle of Nordic co-operation, a similar hierarchy of meaning that exists between *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt mervärde* is missing in this translation. Instead, the composition of the concept directs attention to the conceptual relative of EAV, which, however, receives its meaning in its own unique regional context of EU. In addition, the presence of different concepts and their translations often lead to the anachronistic use of concepts, further contributing to their enigmatic character.¹⁴¹

2.4 Summary

This chapter has examined the origins of the idea of Nordic added value and its contemporary use in both official Nordic co-operation and Nordic research co-operation. The chapter has shown that several concepts and translations of them have been used in formal Nordic co-operation since the 1990s to articulate the positive accumulative effect of joint Nordic effort. Despite the changing rhetoric of Nordic co-operation, these concepts have always been fundamentally intertwined with both socio-cultural and economic values, and have negotiated the Nordic region in relation to both the national level and the outside world in both official Nordic co-operation and its various policy areas. In essence, the concepts of Nordic co-operation are an integral part of target-oriented region-building, where Nordic co-operation does not have an intrinsic value in itself, but where success is weighed in relation to predetermined goals. The chapter has further pointed out that while the concepts of Nordic co-operation are not widely debated in official Nordic co-operation, there are enduring challenges relating to their operationalisation, revealing a tension between the simultaneous role of concepts as both political visions and practical instruments. In the following chapter, the findings from the interviews conducted with science advisors and other experts working in NordForsk's programme committees are presented in order to link the theoretical discussion on Nordic added value to a practical context.

Chapter 3: Expert interviews

This chapter presents the results of interviews that were conducted with science advisors and experts involved in the work of NordForsk's programme committees. The focus of the interviews was on the concept of Nordic added value in terms of

its familiarity, definition, operationalisation and assessment. In addition, the potential strengths and challenges of Nordic research co-operation were discussed during the interviews.

3.1 Background and method

The expert interviews were conducted with 17 science advisors and other science experts who had been or were involved in NordForsk's programme committees as of spring 2022. Invitations were sent by email to 26 recipients, of whom 65% responded. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in October and November 2022. The majority of the interviews were conducted via video link, but a few respondents preferred to answer in writing. The interviews were recorded and partially transcribed to complement the notes that were taken during the interviews. The responses were analysed qualitatively by using thematic and qualitative content analysis.

Members of NordForsk's programme committees generally represent science experts from national research funding organisations from the Nordic and Baltic countries and are thus an important stakeholder group for the analysis of Nordic added value. The principle of Nordic added value is present in the work of the programme committees from the implementation and preparatory work of the research programmes to the assessment of project proposals and monitoring activities. Funding applications are always evaluated by an international peer review panel on the basis of the scientific quality of the proposals. The programme committees make funding proposals based on the peer review, but in situations where the proposed projects are of equal merit, Nordic added value is taken into account.

The science advisors and experts consulted for this study were selected with the assistance of NordForsk so that they would represent a balanced range of countries, programmes and organisations. Most represented national science funding organisations in the Nordic and Baltic countries, in which they had a wide variety of roles and responsibilities. Some of the interviewees also had prominent academic backgrounds.

The interviewees represented 14 different NordForsk programmes or calls and some were members in more than one programme committee or call. The experts had been involved in different ways in the programme cycles. Some stated that they had been involved in the development of programmes or calls from the outset in their national research funding organisations, while others had been appointed to their role at a later stage.

Some of the interviewees had extensive experience of collaborating at a Nordic level in the context of research co-operation, while others had been in their current role for a shorter period of time. Some interviewees also had experience of other forms of Nordic research co-operation, for example through bilateral co-operation, the Arctic Council or other contacts.

3.2 Defining “Nordic added value”

Familiarity with the concept

The concept of Nordic added value was familiar to the interviewees mainly through the formal Nordic research co-operation that takes place under NordForsk. A couple of interviewees, who had long-standing experience of Nordic research co-operation, also remembered the concept or its Scandinavian equivalents from a longer ago. Although one interviewee recalled that the concept had initially caused some confusion, for example when reading funding applications, the experts felt that the concept is generally well established and visible in many contexts today. The concept was reported not to have been a subject of any particular discussion in the work of the programme committees but taken largely for granted. At the same time, however, a couple of interviewees noted that the meaning of the concept is not always clear.

A few interviewees stressed the central role of the concept Nordic added value in all stages of the work of the programme committees, from identifying potential themes and preparing programmes to assessing applications. For example, one interviewee referred to Nordic added value as a “guiding star”, referring to the central consideration of why a research programme is worth executing in a Nordic context and what the Nordic input or perspective is on different topics. The concept was also more widely recognised as a justification for the existence of NordForsk as an institution. At the same time, however, many experts stressed that Nordic research co-operation and funding decisions are based on the scientific quality and the work of the international peer review panels. Nordic added value can become decisive in situations where applications are on a completely equal footing.

There was also a common consent among interviewees that the concept of Nordic added value is naturally linked to science policy objectives. In this context, Nordic added value was seen to resemble the science policy objective to, for example, promote equality and the careers of young researchers. Taking a step further, one expert also discussed the concept of Nordic added value in terms of broader formal Nordic co-operation, which ultimately aims to promote Nordic co-operation and

support the creation of added value. The concept was thus recognised as having a political function or value as part of a policy-oriented framework that justifies conducting research at a Nordic level and, more broadly, Nordic co-operation.

Different approaches to defining Nordic added value

When asked how the experts then defined the concept of Nordic added value, some approached the definition simply through individual examples or existing definitions of activities that generate Nordic added value. Some also referred to the current definition of Nordic added value available on the NordForsk website, which was perceived as comprehensive and clear, especially for researchers. A few interviewees also approached the task of defining the concept in a more general way, defining it as being essentially about co-operation and adding value to the national level through phrases such as “being stronger together” or being “more than the sum of its parts”.

Many experts emphasised the added value of Nordic co-operation based on the strong similarities between Nordic societies, which was seen as an important element as the starting point of the research, for the way in which research co-operation is carried out and for the research impact. On the other hand, a few respondents underlined that there are also differences within the Nordic countries, which makes Nordic comparisons particularly interesting. In this context, the benefits of Nordic research co-operation were seen as arising from a suitable contrast or from having something that is different, but not too different.

At the same time, however, many interviewees stressed the situational and relative nature of the concept, meaning that the definition of Nordic added value depends largely on who you ask. From a scientific perspective, the experts emphasised that Nordic added value can mean different things in different programmes or within different disciplines, meaning that the concept should always be shaped according to specific programmes and calls. Several experts exemplified this need by drawing a distinction between the social sciences and humanities, and the natural sciences,

technology and engineering, and emphasising how Nordic added value can be defined in different ways from the perspective of these different fields. For example, in the natural sciences, technology and engineering, the concept may be defined as something more concrete, referring for example to the building of critical mass or sharing of infrastructures, while in the social sciences and humanities, Nordic added value may be much more abstract and based on uniquely Nordic premises and phenomena.

Nordic added value as a multidimensional concept

The ways in which the interviewees defined Nordic added value often reflected a certain two-way thinking, which was, however, expressed in varying ways depending on the interviewees' fields of expertise. In simplified terms, this way of thinking referred to the need to define Nordic added value both in terms of what Nordicness or the Nordic perspective brings to research and what research brings to the Nordic countries. This perspective emphasises the subtle, yet important, distinction between research co-operation *generating added value* and the Nordic dimension *adding value* to something that already exists. In this context, the latter can be perceived as the already top-quality research that is conducted at a national level, but which benefits from collaboration with Nordic partners.

One formulation used in the interviews to clarify this distinction was the division of added value into "input" and "output values". Using this terminology, "input value" refers to what Nordicness as a framework brings to the research, influencing, for example, which research topics or themes are chosen, which common Nordic priorities or challenges are identified, or which preconditions already exist for the practical realisation of collaborative efforts. "Output values", on the other hand, refer to the impact of research co-operation, which the interviewees almost without exception divided into scientific and societal added value.

In the interviews, the idea of "input values" were divided into concrete/material dimensions such as similar data infrastructures and the pooling of resources and knowledge, and abstract/immaterial dimensions such as similar social structures, shared values, shared cultural and linguistic heritage and similar climate/geography. For example, shared values, language and culture

were readily seen as providing an important basis for trust-based and effective co-operation.

"Output values" were, however, more emphasised in the interviews and especially the goal to generate scientific added value through collaborative effort. This referred to the creation and strengthening of networks and the promotion of quality, renewal and impact of science. The societal added value, on the other hand, referred to the impact of research on Nordic societies. For example, Nordic research co-operation was seen to be able to contribute to policy-making at the national level. In this context, the similarity of the Nordic societies was highlighted as a particularly important precondition and benefit for facilitating the application of research results at the national level.

Some interviewees tended to stress the societal added value generated by Nordic research co-operation particularly because it is ultimately funded by Nordic taxpayers. Therefore, it was often considered important that the added value generated by research co-operation is returned to the societal level.

Challenges in defining Nordic added value

The experts reported that, in practice, they had not experienced challenges in the operationalisation of the concept of Nordic added value, although a couple of interviewees noted that the concept could be discussed more consciously in the programme committees. In reference to defining Nordic added value, the experts tended to emphasise the importance of the project design phase and paying attention to why a project should be implemented at the Nordic level. For example, if high-quality research on a particular topic is already being done at the national level, it should be considered what is to be gained from combining national efforts. Alternatively, one could consider why a specific topic needs to be studied at the Nordic level rather than the national or European level.

At a more theoretical level, concepts were acknowledged as posing certain challenges. For example, a couple of interviewees highlighted the challenges that can arise when Nordicness is taken as an unquestioned and granted element of joint action. For example, one expert pointed out while abstract input values as a basis for action may seem easy to define, they can prove to be quite slippery in practice. If the value or benefit of

the Nordic dimension for research co-operation is conceptualised as the shared values, cultural and linguistic heritage, ideas of welfare and many other things that are often associated with the Nordic countries, how do we then define these in reality? As noted earlier, some respondents emphasised that alongside the presumed similarities, the small differences that become apparent because of the many similarities can also make Nordic co-operation particularly fruitful.

Another interviewee pointed out that if the assumption of similarity is seen to frame the definition of Nordic added value, there is a risk that joint co-operation becomes limited within "closed clubs", which seek to conserve and cement the ways in which things are done and thus hamper research development. While there are always limits and boundaries to be drawn in research, the interviewee stressed that research should be about continuous learning and pushing knowledge forward. This is where, for example, collaboration and platforms outside the Nordic countries are particularly important.

When the importance of understanding the generalising and fluid meanings of concepts were stressed, it was also deemed difficult to come up with any strict definitions for Nordic added value. For example, one interviewee expressed that concepts are good when they are generative, but challenges occur when they become ways of policing boundaries. The expert pointed out that concepts should rather be considered as "empty signifiers", which have no agreed meanings and for which one cannot get too hung up on definition.¹⁴² Another expert added that Nordic-level research co-operation must actively follow the development of both research and society and be prepared to revise and redefine concepts.

Building on these challenges, the experts highlighted the importance of paying attention to investigator and project-driven perspectives in defining the concept of Nordic added value. When attempting to define the concept, it was seen as important to trust the researchers' views and leave room for creativity in order to support and reinforce the renewal of research.

Lost in translation?

The expert interviews were mainly conducted in English and Finnish, but the Scandinavian concepts *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt mervärde* were also discussed with some of the interviewees. These concepts were generally considered as both synonymous with each other and as translations of the English-language concept of Nordic added value.

The interviewees reported that they had not reflected on or paid attention to any translation issues in reference to these concepts. However, when the two different Scandinavian-language concepts were brought up in the interviews, a couple of native speakers of Scandinavian languages acknowledged that the concepts do not in fact mean exactly the same thing. As noted in the previous chapter, when reflecting on the issue, the interviewees saw *nordisk nytta* as a broader concept in the Nordic conceptual hierarchy than *nordiskt mervärde*. *Nordisk nytta* was interpreted more readily as the benefit of an action and *nordiskt mervärde* as more the tangible outcome.

In the case of *nordisk nytta*, the interviewees found it somewhat difficult or awkward to translate into English as the translation "Nordic benefit" was not seen as conveying the same idea or as being as easily understood as Nordic added value.

3.3 Nordic added value as a regional concept

One way in which many interviewees approached the definition of Nordic added value was to think about it in terms of regionality, making it a relational concept. This perspective emerged in the interviews as a very broad and varied theme. At its simplest, it could refer to the consideration of which countries are involved in research co-opera-

tion and the range that is set in the projects. Most often, however, the experts approached Nordic added value in a comparative way, reflecting Nordic co-operation in relation to the national and European dimensions.

Nordic added value to the national level

When Nordic co-operation was discussed as something adding value to the national level, this added value was constructed in the interviews primarily in terms of efficiency and resources. For example, one interviewee articulated that the added value of Nordic co-operation for the national level is the ability to address issues that could not be tackled as meaningfully and effectively by individual Nordic countries.

In contrast, resources were discussed more in terms of constraints. For example, the experts highlighted how from the perspective of national funders, decisions to participate in Nordic co-operation are often a resource issue, as national funders must first and foremost ensure that funding is sufficient for national level initiatives.

From the researchers' point of view, the experts saw no particular issues in reference to choosing between the level at which research is conducted. For example, one interviewee said that researchers do not often see any need to choose one over another as everyone applies for national funding by default. Emphasising the priority of the national level, another expert gave a practical example of how an overlap at the national and Nordic level for similar research topics had shown a clear preference for the national level among researchers.

The Nordic and the European dimension

The relationship between the Nordic and the European level was significantly more discussed in the interviews. Like the relationship between the national and the Nordic levels, the relationship between these regional levels was built on the idea of the positive accumulative effect of joint action. Instead of emphasising efficiency, however, the relationship between the Nordic and European levels was more readily discussed in terms of the level of higher scientific impact and research development.

The expert comments on the relationship between the Nordic and European levels in the research context challenged the intrinsic value of having specific regional research areas, but rather stressed the need to examine them critically. Above all, the interviewees emphasised the importance of paying attention to the added value of co-opera-

tion in terms of quality and research development. In simple terms, this refers to a critical evaluation of which topics benefit from being examined at a Nordic level and which at a European level in order to first and foremost ensure high quality and renewal in science.

In the social sciences and humanities, for instance, the Nordic countries were often pointed out as a more natural research context because of their similarities. Therefore, it was considered short-sighted to overlook the Nordic perspective just for the sake of engaging in European or other international research co-operation. As an example, several interviewees mentioned the educational sciences as a specific field where the Nordic dimension is central due to the similarity of the Nordic education systems. Co-operation in the field of education was also not considered as advanced internationally.

On the contrary, in the fields of the natural sciences, technology and engineering, it was seen as less meaningful to limit collaborative efforts to the Nordic countries. For example, one interviewee pointed out that while there is concrete Nordic added value in sharing infrastructure or other resources across the Nordic region, at a more abstract level, limiting co-operation to Nordic partners does not necessarily create scientific added value. Another interviewee also pointed out that European research co-operation is much more progressive in certain fields. Therefore, collaboration at a European level can help to establish a quicker transition and broaden the research fields.

The interviewees placed substantial emphasis on similarities when discussing the rationale of acting at a Nordic level, but when discussing the Nordic and European levels in relation to each other, they rather emphasised differences. For example, at the European level, there were seen to be major differences in the ways in which societies, but also universities and research funding organisations work, which can make it difficult to reach a common understanding. At the same time, however, many of the interviewees emphasised that the Nordic and European levels should not be seen as being mutually exclusive or competing, but rather as complementary. They reminded that in the same way as research at the European level addresses issues that are important for the Nordic countries, research conducted in the Nordic region can also make a significant contribution to the European context.

Within the European context, the respondents constructed Nordic research co-operation prominently as one of many regional perspectives. For example, one interviewee pointed out, by way of comparison, that one might as well consider what is "Southern European value" when the large and economically powerful countries in the Mediterranean region co-operate with each other. In this way, all sub-regional co-operation in a European context was seen as having an added value as it can strengthen the regions and increase their power and influence in the European landscape.

Nordic-Baltic added value

One particular regional perspective that was discussed during some interviews was the role of Nordic co-operation in the Baltic context. This is an important aspect in the context of official Nordic co-operation as the Nordic Council of Ministers has co-operated closely with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania since the early 1990s. From this particular Nordic-Baltic perspective, the idea of Nordic added value was approached either as an extended concept that includes the Baltic countries or alternatively through a separate concept of "Nordic-Baltic added value", forming a regional co-operation format of its own. One interviewee recognised Nordic added value is a fluid term especially in relation to the Baltic countries, because it can be used to both include or exclude them.

The idea of Nordic-Baltic regional co-operation also generated multidimensional meanings of the idea of the added value of research co-operation in the interviews. For example, from the Baltic perspective, the rationale of co-operating with the Nordic countries was conceptualised through similarities such as similar challenges or shared climatic, cultural and other elements that exist between the Nordic and the Baltic countries. Similar data infrastructures and other opportunities to pool resources were also mentioned. Furthermore, the Nordic relevance could also be motivated at a more abstract level as part of ongoing regional and national identity building processes. For example, the Baltic countries were discussed as being able to seek to position themselves towards the Nordic region instead of being labelled as part of the Eastern European sphere of influence. This was seen to provide a strategic advantage for the Baltic countries as a stepping stone into wider global co-operation.

Further underlining the multidimensionality of the concept of Nordic added value, an additional perspective that emerged in the interviews was the question of what kind of added value does the Nordic dimension generate for the Baltic countries and *vice versa*. One interviewee recognised that Nordic added value may easily sound like a concept that only refers to the added value generated for the Nordic countries, although the Baltic countries should also benefit from the joint action. As examples of the benefits that the Nordic dimension brings to the Baltic countries, both scientific and societal impact were mentioned. For example, the potential impact of joint Nordic-Baltic action for the Baltic countries was discussed in terms of the development of culture, society and economy.

In reference to the added value that the Baltic countries may bring to the Nordic countries through co-operation, the interviewees underlined the importance of specific areas of excellence in which the Baltic countries are pioneers or which are being strategically developed. For example, Estonia's role as a global pioneer in the digitalisation of the public sector was introduced as a particularly good example of the added value of Nordic-Baltic research co-operation.

Nordic added value for non-Nordic partners

In addition to the Baltic countries, NordForsk-funded programmes involving other non-Nordic partners such as the UK or Japan were also repeatedly mentioned in the interviews. Experts had very positive experiences of such programmes and towards the inclusion of non-Nordic partners in Nordic research co-operation.

When discussing the added value of collaborating with non-Nordic partners under the auspices of NordForsk, the experts' views focused above all on ensuring high scientific quality and research impact. For example, one interviewee pointed out that research rarely has national boundaries and that top experts in particular fields can more often be found outside the Nordic countries. In such cases, it is not purposeful to limit joint action to the Nordic countries, but co-operation with non-Nordic partners can significantly strengthen the quality of research in the Nordic countries.

In co-operation with non-Nordic partners, the importance of looking at added value in a

multidimensional way was also stressed. For example, it was mentioned that one added value for the Nordic countries of such co-operation is that the Nordic countries can benefit from the niche competences of certain countries or regions. In addition, the Nordic countries were seen as benefiting from the increased impact of Nordic science through international co-operation.

Non-Nordic partners, on the other hand, were seen to benefit from Nordic co-operation by receiving a so called "package deal". This referred to the idea that through official Nordic research co-operation, non-Nordic partners would receive the whole region as their partner instead of having to implement co-operative schemes through bilateral agreements or other arrangements.

European Added Value

As noted in the previous chapter, the idea of "European Added Value" is an important conceptual relative to the English-language term "Nordic added value". When the experts were asked of their familiarity with the principle of European Added Value, it emerged as largely less familiar. This was even despite the fact that many of the interviewed science advisors had experience of European research co-operation as well.

When reflecting on the concept, the experts agreed that it seems to be a similar concept to Nordic added value. At the same time, a couple of experts elaborated that European Added Value is a broader concept because Europe is a much larger entity. European Added Value was also seen as a much more strategic concept with a strong economic dimension.

Reflecting on the two concepts from a researcher's perspective, one interviewee pointed out that it would be challenging if European Added Value and Nordic added value were not in some way compatible and harmonious with each other as researchers may well apply for both Nordic and European research funding. However, if different goals are pursued or produced through these two different concepts, it was seen as more likely to just cause confusion among researchers.

Nordic research co-operation as a springboard to European research funding

Several experts emphasised the added value of Nordic research co-operation through a metaphor of a springboard. Stressing the synergy between the Nordic and the European levels, this refers to the basis and support provided by Nordic research co-operation for establishing European-level collaborative initiatives and even securing European funding through, for example, the European Union's flagship research and innovation programme Horizon Europe. This was perceived as particularly valuable because of higher funding levels and the prestige of conducting research at the European level.

When providing examples of how researchers involved in Nordic research co-operation had received funding at the European level, many experts stressed the importance of networks. Nordic projects were framed as important in enabling the establishment of new contacts, which, in turn, were often seen important in facilitating the establishment of wider networks within the European system.

Apart from the direct added value of receiving funding, the potential of Nordic research co-operation in facilitating access to European funding was seen as adding value to the Nordic region also more indirectly by creating jobs for researchers, increasing knowledge and experience, and promoting networking among researchers.

As a particular challenge relating to European research funding, experts stressed that due to the lack of time and resources that researchers often face, many cannot compete for both Nordic and European funding, but have to decide where to invest their time and resources. This accentuates the importance of paying attention to how to make Nordic research co-operation attractive.

3.4 Research impact and assessment

One broader theme that was much discussed in the interviews was how Nordic added value can or should be evaluated or measured. This linked to broader questions on how the effects and impact of research can be evaluated in general. As some interviewees pointed out, for decades, emphasis has been increasingly directed at the evaluation of the effects and impact of research and that fulfilling this task is not easy in any research funding activity.

Two levels of evaluation

When assessing the impact of Nordic research co-operation, the experts highlighted the need to firstly pay attention to the different levels on which research is expected to have an impact, and secondly to the different levels in which added value is generated.

In reference to the former, the experts agreed that the evaluation of research should take into account both academic impact and societal impact. These were considered as the two main dimensions within which Nordic added value can be assessed. For example, one expert summarised that added value is to be found in collaborative efforts that reinforce the quality and impact of research in the Nordic countries, and that it is this that research co-operation should strengthen. They added that it should benefit both the research system and society. Despite the importance of societal impact, the experts tended to emphasise the academic impact. For example, Nordic research collaboration was seen as generating particular added value for the research community through the creation and maintenance of collaborative relationships, mobility and networks, while also with the reminder that this is not something limited only to Nordic-level research co-operation. The added value generated for the academic community was seen to have far-reaching implications, especially in cases where the collaboration between Nordic partners continues through other funding schemes.

Regarding the second point, the interviewees highlighted that when assessing the potential added

value of research co-operation, it is important to take into account the different ways in which added value is defined depending on the different disciplines, the conditions of individual projects and the stakeholders involved. This creates a challenge in terms of assessing the impact and effectiveness of Nordic research co-operation because of the simultaneous existence of different perceptions of what Nordic added value is.

Carrying out the evaluation

How should the evaluation then be put into practice, especially when attempting to evaluate the specific Nordic added value of research projects? The interviewees stressed that the evaluation of research impact is fine science, reaching from the assessment of project proposals to the evaluation of the ways in which completed research influenced both the scientific community and society.

Nordic added value was represented in the interviews primarily as a qualitative concept, which makes the evaluation of the added value an especially difficult task in contrast with quantitative results, which are easier to analyse comparatively and also to communicate. In addition, one interviewee pointed out that the Nordic added value of research projects is often difficult to assess also because the potential added value that the collaborative effort will generate is only an estimate and the impact becomes visible only much later once the projects have already been completed.

Although the monitoring of the research impact was considered as highly important, its implementation often depends on the resources available. Examples of qualitative evaluation and monitoring methods mentioned in the interviews include self-evaluation and narrative analysis, which, however, require a longer timeframe for analysis. They can also present a challenge in terms of how to provide guidance in a way that ensures that everyone understands the task the same way. For example, project leaders and researchers may understand research impact differently to the way the funding organisation meant it.

In the context of research evaluation, critical perspectives also surfaced regarding, for example, the need to evaluate research in a context where it is already measured and evaluated in many different ways, not all of which were always seen as relevant. From this perspective, it was deliberated whether the focus of the evaluation of

Nordic added value should be input values rather than output values and the results of the joint action. In other words, it was asked whether the evaluation should focus more on the preconditions and the specific Nordic dimension of research than concrete outcomes.

3.5 Strengths, challenges and opportunities

Nordic research co-operation was also deliberated in terms of its strengths and challenges, which adds an additional dimension to the reflection on Nordic added value. In addition, the question of the relevance of Nordic co-operation in a contemporary global political context was also brought up in the interviews.

Similarities as a strength

When asked about the particular strengths of Nordic co-operation, several interviewees highlighted the long-standing ties between the Nordic countries and their shared regional and cultural characteristics as a key strength of Nordic co-operation. This was seen as a particular asset because it creates a basis for a certain shared mindset. From the perspective of science advisors, this was reflected in concrete ways through the benefits it provides for carrying out the work, such as the ability to agree on common objectives and to design the research programmes accordingly. The ease of collaboration that stems from similarities was thus seen as creating efficiency. Efficiency, in turn, can translate into cost-effectiveness, because it prevents practical collaboration from becoming too cumbersome and expensive.

Experts also generally agreed that the Nordic countries face similar challenges, which, in turn, require common solutions. This was seen as achievable because of the many similarities between the Nordic societies. Research co-operation was also cited as a particularly good tool for responding to this need. As a concrete example of shared challenges, the geopolitical and security-related issues following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 were discussed.

Benefits of scale

Scale was also seen as another Nordic strength in the context of research co-operation. However, the issue of scale was approached from different perspectives. For example, co-operation between a smaller number of countries was perceived as beneficial because then individual countries do not have to meet the expectations and needs of a larger set of countries, as is the case with EU co-operation.

On the other hand, Nordic co-operation makes the Nordic countries seem larger than their individual size. This was seen as beneficial, for example, in terms of appearing together in global arenas and in terms of increased effectiveness. One interviewee elaborated that the further away from the Nordic countries one goes, the more readily the Nordic countries are seen as one front. This makes the Nordic countries more attractive to co-operate with than through the establishment of bilateral agreements.

Disciplinary strengths

Nordic strengths were also discussed in the interviews in terms of disciplinary strengths. For example, Nordic strengths can be particularly evident in areas where there has traditionally been a high level of co-operation. In addition, in areas where shared data and infrastructures are used prominently, the benefits of co-operation can also become more evident.

One expert also highlighted trust in science as a particular Nordic strength at both the national and Nordic level. The recognition of the importance of research and science at a Nordic level was deemed to be particularly visible due to the formal support of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Prioritisation and attractiveness of Nordic research co-operation as a challenge

One of the challenges of Nordic research co-operation that some experts highlighted was the need for a stronger will and stronger resources to operate at a Nordic level. While Nordic co-operation was seen to have a reasonably good formal structure and foundation, a couple of interviewees raised the need to pay attention to the generation of genuine Nordic added value rather than just something where the interests of individual countries take precedence. One interviewee also recognised that although the benefits of Nordic co-operation are often recognised at a general Nordic level, they are not always prioritised.

From this perspective, a challenge for Nordic research co-operation is how to increase attractiveness and visibility. In addition to requiring time and money, another particular challenge was that Nordic co-operation is easily marginalised especially in comparison to European research funding projects that offer more money and prestige.

Differences at the national level

One particular challenge that emerged in the interviews as an issue between the individual Nordic countries were the challenges of research funding and fragmentation of the funding landscape. As an example, several interviewees mentioned challenges relating to the common pot system, especially in terms of fairness. For example, one country's simultaneous under-investing and outperforming in terms of research funding was generally not perceived as being fair to others. Many interviewees mentioned Denmark as a particular example of this challenge, because it was felt that the country was not allocating the expected resources to Nordic research co-operation. Nevertheless, the benefit that small countries may receive from the common pot system was not questioned in the interviews.

The virtual common pot funding system, whereby the national research funding organisations decide individually on their portion of the funding was perceived as a fairer system. Alternatively, some form of equal-share funding requirement was also suggested as a solution to these challenges.

Another challenge at the national level that was raised in the interviews was the difference between the Nordic countries in their opportunities to participate in Nordic research co-operation. For example, smaller countries with limited resources have to think carefully about what they can get involved in, in a way that still benefits them. On the other hand, Nordic co-operation was seen to be more time-efficient than, for example, bilateral agreements. In addition, it was seen to be more meaningful to channel certain co-operation through the Nordic co-operation framework.

Internationalisation of the academic community

The increasing internationalisation of societies and research communities in all fields and in all the Nordic countries was also mentioned in the interviews. In turn, this influences the ways in which Nordic added value should be defined and communicated.

While for those born and raised in the Nordic countries the added value of Nordic co-operation may be more self-evident, it was acknowledged not to be so for everyone. For example, for researchers coming from elsewhere, Nordic co-operation may not offer any particular added value compared to co-operation at the European or other international level. It was therefore cited as being essential to not only recognise that a specific Nordic added value is not a given for the research community as a whole, but also that Nordic research co-operation should be kept open to all without assumptions of certain preconceptions and understandings. A clear definition of the concept of Nordic added value and the provision of concrete examples to applicants were therefore stated to be especially important. Although internationalisation brings its own challenges, it was stressed that it should also be seen as an opportunity for research co-operation.

The role of the English language

Language questions were also discussed in many of the interviews. English was perceived to work well and inclusively as the language of Nordic research co-operation. Although the use of Scandinavian languages has traditionally been seen as valuable in Nordic co-operation due to their mutual intelligibility, several interviewees raised the point

that the assumption of Scandinavian languages as the language of Nordic co-operation can also be counterproductive. For example, it was seen to potentially exclude or create thresholds for participation for those who do not speak Danish, Norwegian or Swedish as their native language. This was highlighted as an issue also for those who know one Scandinavian language, but do not speak it as their first language, in which case understanding other Scandinavian languages is not self-evident.

At the same time, it was also contemplated what would happen if the Scandinavian languages were no longer used in Nordic co-operation. For example, one interviewee stressed that the importance of language and mutual intelligibility should not be forgotten, as it constitutes the whole basis of what makes the Nordic countries so special, builds trust and facilitates co-operation. At the same time, another expert was of the opinion that linguistic realities should be accepted and that English should not be seen as inferior to the Scandinavian languages.

The new relevance of Nordic co-operation

Due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which was topical at the time of the interviews, the experts were asked about their views on the role of Nordic

co-operation in this broader global context. Nordic co-operation was generally perceived as being more relevant and valuable in the light of ongoing political developments and challenges. The unstable character of global co-operation was also considered to strengthen interest in Nordic co-operation. The increased interest in co-operating with close neighbours and allies was seen as natural in a situation of a perceived external threat. The Nordic countries were perceived as a reliable, secure and desirable context for co-operation, underlining the key role of shared values.

Some interviewees reported that the global situation had had a concrete impact on research co-operation through, for example, the termination of all co-operation with Russia. This had affected bilateral agreements, Nordic-Russian co-operation and Arctic research. The interviews suggested that Nordic co-operation may become more important in a context where the global political situation increasingly frames the activities of research funders and expert organisations.

This was also seen as a good moment to increase Nordic-level co-operation. In this context, it was stressed that this does not imply a need for closer co-operation between the Nordic countries, but rather a clearer appreciation of the similarities and the value of co-operation.

3.6 NordForsk as a platform for Nordic research co-operation

The role and importance of NordForsk as an enabling and facilitating institution for Nordic research co-operation emerged several times in the interviews. Attitudes, experiences and support for NordForsk were highly positive and it was perceived as the best instrument for co-ordinating Nordic research co-operation. One interviewee even called it a "hidden gem" in the funding system that could be used more, or as another interviewee put it, "we need more Nordic, not less". NordForsk was perceived as fulfilling its mission well.

There were no significant comments on the forms of research funded by NordForsk. However, a couple of experts reflected more broadly on how the relatively small and narrow projects that are executed at a Nordic level create an interesting

dynamic. On the one hand, small and non-repetitive projects require a lot of resources and are not always the most efficient, but on the other hand, putting money into stable repetitive research would appear somewhat pointless, as such forms already exist at the national and European level. One science expert deliberated that perhaps it is precisely the smaller projects, networks and co-operation that set the Nordic countries apart from the EU as they are instrumental in generating trust.

Providing an added layer to the discussion on Nordic added value, as an institute, NordForsk was also seen as generating added value for national funding organisations. One example of the added value of Nordic co-operation for a national funding

organisation was the fact that NordForsk takes care of the practical implementation of the programmes, which does not require resources from national funding organisations. From a Baltic perspective, collaboration with NordForsk was also cited as providing certain institutional added value to a national research organisation through the opportunity to learn best practices.

A couple of science advisors also highlighted NordForsk's role in contributing to the establishment and maintenance of networks between science advisors and experts from different Nordic countries. For example, the Nordic Heads of Research Councils (NORDHORCS), which is a committee consisting of the directors of the national research funding agencies in the Nordic countries, and the NOS organisations, which are joint committees for Nordic research councils in different fields, were both mentioned. The central role of the NOS organisations was stressed in particular due to their role as important fora for representatives of

different national funding organisations to discuss topical issues on an equal footing. The NOS organisations were also perceived as valuable arenas for discussing research topics, leading at best to open invitation proposals.

Finally, the expert interviews touched upon different ways in which Nordic research co-operation may be developed and strengthened in the future. In general, the interviewees advocated for more Nordic research co-operation, but at the same time, it was acknowledged that there also needs to be more awareness of it. Another potential area for development that was suggested by an individual respondent was the more strategic use of Nordic research co-operation in areas where there is a need to break ground and prepare Nordic researchers for larger international collaborations. In addition, the importance of supporting the work of the programme committees and the relevance of including relevant non-Nordic partners in research programmes was stressed in the interviews.

3.7 Summary

This chapter has presented the results of the interviews conducted with members of NordForsk's programme committees. The analysis shows that the Nordic added value principle is familiar to science experts and no major challenges have been experienced in the operationalisation of the concept in practice. Nevertheless, attempts to define Nordic added value highlight the relative character of the concept and how it can receive different meanings depending on the discipline, individual project or different stakeholders. In addition, Nordic added value emerges as a multidimensional concept, calling for a need to consider both the added value that the Nordic perspective gives to research and the added value that research gives to the Nordic region. As a specific input value or precondition, the similarities between Nordic

societies and their shared cultural and linguistic heritage were highlighted as a contributing factor to research efficiency. In reference to the added value that research co-operation generates, Nordic added value was closely linked to both academic and societal impact, and the objective of Nordic research co-operation was perceived first and foremost to facilitate high scientific quality. This raised a number of critical aspects in relation to the reasons for acting at the Nordic level, which can be restrictive rather than enabling, especially in the context of research co-operation and in specific disciplines. From this point of view, identifying genuinely Nordic needs in the programme design phase and the ongoing importance of collaborating with non-Nordic partners stand out as particularly important.

Chapter 4: Participant survey

When looking at the definition of "Nordic added value", researchers are another important group of stakeholders to be included in a critical examination of this concept. In addition to being actively engaged in Nordic level research collaboration, researchers and other project participants are also requested to define, articulate and assess Nordic added value in all stages of their research projects. At the same time, it has been noted that the concept of Nordic added value is not necessarily widely known or easily addressed among researchers, making it also difficult to evaluate what kind of Nordic added value the projects generate.¹⁴³

This chapter presents the results of the participant survey that was conducted as part of this research project. In the survey, the respondents were asked to evaluate statements about Nordic research co-operation, assess attributes describing Nordic research co-operation, identify relevant research activities that generate Nordic added value and answer open-ended questions about Nordic added value. The answers were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. A summary of the analysis is presented below.

4.1 Background and method

The participant survey was conducted among the contact person and group leaders of NordForsk-funded research projects between 2018 and 2022 (as of June 2022). The web-based survey was sent out to the recipients in December 2022. An e-mail invitation with a link to the survey was sent out to a total of 368 project contact persons and group leaders, who were selected in co-operation with NordForsk representatives. 30 invitations bounced back due to inactive e-mail addresses and an additional five recipients were not reachable within the survey period. The recipients were invited to participate in the survey themselves, but project leaders were additionally asked to expand the invitation to their research groups, if possible.

Recipients were mainly involved in research projects within the fields of medical and health sciences, social sciences and natural sciences, some of which were also interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral by character. In addition, some recipients were affiliated to a research infrastructure hub programme and programmes involving both Nordic and non-Nordic countries.

A total of 79 respondents completed the survey. Dividing the number of completed survey responses by the number of invitations that were assumedly received by the selected participants, the response rate of the survey would be 23.7%.

This falls within the range of typical response rates in online surveys although there is no information as to how many project leaders forwarded the invitation to the rest of their research groups. Assuming that some of the project leaders extended the invitation to their research groups, the resulting response rate is lower. The decision not to

participate in a survey can commonly be explained by lack of time but does not disclose other reasons.

Based on the background information provided by the respondents, most respondents has been the group leader or country co-ordinator (39%) in their respective NordForsk-funded research activity, as shown in Table 2.¹⁴⁴ One in four respondents (25%) selected the title of participant, implying that some project leaders may have disseminated the invitations to their research groups. However, only one doctoral student answered the survey, creating a certain sample bias in the survey data. For instance, the respondents were asked how many times they have been involved in NordForsk-funded research projects or activities, to which 67% answered once, 23% twice or three times, and 5% four times or more, implying that the respondents represented scholars who are already in more advanced stages of their careers. Furthermore, 5% of respondents was unsure how many times they have participated in NordForsk-funded activities.

The limited opportunities to reach early-stage researchers were also reflected in the distribution of

Table 2: Respondents' roles in NordForsk-funded research activity

	n	%
Project leader/ main co-ordinator	22	28%
Group leader/ country co-ordinator	31	39%
Participant	20	25%
Doctoral student	1	1%
Other	5	6%
Total	79	100

current titles, which are presented in Table 3. Nearly half of the respondents (47%) were professors. In addition, 15% of the respondents had the title of either assistant, associate or adjunct professor.

The distribution of the country or the autonomous region that the respondents represented in their respective research activity is shown in Table 4. The largest share of respondents represented Sweden (34%), which is also the most populous country in the Nordic region, while the share of respondents from Denmark (16%), Finland (16%) and Norway (19%) was more even. There were no respondents from any of the autonomous regions, and the only Baltic respondents represented Latvia. The category "Other" consisted exclusively of respondents from the United Kingdom, which can be at least partly explained by the joint Nordic-UK research programmes on Migration and Integration, which started in 2019. In most of the research projects (66%), collaboration was limited to the Nordic countries, but in the projects involving

partners from outside the Nordic countries, most common were the Baltic countries and the United Kingdom.

With regard to of the type of institution that the respondents represented in the NordForsk-funded research project, most respondents (68%) selected "University", as can be seen in Table 5. Among the responses in the category "Other", a cultural organisation, an NGO and a university hospital were specified as the type of institution represented in the research project.

Table 6 below shows the scientific areas, which were covered in the survey. The largest areas were the medical sciences (28%), the social sciences (27%) and the natural sciences (16%), which have

Table 3: Respondents' titles

	n	%
Professor	37	47
Assistant/associate/adjunct professor	12	15
Senior scientist	7	9
Researcher	7	9
Lecturer	6	8
University teacher	0	0
Junior researcher	0	0
Post-doc	3	4
Doctoral student	1	1
Research assistant	0	0
Other	6	8
Total	79	100

Table 5: Distribution of the types of institutions represented in the NordForsk-funded research activities

	n	%
University	54	68
Polytechnics	0	0
Research institute	12	15
Business sector	3	4
Public sector	5	6
Other	5	6
Total	79	100

Table 4: Distribution of countries and autonomous regions represented in NordForsk-funded research activities

	n	%
Denmark	13	16
Finland	13	16
Iceland	4	5
Norway	15	19
Sweden	27	34
Estonia	0	0
Latvia	3	4
Lithuania	0	0
Russia	0	0
Greenland	0	0
Faroe Islands	0	0
Åland	0	0
Other	4	5
Total	79	100

Table 6: Distribution of the respondents' research areas in NordForsk-funded research activities

	n	%
Social sciences	21	27
Humanities	1	1
Natural sciences	13	16
Technical sciences	6	8
Agricultural, forestry, fishery sciences	5	6
Medical sciences	22	28
Multi- or cross-disciplinary	8	10
Other	3	4
Total	79	100

also traditionally been the research areas with the largest share of NordForsk funding.¹⁴⁵

The gender distribution of the respondents was fairly even, with 53% of respondents identifying as men and 43% as women, while 4% of the respondents preferred not to provide information about

their gender. The largest age group in the survey was those over 55 years old (38%) and second largest 45 to 54-year-olds (29%). This also reflects the overrepresentation of more senior scholars in the sample. The youngest respondents were between 25 and 34 years old (10%).

4.2 The value of Nordic research co-operation

In the survey, the respondents were asked to evaluate on a scale from 0 to 5 (0 = Do not know/no opinion, 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree) the extent to which they agreed with various statements about Nordic research co-operation based on their personal experience in participating in a NordForsk-funded research project or activity. The respondents were first asked to evaluate the Nordic dimension of their research. Their answers are shown in Table 7.

The vast majority of the respondents less surprisingly agreed (33%) or strongly agreed (56%) with the statement that their research has a clear Nordic dimension. Furthermore, a clear majority of the respondents either agreed (25%) or strongly agreed (66%) that their research benefits from having a Nordic perspective.

A similar trend was observed for the statement "It is easy for me to define what kind of Nordic added value my research generates", with 86% of the survey respondents stating that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. However, there was more deviation when asked if it was easy for the respondents to understand which phenomena are uniquely Nordic. The proportionally high number of answers in the category "Neither agree nor disagree" implies that there are certain ambiguities involved with this statement. This result may, for example, imply the sheer breadth of phenomena, which can be defined as uniquely Nordic, or the challenge of holding something as "uniquely" Nordic.

The second set of statements looked at the respondents' opinions and experiences of the impact of Nordic research co-operation. The responses are shown in Table 8.

Table 7: The Nordic dimension of NordForsk-funded research activities

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Do not know/no opinion	Total
My research has a clear Nordic dimension.	1%	1%	9%	33%	56%	0%	100%
My research benefits from having a Nordic perspective.	0%	3%	6%	25%	66%	0%	100%
It is easy for me to define what kind of Nordic added value my research generates.	1%	3%	9%	29%	57%	1%	100%
It is easy for me to understand, which phenomena are uniquely Nordic.	0%	6%	23%	28%	38%	5%	100%

Table 8: The impact of Nordic research co-operation

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Do not know/no opinion	Total
Collaborating on a Nordic level creates new networks.	0%	0%	8%	14%	78%	0%	100%
Collaborating on a Nordic level enhances existing networks.	1%	3%	9%	29%	57%	1%	100%
I would like to continue cooperating with my Nordic partners.	0%	0%	1%	15%	81%	3%	100%
Nordic research collaboration improves chances of receiving funding on national level.	0%	0%	25%	19%	44%	11%	100%
Nordic research collaboration improves chances of receiving European funding.	0%	1%	16%	32%	33%	18%	100%
Nordic research collaboration improves chances of receiving other international funding.	0%	0%	24%	25%	29%	22%	100%
Nordic research funding is too small to make a substantial contribution.	27%	37%	13%	15%	5%	4%	100%
Collaborating on a Nordic level has developed my professional growth.	3%	1%	5%	47%	41%	4%	100%
Collaborating on a Nordic level has developed my personal growth.	1%	3%	23%	39%	32%	3%	100%

The respondents agreed or strongly agreed that collaboration on a Nordic level both creates networks (92%) and enhances existing ones (86%). Almost all respondents (96%) agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to continue the collaboration with their Nordic partners in the future, which is very telling about the functioning of collaboration within the projects.

Responses to the statements of the potential of Nordic research co-operation improving the chances of receiving research funding in the future – the so-called springboard idea – were mostly positive. The funding level on which Nordic research collaboration was seen as having the most positive effect was national, with 44% of the respondents strongly agreeing with the statement in contrast

with European level (33%) and other international level (29%), which received more cautious support. However, there was also a high number of responses neither agreeing nor disagreeing with these statements, or alternatively not knowing or having no opinions about the improved opportunities of receiving further funding. This may be a reflection of limited experience of the long-term impact of Nordic research co-operation, as many respondents were participating in NordForsk-funded projects for the first time.

The statement of Nordic research funding being too small to make a substantial contribution divided opinions most strongly with 64% of the respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement, and 20% agreeing or strongly

agreeing with the statement. In general, however, the respondents saw that Nordic-level research has the potential to make substantial contributions. There was no specific disciplinary pattern regarding which respondents tended to find Nordic research funding too small to make any substantial contribution, while respondents from the fields of the social sciences and the medical sciences were among the most frequent proponents of these statements.

The answers also show that participation in a NordForsk-funded project has distinctly supported both the professional and personal growth of the respondents. A total of 88% of the respondents observed professional growth and 71% personal

growth. At the same time, however, 23% of the respondents were indifferent about the impact of Nordic research co-operation on their personal growth in particular.

The third group of statements focused on the value of Nordic research co-operation. The answers to these statements are summarised in Table 9.

The respondents largely felt that the Nordic countries face similar challenges, with 43% of the respondents agreeing and 34% strongly agreeing with the first statement. At the same time, they were also strongly of the opinion that shared Nordic experiences facilitate effective responses to a wide range of issues (94%). Furthermore, the

Table 9: The value of Nordic research co-operation

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Do not know/no opinion	Total
Nordic countries face similar challenges.	4%	0%	14%	43%	34%	5%	100%
Shared Nordic experiences facilitate effective responses to a wide range of issues.	0%	0%	3%	57%	37%	4%	100%
Shared Nordic solutions provide benefits for the peoples of all of the Nordic countries.	0%	1%	13%	38%	44%	4%	100%
Shared historical and cultural heritage in the Nordic region enhances research cooperation.	0%	0%	13%	48%	34%	5%	100%
Similar social structures in the Nordic region enhance research cooperation.	0%	0%	11%	41%	43%	5%	100%
Similar working cultures in the Nordic region enhance research cooperation.	0%	0%	13%	43%	39%	5%	100%
Shared Nordic values enhance trust-based cooperation.	0%	0%	5%	39%	52%	4%	100%
Ability to understand other Nordic languages enhances trust-based co-operation.	1%	11%	33%	27%	22%	6%	100%

survey respondents largely recognised that shared Nordic solutions benefit people in all the Nordic countries in contrast with, for example, benefitting people in only individual countries.

The respondents also agreed that the similar historical, cultural and social traditions in the Nordic region translate to effective research co-operation. Around four out of five respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that shared historical and cultural heritage (82%), similar social structures (84%) and similar working culture (82%) in the Nordic region result in effective and functioning research co-operation. In a similar vein, the majority of the respondents also either agreed (39%) or strongly agreed (52%) that shared Nordic

values enhance trust-based co-operation, enhancing the view of Nordic co-operation as being built on common values.

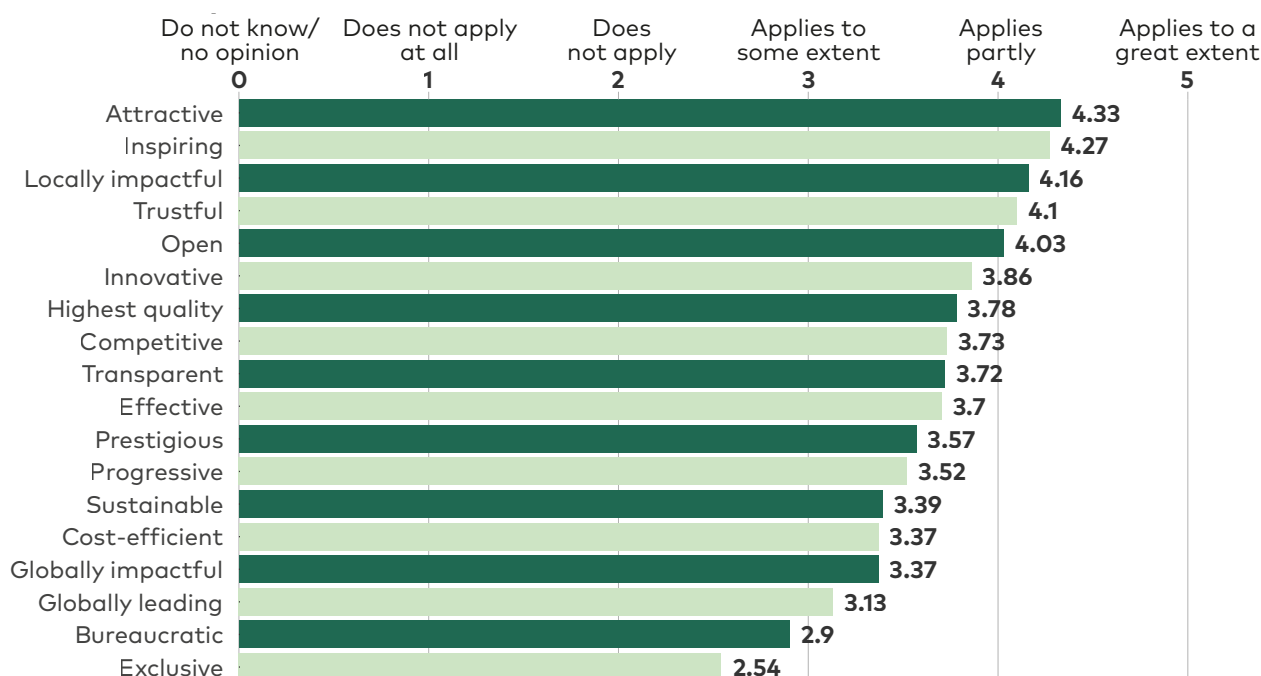
Responses to the statement "Ability to understand other Nordic languages enhances trust-based co-operation" showed the most variation within this category. Although 49% of the respondents emphasised the continuing importance of shared linguistic heritage by agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, a total of 12% of the respondents also contrasted this view by disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement. At the same time, one-third of the respondents (33%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, highlighting ambiguities related to this question.

4.3 Characteristics of Nordic research co-operation

In addition to assessing specific values and impact, the respondents were asked to evaluate different attributes and the extent to which they apply to Nordic research co-operation based on their personal opinions and participation in a Nord-Forsk-funded project. The respondents were asked to evaluate a list of attributes compiled from

various research related material on a scale from 0 to 5 (1 = Does not apply at all, 2 = Does not apply, 3 = Applies to some extent, 4 = Applies partly, 5 = Applies to a great extent, 0 = Do not know/no opinion). The results are shown in Figure 1 from the highest average to the lowest.

Figure 1: Respondents' evaluation of attributes describing Nordic research co-operation



The attributes presented in the list were compiled from available material and documents articulating research co-operation, such as NordForsk strategy papers in the period 2006 to 2022, in order to see how well they match with project participants' views of Nordic research co-operation.

Overall, the average scores that the respondents gave show that several different attributes were seen as suitable for describing Nordic-level research co-operation. The fact that almost all attributes received scores ranging from "applying to some extent" to "applying greatly" also demonstrates a certain level of agreement among the respondents as to the many meanings that Nordic research co-operation may have.

The five attributes with the highest average score (over 4) were "attractive" (4.33), "inspiring"

(4.27), "locally impactful" (4.16) "trustful" (4.10) and "open" (4.03). The two highest rated attributes "attractive" and "inspiring" can be seen as reflecting in particular the respondents' personal attitudes towards collaborative research. The high ranking of the attribute "locally impactful" (4.16) also shows that the respondents regard the benefits of Nordic co-operation to primarily be at the local level rather than, for example, at the global level (3.37).

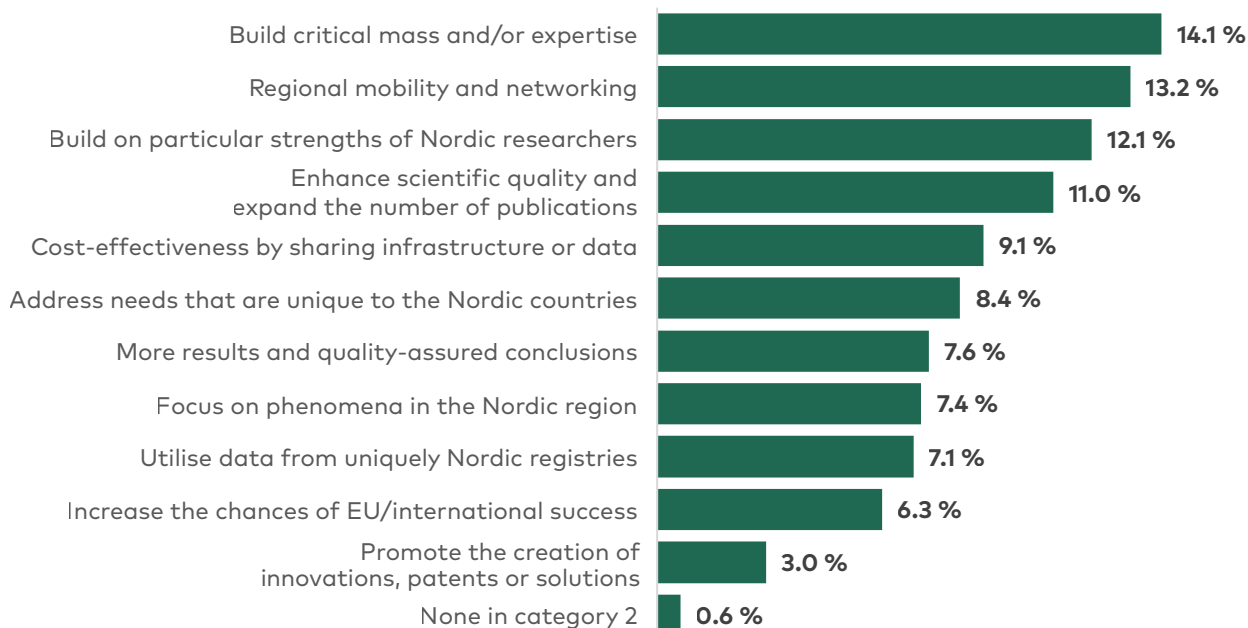
Only two attributes were evaluated with an average score falling within the category "does not apply". These were "exclusive" (2.54) and "bureaucratic" (2.90), affirming the openness of Nordic research co-operation as well as implying that the respondents generally associate a lower level of administration with Nordic research co-operation.

4.4 Added value of Nordic research co-operation

In NordForsk's calls for proposals, Nordic added value is one of the assessment criteria in the applications, with applicants asked to describe the Nordic added value that their research will produce and to define its importance. As discussed earlier in this report, NordForsk has devised its own

definition of Nordic added value, which is used both in the assessment of grant applications as well as in the development of programmes and design of calls for proposals. These activities are divided into two main categories of Nordic added value, which are **1) the added value generated**

Figure 2: Research activities creating Nordic added value



because the research collaboration is taking place in the Nordic region (category 1), and **2) the added value generated because the research can only be carried out in the Nordic region** (category 2).

The survey respondents were asked to look at NordForsk's definition of research activities that create Nordic added value and to select all the relevant research activities that they deemed to generate added value in their respective research projects. The respondents could select more than one option from both categories resulting in 462 answers. The distribution of the responses is presented in Figure 2.

A total of 64% of the selected activities belong to the first category of Nordic added value ("added value generated because the research collaboration is taking place in the Nordic region") and 36% to the second category ("added value generated because the research can only be carried out in the Nordic region"). Included in the latter group, three respondents (0.6% of answers) did not identify any relevant research activity from the second category, while all the respondents could find options from the first category. Overall, research activities listed in the first category seemed to be more relevant or applicable to the respondents than the activities categorised under the second category.

NordForsk has gathered similar information on the Nordic added value that projects produce. The currently available data is extracted from the ResearchFish system as of June 2022 and is based on information provided about 107 NordForsk-funded projects.¹⁴⁶ Compared with this

data, the survey responses show similar results with the same four results topping both data sets, although in a slightly different order. For example, whereas the data on NordForsk's website positions research activities that build on particular strengths of Nordic researchers at the top, the respondents participating in the survey placed research activities that build critical mass and/or expertise in the number-one position. In addition, in the data extracted from the research projects, regional mobility and networking ranked third and in the participant survey second.

The greatest difference between NordForsk's data on the projects and the survey data collected for this report are views on the importance of research activities that produce Nordic added value through increased chances of success for Nordic researchers in EU research activities or other international research co-operation. While the data extracted from ResearchFish positions this as the fifth most frequently mentioned activity, the survey respondents placed it only second to last (6.3%). This difference can be explained by the differences between the overall aims of the projects as stated in research reporting and the experiences of individual participants. This highlights the relativity of defining Nordic added value. Furthermore, this result is also likely affected by the fact that not all survey participants have reporting responsibility towards NordForsk. As discussed earlier, the survey respondents also tend to emphasise the positive impact of Nordic-level research co-operation in chances of receiving national-level funding *vis-à-vis* European or other international funding.

4.5 Familiarity with Nordic added value

After reviewing the list of research activities, the survey participants were asked if they found the definition of "Nordic added value" to be clear. Contradicting with the alleged difficulties in addressing the concept, the vast majority of the respondents felt that the definition was clear by either agreeing (47%) or strongly agreeing (25%) with the statement. The share of respondents disagreeing with this statement was 6%, showing that most of the project participants find the concept clear, but not disclosing that it might still

be unclear to some. Furthermore, almost one-fifth (19%) of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, revealing certain ambiguities embedded in the question. Among those disagreeing with the statement and neither agreeing nor disagreeing it, no specific pattern could be detected in terms of the respondents' roles in NordForsk-funded research projects.

The participants were further asked to clarify if it was easy for them to identify relevant research

activities from the current list of activities generating Nordic added value. The majority of the respondents felt that identifying relevant research activities was easy by either agreeing (38%) or strongly agreeing (33%) with the statement, while only 5% of the respondents disagreed. Showing a similar trend as in the previously discussed statement, almost one-fifth of the respondents (18%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. An additional 6% of the respondents had no opinion about the statement.

Responses to the question as to whether the list of research activities was sufficient showed similar

variation. Whereas 38% of the respondents agreed and 23% strongly agreed that the list was sufficient, one-third of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed (25%) or had no opinion (11%). Only 2.5% of the respondents disagreed with this statement. When asked to name research activities that the respondent felt that were missing from the list, only two clearly named research activities were given. However, both of these answers were research activities that could be categorised within the existing list of research activities that are seen as producing Nordic added value. This implies that what the listed research activities cover may not always be comprehensible enough.

4.6 Open-ended questions

Due to the key interest in how those involved in research projects understand and view the idea of Nordic added value, the respondents were further asked to describe what kind of added value they have gained professionally and personally from participating in Nordic research co-operation in an open-ended question. In addition, they were asked to describe the added value of doing research on a Nordic level *vis-à-vis* a national, European and/or an international level. These questions were a mandatory part of the survey, leading to a large number of answers with 73 participants (92%) giving an answer worth considering to the first question, and 71 participants (90%) to the second question. The answers to these questions are presented thematically in the following section with examples from the data.

Networks and mobility

The most frequently mentioned added value that had benefitted the participants professionally through their participation in Nordic research co-operation was networks and mobility. This emphasises the importance of Nordic research co-operation for individual participants above all as facilitating the creation and maintenance of networks.

Networks were understood as collaboration and contacts that take place at many different levels and between various actors. While individual respondents mentioned that they have co-operated with the same partners before, NordForsk-funded projects have generally facilitated the creation of new networks. Through the projects, new

networks have been formed between different Nordic universities and institutions, as well as between universities and other sectors, such as the private sector. Some respondents said that Nordic co-operation had also facilitated the creation of networks across disciplinary boundaries. Other respondents, on the other hand, underlined the network-building capacity of the research projects more broadly as something facilitating the creation of new contacts both within and outside of the Nordic countries. This is summarised by one respondent who writes:

I have developed strong scientific and collaboration ties with researchers from Nordic universities. [...] We have enabled substantial academic mobility and exchange within the Nordic region and neighbor [sic] areas such as the Baltic countries.

Within the academic context, some respondents emphasised the importance of having Nordic-level networks for early-stage researchers in particular, allowing the education and training of young scientists in specific fields, their integration into the research community and the supervision of PhD students by scholars from different countries.

Networks were also discussed from a more personal perspective by stressing how NordForsk-funded projects had been instrumental in creating networks between likeminded people. This had sometimes even led to the creation of friendships, blurring the line between professional and personal added value of networks, as is shown in the following example:

I've learned to know many new researchers, and some of them I could even call friends. It's been very enjoyable [sic] both professionally and personally.

In general, networks were described in the material as fruitful by having enabled knowledge-sharing and the exchange of ideas. Some respondents even described networks as the key factor behind generating more robust research results by bringing complementary expertise together, or even by reshaping research agendas, as the following example shows:

I have expanded considerably my collaboration network in the region, reshaping my agenda towards addressing relevant societal challenges in the Nordic context.

Overall, getting to know new people was also described as being simply fun and rewarding:

I have started to cooperate with new researchers, which I believe will lead to more and better research in the future. It's fun and rewarding to get to know new people.

Although NordForsk-funded projects often include mobility, the importance of networks is emphasised in the material notably more than mobility. In addition, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions are interestingly not discussed almost at all, even though the pandemic coincided with the timeframe of the projects included in this survey.

Shared culture and way of working

When asked what the survey participants saw as the added value of doing research on a Nordic level *vis-à-vis* a national, European or other international level, the respondents placed most emphasis on the importance of cultural proximity in enabling a functioning and effective partnership. In a similar vein to the expert interviews, the responses cited the added value of having a common culture as influencing both practical implementation and the research itself, ranging from having a shared cultural and linguistic heritage to a similar working culture and living conditions across the Nordic region. For example, the respondents saw that a common culture often translated into having a shared understanding of various issues, as shown below:

It is a great advantage that we do not have to negotiate the practical meaning of the relevant values in great detail --despite remaining cultural differences [sic], central patterns of social interactions are similar in the Nordic countries, i.e., the practical understanding of certain values is shared, which greatly eases collaboration.

Furthermore, some respondents were of the opinion that having a common language or low language barriers facilitated communication with other Nordic colleagues. In general, the respondents described Nordic collaboration as easy, and the resulting bonds as closer and stronger.

Similar bureaucratic systems were also mentioned by some respondents as a specific benefit of doing research at a Nordic level. Similar systems were perceived to ease processes in general, leaving more time for research instead of spending time in "documenting research", as one respondent summarised. The low level of bureaucracy related to the administration of the NordForsk-funded projects was also mentioned and compared in particular with EU-funded projects:

Less bureaucracy. Being honest, I could never join a [sic] EU funded project given the administrative work. This is killing each project and does not allow for innovative mind-sets.

Some respondents also discussed the cultural proximity and successful partnerships through the concept of trust. This is exemplified in the following:

Cooperation with Nordic research projects has been relatively easy because the trust is pretty much already there and that makes it so much easier to try out new things together, even when most partners do not know *me* personally from before. Such trust makes social cooperation easier, enhances confidence and helps with everything.

And:

There is a high level of trust due to similar cultural values between Nordic institutes.

Some critical counter-arguments to the view that shared culture creates better conditions for research in terms of content, implementation and impact can also be found in the data. For example,

one respondent had an experience of a competitive situation that had arisen between national teams, leading to no fruitful results. The respondent cites that the success of a research project also depends on the type of teams that collaborate with each other. Some other respondents also cited that Nordic co-operation is just as important as any other international collaboration. Respondents coming from outside the Nordic countries in particular tended to point out that they do not conduct research solely on a Nordic level, making the evaluation of Nordic added value difficult.

Geographical proximity and sustainability

Geographical proximity between the Nordic countries was also valued by some respondents as a particular added value of doing research at a Nordic level. It was particularly emphasised for practical reasons. Travel between the Nordic countries was perceived as being relatively easy, while simultaneously being able to extend co-operation beyond national borders and thus increase the expertise available.

As a new type of added value or benefit of co-operating at a Nordic level, a couple of respondents also mentioned sustainability as a particular added value in reference to geographical proximity, as shorter distances result in fewer CO2 emissions and enable more sustainable travel.

New insights and perspectives

In addition to being regarded as a precondition for functioning partnerships and the practical implementation of the research projects, many respondents reported that both shared culture and uniquely Nordic phenomena had played an important role in providing them with new insights and perspectives, and even shaping research agendas. In the responses, these cover a range of issues such as similarly functioning societies, related legal and cultural frameworks, similar behavioural traits as well as common geographical and climatic conditions.

Having a similar or comparable research setting had allowed the respondents to identify shared interests and phenomena across the Nordic region. The respondents were also strongly of the opinion that specific regional problems and

shared Nordic challenges require shared Nordic solutions.

More often, however, focusing on shared elements had led to the acknowledgement of differences across the Nordic region, which, in turn, had opened up novel comparative perspectives to understand various phenomena such as differences in societal structures. This is demonstrated in the following two quotes from the survey, which also reveal how the gaining of such insights may influence the whole field of research as well as the research agenda of an individual researcher:

We have been able to juxtapose similar phenomena in a critical way, which has given us tremendous insights about the multiplicity of the Nordic countries. We have established strong basis for Nordic scientific excellency in the field under investigation.

And:

My academic career was most conducted out of the Nordic context. Taking part in this project opened up several opportunities to improve my understanding of relevant societal challenges in the region, reshaping my research agenda.

The fact that a closer look at the shared Nordic elements makes it possible to identify differences was represented as being largely beneficial in the material. Differences were seen as facilitating the understanding of various phenomena in greater depth, especially at the national level, as the following responses show:

Nordic research broaden that understanding of slightly different solution in similar contexts. It helps to understand also the national level and validate the national research results. Nordic countries are fielding the development of services, so it is not easy to find similar context elsewhere.

And:

We learn so much from each other. We have very similar contexts which makes our results comparable, while at the same time different approaches on a national level which makes it very interesting to compare and learn from each other.

In addition from research, some respondents mention how collaboration at a Nordic level had also increased their understanding of different university and research practices:

I think it is valuable to see how research is conducted in other Nordic research institutes.

Resources

Respondents also felt that Nordic research co-operation was valuable in terms of resources. These resources can be divided into both material resources, such as data and infrastructure, and immaterial resources, such as competence.

The respondents discussed the material resources that Nordic research collaboration facilitates from various perspectives. First, access to data from multiple countries was considered valuable in itself. For example, the availability of homogenous data from different countries was seen as an added value of working at a Nordic level:

The added value is the use of similar data in nationwide studies where we can compare results between the individual countries and also provide more power and use up to date methods in research. For our research this collaboration has been extremely important and productive.

Second, the respondents valued material resources because of the critical mass that the incorporation of a large amount of data from different countries provided. Some respondents from the field of the medical sciences in particular cited critical mass as a key element in conducting high-quality research. Critical mass was valued for enabling different outcomes and hypotheses, as well as for supporting the reliability and validity of research results:

[U]se of several national cohorts of patients [sic] in similar diseases gives a high number of patients [sic] when exploring different outcomes/hypotheses.

And:

Access to more data which increases statistical power in hypotheses testing.

Third, some respondents found the incorporation of data from different Nordic registers valuable

because it makes Nordic research more competitive with larger countries, as the example below shows:

In my case we build on unique experiences and knowledge which are shared among colleagues from different Nordic countries (as well as Estonia). Sharing these experiences and cultivating them in a longer and larger project will definitely lead to results that are competitive.

For some, the pooling of resources had even translated into increasing funding options:

The cooperation has meant a larger population for the study, has increased the funding options - and increased our funding support from national Funds [sic].

The pooling and sharing of data and infrastructures are generally seen as helping to build the critical mass needed to produce particular results, but they can also be seen as enhancing cost-effectiveness. Cost-effectiveness and access to research facilities were also mentioned in the material. Alongside this, however, material resources were also seen as having an important role in strengthening specific scientific disciplines across the Nordic region.

In addition to material resources, researchers also discussed immaterial resources. Immaterial resources refer to the added competence and expertise that the co-operation of scholars across the Nordic region had generated. In addition to producing a greater pool of relevant scholars, Nordic collaboration had also brought experts together across different disciplines:

Professionally: it would have been nearly impossible to conduct the research in question without the Nordic research cooperation because our research question required complementary competences distributed across the Nordic countries and required a unique resource almost only found in the Nordic countries. Additionally, our project is interdisciplinary, which has been very scientifically enriching and allows us to reach levels scientifically that would not have been possible without this project.

Some respondents even emphasised the role of immaterial resources as imperative for the realisation of research projects, as they had provided both individuals and research groups with valuable

input on the studied phenomena, theory and methods. In a similar vein to material resources, immaterial resources were seen as improving the quality and validity of research when results could be compared across multiple countries or when scholars could share their knowledge and expertise with each other. In addition, the increased opportunities to receive feedback from colleagues was valued as important.

Research skills

The development of research skills was a particular added value that the respondents felt they had gained from their participation in NordForsk-funded projects. These responses were most strongly weighted towards professional added value. For example, some respondents mentioned how the projects had increased their expertise in their respective fields of research through new perspectives, such as cross-disciplinary perspectives. Others reported that they had also learnt new communication skills, project management skills and co-ordination skills, as the example below demonstrates:

Professionally I have gained the valuable experience of being part of the management team of a larger project as well as experience of coordinating the work of one participating partner.

Some respondents also felt that they had benefited from the projects on a personal level, for example through increased self-esteem and self-confidence.

Increased visibility and impact

Looking at the wider impact of the projects in more detail, the added value of research co-operation at a Nordic level also was articulated in terms of research visibility and impact. For example, some respondents felt that funding from NordForsk had raised the profile of their research. Other respondents reported that the project had provided them with increased visibility throughout the Nordic region towards different stakeholders, such as scholars and policymakers. For example, one respondent stressed the importance of a shared culture, not only in terms of the relevance of studying certain phenomena, but also in terms

of the most effective social impact that can be achieved through research:

While many of the social phenomena [...] result from international developments, the Nordic countries often have a shared understanding of what sorts of reactions might be legally possible or morally admissible. Joint cultural frameworks thus make it relevant to study social phenomena on an Nordic level, and results may well include eg [sic] policy recommendations that would not work in, say, France or Germany, not to mention the U.S. or Asia. When you work with politically important society-changing questions, this is a very important point to consider.

Visibility and impact are not limited to the Nordic countries, with some respondents also highlighting the growing reputation of the research group outside the Nordic countries:

Nordforsk funding has been critical factor of building my research group and its international reputation (also beyond the nordic [sic] countries)

The responses also mention how the projects have supported the publication activities of individual researchers by increasing the number of publications or enabling the writing of co-authored papers.

Future prospects

Responses to the open-ended questions on Nordic added value show that Nordic research co-operation continued to generate added value even after the completion of the projects. While some respondents felt that the mere participation in a NordForsk-funded project had had a positive impact on their professional reputation, others reported that it had also had a positive impact on future applications. As the most important success factor, the respondents identified networks, which had led to new collaborative projects and partnerships, as exemplified by one respondent:

Developed strong personal and professional relationships with fellow researchers in the Nordics. This has lead [sic] to me participating in proposals for national funding in other Scandinavian countries and continued collaboration.

A couple of respondents similarly cited how participating in NordForsk-funded projects had both led to the initiation of further collaboration, as well as acted as a springboard, enabling the respondents

to move to larger European-level infrastructures and networks, and even securing research funding at a European level.

4.7 Views on NordForsk

Lastly, questions about NordForsk as an organisation in terms of its familiarity, reputation and performance were included in the participant survey. The respondents were asked to evaluate four statements about NordForsk on a scale from 0 to 5 (0 = Do not know/no opinion, 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree). The distribution of the answers is compiled in Table 10.

The respondents viewed NordForsk's performance to be positive across all statements. NordForsk is generally considered a well-known and reputable institution, although 18% of the respondents simultaneously neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement on reputation. In the open responses of the survey, one respondent specified that Nordic co-operation often seems to be undervalued, writing that "Nordic cooperation is an 'easily hanging fruit' which is undervalued."

The majority of respondents had been satisfied with NordForsk. A total of 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement and none disagreed. This trend is also reflected in the

background question, where the survey participants were also asked how likely it is that they will apply for NordForsk funding again in the future. The vast majority of the respondents answered this question positively, with 52% answering very likely and 28% quite likely, while 9% of respondents answered not so likely and 1% very unlikely. Ten percent of respondents were unsure whether they would reapply for NordForsk funding.

The participants also had the opportunity to leave open comments through the survey, most of which touched upon NordForsk's performance. The majority of the open comments were positive and complimentary, highlighting the added value that NordForsk-funded projects had generated from both a research and a personal perspective. General support for the continuation and even strengthening of Nordic research co-operation was also present in the responses.

The open responses also included some proposals for the further development of Nordic research co-operation. A couple of respondents raised the need for more funding to increase the interest

Table 10: Views on NordForsk

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Do not know/no opinion	Total
NordForsk is a well-known institution.	3%	5%	18%	46%	27%	3%	100%
NordForsk has a good reputation.	0%	0%	9%	35%	48%	8%	100%
The application procedures of NordForsk are clear and easily accessible.	1%	4%	15%	43%	25%	11%	100%
I have been satisfied with NordForsk.	0%	0%	6%	37%	53%	4%	100%

in and impact of research. In addition, a couple of other respondents highlighted the need to better integrate non-Nordic partners in projects, for example, by providing funding to non-Nordic researchers and institutions in order to involve key researchers in projects rather than having to subcontract them. This would allow relevant contributors to be a key part of the project team from the outset. Similarly, another respondent stressed the importance of enabling external research partners to be fully involved as partners, so that non-Nordic partners can be more closely involved in the project design and their research staff can also be paid. The respondent emphasised that only working with external parties at a secondary level with less to say and fewer resources may result in the reproduction of longstanding inequalities.

4.8 Summary

The analysis of the participant survey in this chapter has shown that researchers do not experience any major challenges in identifying the added value of conducting their research as a Nordic collaborative effort. The current definition of Nordic added value as devised by NordForsk was also deemed as sufficient and functioning. Nevertheless, the relative character of the concept of Nordic added value was apparent in the varying ways of emphasising the key rationale of collaborating at a Nordic level, from practical benefits to contributing to uniquely Nordic phenomena. A particular added value that was emphasised in the survey was that of networks. Like the experts, the researchers also regarded the similarity of Nordic societies as an important factor and strength that contributes to the efficiency of Nordic research co-operation, but also raised critical perspectives in respect of preconceived assumptions of the rationale of collaborating at the Nordic level and the importance of also acknowledging differences. The next chapter concludes the results of this report and suggests what implications these findings may have for the future use of Nordic added value as a guiding principle in Nordic research co-operation.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations

The idea of Nordic added value with its varying terms and translations emerged as a guiding principle of official Nordic co-operation after the end of the Cold War and in the face of accelerating European integration. In the present day, it continues to underpin the core principles of Nordic co-operation as a means of articulating the political legitimacy and significance of Nordic co-operation and of guiding funding decisions. However, concepts of Nordic co-operation are not fixed or static. They have evolved alongside the practical development of Nordic co-operation. Furthermore, it is evident that the meanings of key concepts associated with Nordic co-operation vary depending on who uses and interprets them, making these concepts contested, ambiguous and sometimes even a bit enigmatic. Nordic added value, in particular, seems to function both as a political vision guiding formal co-operation as a whole on the one hand, and as a practical instrument guiding co-operation in various specialised sectors, on the other.

Based on the literature review in Chapter 2, the idea of Nordic added value can today be defined at policy level as the positive effects of a joint Nordic effort that take place through:

- **Nordic solutions:** activities that could otherwise be undertaken at the national level, but where concretely positive effects are generated through common Nordic solutions;
- **Nordic solidarity:** activities that manifest and develop a sense of Nordic community;
- **Nordic capabilities:** activities that increase Nordic competence and competitiveness;
- **Nordic influence:** activities that strengthen the Nordic international influence; and
- **Nordic sustainability:** activities that foster equal and balanced social, economic and environmental interactions in the Nordic region.¹⁴⁷

Although there has been a tendency to give these different dimensions varying importance over time and depending on the prevailing context, the concepts of Nordic co-operation have been enduringly linked with both socio-cultural and economic values. Drawing together the way in which the principles of Nordic co-operation have evolved over time, this means that today the idea of Nordic added value contributes to Nordic

region-building by **strengthening the Nordic region as a cultural and historical community, and as a locally and globally competitive and sustainable welfare society**. Furthermore, the principle of Nordic added value is based on target-oriented management, where the mere act of operating at a Nordic level is not seen as yielding sufficient added value, but where the success of joint effort is evaluated according to predetermined goals. Drawing insights from the discussions on the use of *nordisk nytta* as a criterion for cutting expenditure in the 1990s, a key question that remains is whether the funding or success of any activity at the Nordic level should be assessed by its ability to reach all the predetermined goals or whether some of them carry more weight than others. This is a debate that should take place within the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

In Nordic research co-operation, the English-language concept of Nordic added value has been prominently established as the key justification and evaluation criteria in recent years. It is used at various stages of research programme cycles, from the planning of programmes to the evaluation of project applications and the assessment of research impact. NordForsk currently provides the most detailed and comprehensive definition of Nordic added value in the context of Nordic co-operation. The concept has been operationalised by extending its meaning to specify activities that are typically perceived as creating Nordic added value in this policy area, while simultaneously recognising that Nordic added value can be defined and described in various ways depending on the sector in question and the focus of co-operation. Although NordForsk has devised its own definition of Nordic added value, several challenges related to attempts to define and operationalise the concept of Nordic added value or similar concepts were identified in Chapter 2.3. These were:

- the simultaneous presence of several concepts and translations;
- ambiguities related to value-based concepts;
- limited available strategies to navigate the conceptual framework; and
- the different interpretations of concepts by various stakeholders.

The analysis of the definition and use of Nordic added value in practice in Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated that both science experts and researchers perceive Nordic added value mainly as a clear concept and had not experienced any particular challenges when operationalising it. However, upon looking more closely, there were significant differences in the ways in which the concept was understood. The variety of ways in which the concept was discussed in the material are determined by the following factors:

- **Nordic added value is a relative concept:** The perceived added value of Nordic research co-operation depends on **individual and disciplinary differences**, and on whether the added value is expected to be generated for the **academic or societal level**. Activities generating Nordic added value can also be understood as both **concrete/material** (e.g., pooling of resources and knowledge, expanding the number of high-quality scientific publications) and **abstract/immaterial** (e.g., similar social structures, shared values, shared cultural and linguistic heritage and similar climate/geography). As the concept can mean many different things to different people, a key challenge is how the Nordic added value principle should be communicated to different stakeholders.
- **Nordic added value is a multidimensional concept:** Nordic added value is both **a set of characteristics or preconditions that contribute to research** (e.g., similarity of societies) and **an added value that research generates for the Nordic societies and the scientific community**. This simultaneous presence of these two dimensions may complicate the evaluation or assessment of Nordic added value when making funding decisions and evaluating the impact of research. Networks, for example, which were highlighted as a particularly important added value in the data, may be perceived both as a precondition and an outcome of research collaboration. Furthermore, networks may contribute to the strengthening of both the academic community and the sense of Nordic community. The definition of Nordic added value as both a precondition and as an outcome draws attention to linguistic differences, as the Scandinavian terms *nordisk nytta* and *nordiskt*

mervärde are able to convey this multidimensionality more effectively than their commonly used English counterpart "Nordic added value".

- **Nordic added value is a relational concept:** The benefit of joint Nordic effort has been traditionally discussed in relation to providing something added to the **national level**, but in research co-operation, Nordic added value is also prominently defined in relation to the **European and global level**. In the material, the benefit of co-operating at a Nordic level to the national level was defined in terms of efficiency and resources, whereas the justification for co-operating at the European level rather than the Nordic level was articulated in terms of achieving higher research quality and research renewal. However, these different levels are not mutually exclusive, but complementary. For example, research contributions made by the Nordic countries in the European context may also yield Nordic added value by contributing to region-building and increasing the Nordic influence in the European landscape.
- **Nordic added value is a contested concept:** While there are undeniably many benefits of collaborating at the Nordic level, the idea of Nordic added value may also convey essentialising and prescriptive connotations of Nordic similarities, uniqueness and exceptionalism. In specific disciplines, limiting co-operation to the Nordic region is not always justified and does not advance science. Sometimes acknowledging differences between the Nordic countries may be just as fruitful. Furthermore, similarities between Nordic societies or their assumed shared cultural and linguistic heritage should not be taken for granted as a factor underpinning successful research co-operation as these are not given for the increasingly diverse Nordic research community.

Attitudes, experiences and support for NordForsk as a facilitator and funder of Nordic research co-operation were very positive as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. Members of the programme committees perceived NordForsk as the best instrument for co-ordinating Nordic research co-operation and also in itself providing added value to national funding organisations and

science advisors. The added value that NordForsk generated for the research communities was also highlighted by the researchers. A particular challenge for NordForsk that emerged from the material was how to increase the visibility and awareness of Nordic research funding.

Conceptual and practical investigation into the idea of Nordic added value in Nordic research co-operation shows that it is crucial to acknowledge the flexible, changing and adaptive nature of the concept, rather than enshrine static and normative definitions. The concept of Nordic added value cannot be used uniformly throughout different sectors of Nordic co-operation nor within Nordic research co-operation. On the basis of the findings presented in this report, the following points are recommended to be considered in the future use of Nordic added value as the guiding principle in Nordic research co-operation:

1. STRATEGIC NORDIC NEEDS AND HIGH SCIENTIFIC QUALITY

Nordic research co-operation must aim at funding and facilitating high-quality research. Combined with the need to create Nordic added value, it is essential to identify particular Nordic needs and strategic areas of expertise when designing research programmes. It is vital to recognise the dual role of research co-operation as facilitating high-quality research and as strengthening the Nordic community. Collaboration with non-Nordic partners remains relevant as it constitutes an important element for ensuring research excellence, although it needs to be viewed in a more multidimensional manner, acknowledging the added value that the participating countries contribute to and receive from the collaboration.

2. BALANCE BETWEEN STRICT CRITERIA AND FLEXIBILITY

The concept of Nordic added value is not static. Its definition changes over time and depending on the context in which it is used and the actors who use it. The operationalisation of the concept must

therefore strike a balance between clear guidelines and criteria, and a certain degree of flexibility, leaving room for the development and continuous renewal of Nordic research co-operation. Concepts fail to serve their purpose when taken for granted and as a means of policing boundaries. Consequently, flexibility in their operationalisation is crucial. Rather than enshrining predefined meanings, it is particularly important to leave room for researchers to reflect on Nordic added value to ensure the renewal of Nordic research co-operation.

3. SYMMETRIC COMMUNICATION

In defining and communicating Nordic added value among different stakeholders and across different research programmes, efforts to promote a holistic understanding of the concept and its various interpretations are required. Rather than creating new definitions or attempting new categorisations, this objective could be served by a careful preparation of programme-specific descriptions of Nordic added value and a more informed discussion of the principle in the programme committees. In addition, a broader discussion of the objectives of Nordic co-operation as well as a comparative discussion of the operationalisation of Nordic added value in different joint institutions would be beneficial.

4. REVIEW OF EVALUATION METHODS

Since Nordic added value is primarily a qualitative concept, a key challenge is to enhance the qualitative monitoring of research impact alongside existing quantitative practices to gain a thorough understanding of Nordic added value. Moreover, the conceptualisation of Nordic added value would benefit from being seen more clearly as part of the academic and societal impact of research, rather than as a separate indicator. In the different stages of project evaluation and assessment, it is crucial to consider the relative and multidimensional character of Nordic added value.

Together, these recommendations aim at contributing to the continuation and renewal of high-quality Nordic research co-operation in the future.

Notes

- 1 NordForsk, NordForsk Strategy 2019–2022 (Oslo: NordForsk, 2019).
- 2 Leif H. Jakobsen, Daniel Holmberg, Vera Stafström and Göran Melin, *Evaluation of NordForsk* (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2022).
- 3 Reinhart Koselleck (ed.), *Historische Semantik und Begriffsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1979).
- 4 The Nordic region has seen attempts to form a unified region in the Middle Ages, the unification of the region through the Kalmar Union in the 14th and 15th centuries, and from the early 16th century the establishment of two rival entities in the struggles for regional hegemony, encompassing today's Denmark, Norway and Iceland, and Sweden and Finland. The Nordic region began to take its present form gradually after the Napoleonic Wars in the early 19th century and finally in the 20th century, with the independence of the countries and the formation of the present state borders. See Bengt Sundelius and Claes Wiklund, "The Nordic Community: The Ugly Duckling of Regional Cooperation," *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 18, no. 1 (1979); Johan Strang, "Introduction: The Nordic model of transnational cooperation?" in *Nordic Cooperation: A European Region in Transition*, ed. Johan Strang (New York: Routledge, 2016).
- 5 Johan Strang, "The Rhetoric of Nordic Cooperation: From the Other Europe to the Better Europe?" in *Contesting Nordicness: From Scandinavianisms to the Nordic brand*, eds. Jani Marjanen, Johan Strang and Mary Hilson (Berlin, Boston, MA: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021), 103; see also Peter Duelund, "Cultural Policy: An Overview," in *The Nordic Cultural Model: Nordic Cultural Policy in Transition*, ed. Peter Duelund (Copenhagen: Nordic Cultural Institute, 2003); Norbert Götz and Heidi Haggrén (eds.), *Regional Cooperation and International Organizations: The Nordic Model in Transnational Alignment* (London: Routledge, 2009); Strang, "Introduction"; Sundelius and Wiklund, "Nordic Community".
- 6 Strang, "Rhetoric of Nordic Cooperation", 103. For an alternative division, see Bengt Sundelius and Claes Wiklund, (eds.), *Norden sett inifrån: Det fjärde språkbytet* (Stockholm: Santérus Förlag, 2017).
- 7 Strang, "Rhetoric of Nordic Cooperation", 103.
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- 19 Duelund, "Cultural Policy", 256–258.
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- 23 Dang, "'Nordic added value'", 6.
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- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Nordic Council; Nordic Council of Ministers, *Nordiskt samarbete i en ny tid*.
- 27 Opitz & Etzold 2018; Tønnesson, "Etter 1994", 137.
- 28 Tønnesson, "Etter 1994", 137–138.
- 29 Ibid., 137.
- 30 Ibid., 138.
- 31 E.g. Kharkina, *From Kinship to Global Brand*, 97.
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- 69 Dang, "'Nordic added value'", 2, 15.
- 70 Sundelius and Wiklund, "Nordic Community", 75.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Ulf Andreasson and Truls Stende, *Ett värdefullt samarbete: Den nordiska befolkningens syn på Norden* (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2017), 8.
- 73 Strang, Marjanen and Hilson, "Rhetorical Perspective", 5; see also Øystein Sørensen and Bo Stråth (eds.), *The Cultural Construction of Norden* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997).
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- 75 Arnold, *Rethinking*, 22.
- 76 Tarschys, *Enigma of European Added Value*, 96.
- 77 Tarschys, *Enigma of European Added Value*, 95.
- 78 Daniel Holmberg, "Kontinuitet och förnyelse – Forskningspolitiskt samarbete i Norden 1946–2020" (unpublished manuscript, March 22, 2022); Norrback 2019, 47.
- 79 Holmberg, "Kontinuitet och förnyelse".
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 Ibid.; see also Dan Andrée, *The Nordic Research and Innovation Area (NORIA) and synergies with the European Research Area (ERA)* (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2008).
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- 83 Ibid.; Dang, "'Nordic added value'", 9–10.
- 84 Holmberg, "Kontinuitet och förnyelse".
- 85 Gustafsson, "Nordiskt Forskningssamarbete", 225–231; Andrée, *The Nordic Research and Innovation Area*.
- 86 Tarschys, *Enigma of European Added Value*, 54.
- 87 NordForsk is one of 12 Nordic institutions that operate under the Nordic Council of Ministers. It belongs under the Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research (MR-U) together with the exchange programme Nordplus, the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL) and the Nordic Sami Institute (NSI). In addition, the organisations Nordic Energy Research and NeIC facilitate Nordic research co-operation.
- 88 NordForsk, "About." NordForsk, accessed December 12, 2022. <https://www.nordforsk.org/about>.
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- 90 The NordForsk board consists of representatives of the largest national research funding agencies in the five Nordic countries, a representative of the Nordic University Association (NUS), as well as observers from the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Åland and the Nordic Council of Ministers. *NordForsk*, "NordForsk Board," NordForsk, accessed March 24, 2023, <https://www.nordforsk.org/nordforsk-board>.
- 91 NordForsk, "Funding process." NordForsk, accessed December 12, 2022. <https://www.nordforsk.org/funding-process>.
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- 94 Gustafsson, "Nordiskt Forskningssamarbete", 223.
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- 96 Anna Rylander and Sascha Haselmayer, *Branding the Nordic Research and Innovation Area: Promoting the Nordic region as an attractive destination for global investments in research and innovation* (Oslo: NordForsk, 2008), 8.
- 97 Gunnel Gustafsson, personal communication, January 22, 2023.
- 98 Andrée, *The Nordic Research and Innovation Area*.
- 99 NordForsk, *NordForsk Strategy 2011–2014* (Oslo: NordForsk, 2011).
- 100 Gunnel Gustafsson, personal communication, January 22, 2023; Gustafsson recalls that when the three policy briefs on Nordic research co-operation in a European context were commissioned, it was left open how they would be labelled. They were not necessarily ordered in English, but by communicating in Scandinavian languages.
- 101 Gustafsson, "Nordiskt Forskningssamarbete", 225–231.
- 102 See Tarschys, *Enigma of European Added Value*, 33.
- 103 Arnold, *Rethinking*, 20.
- 104 Ibid., 22.
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- 107 Holmberg, "Kontinuitet och förnyelse".
- 108 See Arnold, *Rethinking*, 22.
- 109 NordForsk, *NordForsk Strategy 2015–2018* (Oslo: NordForsk, 2015).
- 110 Jakobsen et al. *Evaluation of NordForsk*, 51.
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- 115 NordForsk, *Impact report*, 6–7.
- 116 Jakobsen et al. *Evaluation of NordForsk*, 19, 69.
- 117 Ibid., 29.
- 118 See Aadne Aasland, *Going Nordic – A survey among participants in NordForsk and NorFA networks and research training courses 1999-2005* (Oslo: NordForsk, 2006), 21–24.
- 119 Jakobsen et al. *Evaluation of NordForsk*, 51–53.
- 120 See especially Lennartson and Nolin, *Nordisk kulturfonden*.
- 121 Tarschys, *Enigma of European Added Value*, 9–10.
- 122 Duelund, "Cultural Policy", 256–258; see also Lennartson and Nolin, *Nordisk kulturfonden*; Kim Forss, *Nordens hus och institut. En utvärdering av mål, verksamhet och resultat* (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2014).
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- 124 Forss, *Nordens hus*, 56.
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- 126 Dang, "'Nordic added value'", 15.
- 127 Forss, *Nordens hus*, 20.
- 128 Tarschys, *Enigma of European Added Value*, 8–10.
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- 130 Lennartson and Nolin, *Nordisk kulturfonden*, 269–270.

- 131 Ibid.
- 132 See Jakobsen et al. *Evaluation of NordForsk*, 51–53.
- 133 Lennartson and Nolin, *Nordisk kulturfonden*, 269–270; see also Dang, "'Nordic added value'", 6.
- 134 Lennartson and Nolin, *Nordisk kulturfonden*, 270.
- 135 Ibid.
- 136 Tønnesson, "Etter 1994", 137; see also Lennartson and Nolin, *Nordisk kulturfonden*, 269–270; Tarschys, *Enigma of European Added Value*, 34.
- 137 Tønnesson, "Etter 1994", 138; see also PLS Consult 1998, 100
- 138 Tarschys, *Enigma of European Added Value*, 95; see also Tibor, "EU added value", 10.
- 139 Lennartson and Nolin, *Nordisk kulturfonden*, 269–270.
- 140 Forss, *Nordens hus*, 55.
- 141 See e.g. Arnold, *Rethinking*, 20; Dang, "'Nordic added value'", 6–7.
- 142 See also Dang, "'Nordic added value'", 15.
- 143 Jakobsen et al. *Evaluation of NordForsk*, 29.
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- 145 See Anna Herou, *Ten Years of Nordic Research Funding 2009-2018* (Oslo: NordForsk, 2019). 11–12.
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Appendix B: List of abbreviations

COVID-19 Coronavirus disease 2019

EAV European Added Value

EEA European Economic Area

ERA European Research Area

EU European Union

MR-U Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research

NAV Nordic Added Value

NeIC Nordic e-Infrastructure Collaboration

NICe Nordic Innovation Centre

NORDHORCS Nordic Heads of Research Councils

NORIA Nordic Research and Innovation Area

NOS Joint Committee for Nordic Research Councils

NSI Nordic Sami Institute

NUS Nordic University Association

NVL Nordic Network for Adult Learning

Appendix C: List of programme/call affiliations of interviewed experts

Programme or call

Education for Tomorrow

Future Working Life

Joint Nordic-UK research programme on Migration and Integration

Nordic Bioeconomy Programme

Nordic Neutron Science Programme

Nordic Programme for Interdisciplinary Research

Nordic Programme on Health and Welfare

Nordic Societal Security Programme

Research and Innovation Programme on Digitalisation of the Public Sector

Responsible Development of the Arctic

Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Change

Sustainable Urban Development and Smart Cities

The Nordic Research and Innovation Programme for Sustainable Aquaculture

Welfare among Children and Young People in the Post-Pandemic Nordics

Appendix D: Participant survey

Survey about the added value of Nordic research cooperation

Background information

***What is/was the main research area of your NordForsk activity?**

Social sciences
Humanities
Natural sciences
Technical sciences
Agricultural, forestry, fishery sciences
Medical sciences
Multi- or cross-disciplinary
Other area, please specify

***What type of institution do/did you represent in the NordForsk funded research activity?**

University
Polytechnics
Research institute
Private sector
Public sector
Other, please specify

***Which country or autonomous region do/did you represent in the NordForsk funded activity?**

Denmark
Finland
Iceland
Norway
Sweden
Estonia
Latvia
Lithuania
Russia
Faroese Islands
Greenland
Åland
Other, please specify

***Which title corresponds to your role in the NordForsk funded research activity?**

Project leader/main coordinator
Group leader/country coordinator
Participant
Doctoral student
Other, please specify

***Has your NordForsk activity included partners from outside the Nordic countries?**

No
Yes
Do not know
If you selected "Yes", please specify:

***How many times have you been involved in NordForsk funded research projects/activities?**

One
Two
Three
Four or more
Not sure

Statements about Nordic research cooperation

NordForsk's main objective is to facilitate Nordic research cooperation based on scientific quality, efficiency and trust. In addition, this cooperation is expected to generate Nordic added value.

***Below you see statements about Nordic research cooperation from different perspectives. Please evaluate on a scale from 0 to 5 (0=Do not know/no opinion, 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree) to what extent you agree with the statements based on your personal opinions and participation in a NordForsk funded research project/activity.**

1. The Nordic dimension of your research

My research has a clear Nordic dimension.
My research benefits from having a Nordic perspective.

It is easy for me to define what kind of Nordic added value my research generates.

It is easy for me to understand, which phenomena are uniquely Nordic.

2. The impact of Nordic research cooperation.

Collaborating on a Nordic level creates new networks.

Collaborating on a Nordic level enhances existing networks.

I would like to continue cooperating with my Nordic partners.

Nordic research collaboration improves chances of receiving funding on national level.

Nordic research collaboration improves chances of receiving European funding.

Nordic research collaboration improves chances of receiving other international funding.

Nordic research funding is too small to make a substantial contribution.

Collaborating on a Nordic level has developed my professional growth.

Collaborating on a Nordic level has developed my personal growth.

3. The value of Nordic research cooperation.

Nordic countries face similar challenges.

Shared Nordic experiences facilitate effective responses to a wide range of issues.

Shared Nordic solutions provide benefits for the people of all of the Nordic countries.

Shared historical and cultural heritage in the Nordic region enhances research cooperation.

Similar social structures in the Nordic region enhance research cooperation.

Similar working culture in the Nordic region enhances research cooperation.

Shared Nordic values enhance trust-based cooperation.

Ability to understand other Nordic languages enhances trust-based co-operation.

4. The role of NordForsk.

NordForsk is a well-known institution.

NordForsk has a good reputation.

The application procedures of NordForsk are clear and easily accessible.

I have been satisfied with NordForsk.

Attribute assessment

***Below you see a list of attributes. On a scale from 0 to 5, please evaluate to what extent these attributes apply to Nordic research cooperation based on your personal opinions and participation in a NordForsk funded research project.**

1=Does not apply at all, 2=Does not apply, 3=Applies to some extent, 4=Applies partly, 5=Applies to a great extent, 0=Do not know/no opinion

Attractive
Bureaucratic
Competitive
Cost-efficient
Effective
Exclusive
Globally impactful
Globally leading
Highest quality
Innovative
Inspiring
Locally impactful
Open
Prestigious
Progressive
Sustainable
Transparent
Trustful

Nordic added value 1

In calls for proposals, applicants are asked to describe the Nordic added value their research will produce and why this is important. NordForsk has devised its own definition of Nordic added value, which is divided into two main categories and which are listed below.

*Please select the relevant research activities that you see generating added value in your research project/activity. You may select more than one option from both categories.

1) Added value generated because the research collaboration is taking place in the Nordic region. This category of added value is produced when research activities:

- help to build critical mass and/or expertise at the Nordic level in important disciplines or research areas;
- enhance cost-effectiveness by sharing infrastructure or data or harmonising systems for utilising data and other resources in the Nordic region;
- lead to regional mobility and networking among the Nordic countries;
- enhance scientific quality and expand the number of high-quality scientific publications through Nordic cooperation;

- increase the chances of success for Nordic researchers in EU research activities or other international research cooperation;
- lead to more results and stronger, quality-assured conclusions as a basis for shaping the statutory framework or rationalising and improving the public administration;
- promote the creation of innovations, patents or other solutions that help to enhance industrial development and cooperation in the Nordic region.
- None of the above

2) Added value generated because the research can only be carried out in the Nordic region. This added value is produced when research activities:

- build on particular strengths of Nordic researchers, and when the research is carried out by groups with unique expertise;
- address needs that are unique to the Nordic countries in light of our similar social structures, institutions and institutional culture, and shared cultural heritage;
- focus on e.g. geographical, climatic, cultural, linguistic or social phenomena in the Nordic region;
- utilise data from uniquely Nordic registries.
- None of the above

Nordic added value 2

***In the previous section, you were asked to identify research activities that generate Nordic added value in your research. Please respond to the following statements on a scale from 0 to 5.**

1=Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree, 0=Do not know/no opinion

- The definition of Nordic added value is clear to me.
- It was easy for me to identify relevant research activities from the list.
- The list of research activities is sufficient.

If you answered 1 (strongly disagree) or 2 (disagree) to the last statement ("The list of research activities is sufficient"), please name research activities that you think were missing from the list.

Nordic added value 3

Please respond to the following open questions on Nordic added value.

***What kind of added value have you gained both professionally and personally from participating in Nordic research cooperation?**

***What do you see as the added value of doing your research activity on the Nordic level and not on national or European/international level?**

Do you have any additional thoughts or comments you would like to share?

Personal background information

Finally, we would like to ask you for some information about your personal background.

***How old are you?**

18-24 years old
25-34 years old
35-44 years old
45-54 years old
Over 55

***What is your gender?**

Female
Male
Non-binary
Prefer not to answer

***Which title corresponds best to your current title?**

Professor
Assistant/adjunct professor
Senior scientist
Researcher
Lecturer
University teacher
Junior researcher
Post-doc
Doctoral student
Research assistant
Other, please specify

***How likely will you apply for NordForsk funding in the future?**

Very likely
Quite likely
Not so likely
Very unlikely
Not sure/I don't know



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