

**Strategy for
International Branding
of the Nordic Region**

2022–2024

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Preface



With this revised strategy for branding of the Nordic region, the ship that was set to sail in the slipstream of the successful cultural initiative in Washington's Kennedy Center in 2013 has found it's right course and is continuously gaining pace. As with any long voyages you need a clear goal in the horizon, while also being aware that you'll never move in a straight line. Detours are necessary and obstacles are hard to avoid along the way. The same thing goes when it comes to branding. Trial and error is part of the process that moves the project forward – for instance, who would have thought that the whole world would more or less shut down due to a pandemic? Also, a new vision declaration for the Nordic Co-operation has seen the day of light: *The Nordic region will become the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030.* This third version of the Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region will contribute to achieve this vision, by focusing the branding efforts on and sharing Nordic know-how and contributions to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The branding project has actively contributed to the UN climate negotiations (COP) in the past five years and, through Open Calls, the project has provided support, both financially and in terms of content, to 185 projects in 44 different countries. The projects, which over the years have involved more than 800 Nordic stakeholders and 295 embassies and consulates, have ranged from gender equality and green Nordic solutions to tourism and cuisine. The Open Calls approach and not least the concept for live talks and podcasts, Nordic Talks, which was introduced in 2020 has proved to be a successful catalyst in bringing Nordic forces together and putting Nordic ideas and strongholds on the international agenda.

But branding The Nordics does not end here. Branding is a long, arduous journey, requiring the commitment and involvement of many parties. With this revised strategy, we will continue developing and improving tools that will facilitate the work

of those parties engaged in everyday activities relating to branding of The Nordics. We will be developing new concepts that put us in a position to engage in dialogue with the world around us, and we will be working specifically to communicate and anchor the project even more firmly in the Nordic countries and with Nordic stakeholders.

Strategic branding requires continuity and consistency. This is why it has not been important to draw up a completely new strategy and, instead, to build on the existing strategy from 2019. Consequently, several elements have been retained from the preceding strategy that have proved to be vital in branding, including the common set of Nordic values and the strategic focus areas. In addition, the revised strategy will focus on the Nordic Talks concept that was developed in co-operation with the projects reference group.

Background



The Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region was developed in response to an explicit request from the Nordic Prime Ministers and the Nordic Ministers for Co-operation. The aim was to showcase the Nordic region globally, and thereby increase the competitiveness and international influence of the Nordic countries.

The Nordic Ministers for Co-operation approved the strategy at their meeting in October 2014, and the first strategy ran until the end of 2018. The second from 2019-2021. The latest strategy and the results were evaluated in 2021, and the experiences formed the basis of this revised and more detailed strategy, with a clearer attempt to link the branding project to current Nordic political agendas.

The basic Nordic values and strategic focus areas forming the basis of the first strategy remain unchanged, and the original goal will continue to apply:

The strategy for branding the Nordic region will increase the visibility of the Nordic region and its influence in the world, and improve the region's competitiveness.

Additionally, the new revised strategy for International Branding of the Nordic region will aim to support and contribute to the Nordic Co-operation's vision of the Nordic region becoming the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030.

Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region



The world around us essentially defines the Nordic region as a single unit. The image is overwhelmingly positive, largely because we in the Nordic region seem to have found solutions to economic and political challenges that both we and others are grappling with. The Nordic Model has become a concept. Every Nordic country has built its own model, parallel with extensive and robust co-operation within the Nordic region. If we in the Nordic region are to experience a positive development, we are dependent on what is happening around us and on other countries being interested in us. It is in our interest to contribute to our own future and that of others by sharing ideas, competencies, experiences, services and goods.

Competition for a place on the international arena is tough, and small countries like ours can work together to generate greater visibility and influence. By coordinating branding activities in a joint initiative, we can generate synergies in the public and/or private sectors in each country.

The strategy sets out strategic guidelines for how to brand The Nordics and their stakeholders internationally. This is part of a long-term initiative to systematize and ensure consistent branding of the Nordic region, an offer that supports the ability to work together toward a common goal when this generates added value for the respective actors. Apart from branding, there are many good reasons for acting together internationally, such as diplomacy and sharing experiences, but these aspects are not considered in this strategy.

Aim of the strategy

The positive international attention regarding the Nordic region and countries will be utilized and strengthened by increasingly presenting The Nordics as a unified region, not least in markets where awareness of the region is greater than awareness of each individual country. The strategy defines the values that bind the Nordic countries together. The branding will give them global exposure, support Nordic competencies and solutions, and thereby improve the region's competitiveness.

A greater number of coordinated activities will also strengthen existing relationships in immediately adjacent geographical areas. The strategy will simplify and improve the work on branding The Nordics at an international level. It will explain the purpose of branding, provide support, and refer to practical tools that will be made available to all parties.

The Nordic perspective

A common Nordic concept enables each country or actor to refer to characteristics that do not apply specifically and individually to Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Iceland, Åland, the Faroe Islands or Greenland. For example, branding can emphasize being part of a strong region with a population of 27 million and a large and diverse range of industries and culture, not to mention a varied and fascinating natural landscape.

In this particular context, The Nordics can be described as a trademark, i.e. the overall package of associations, emotions, experiences and expectations aroused in the recipient. Nothing, neither a country nor a region, can dictate its own image, especially in today's transparent, fast-moving and increasingly digital communication landscape. The image is something that is earned. For long-term and sustainable relations with other countries, what you offer must be genuine. You have to be what you claim to be and want to be.

What binds the Nordic countries together is what creates sufficient strength to attract the interest of the world around us. What is the explanation for the high positions of the Nordic countries in global rankings of competitiveness, quality of life and equality? And why is it that interest in Nordic creativity and culture is so great just now? The outside world is curious about the Nordic countries, and about how we have managed to develop and achieve strong results even in tough times. What are the underlying factors? What is it that we do?

During the past years of the branding project, the value of the clearly defined Nordic perspective on the world has proved to be crucial. In the following illustration, we have compiled the common Nordic values that characterize and bind together our region.

The values can also be seen as a checklist of the perspectives we want to express in our communication and in our relations with the world around us. Individually, they are neither unique nor revolutionary, but together they show a Nordic way of thinking that we call the Nordic Perspective.

The Nordic Perspective, our common set of values, forms the foundation of the Nordic brand. It is precisely this perspective that positions The Nordics in relation to

the rest of the world, and the values can be used in all contexts as a common tool and framework for presenting who we are and what we stand for.

In practice, the values are applied in a simplified English version. This gives them more impact and makes them easier to use as *drivers* in communication initiatives.

Our common values:

- Trust
- Equality
- Sustainability
- Innovation
- Openness

In order to support the common Nordic narrative and create synergy between various branding activities and initiatives, all future branding activities should be linked to, and actively apply, the values in both communication and the organization of the activity itself. The more Nordic actors 'live the brand' in practice, and show the world around us that there is truth behind the words, the greater the synergies and the Nordic benefits achieved.

The Nordic Perspective

- Openness and a belief in everyone's right to express their opinions
- Trust in each other and also, because of proximity to power, trust in leaders in society
- Compassion, tolerance, and conviction about the equal value of all people
- New ways of thinking, focusing on creativity and innovations
- Sustainable management of the environment and development of natural resources

Strategic Areas for Branding



The strategic areas for branding have been formulated on the basis of the overarching political priorities within the Nordic co-operation. The prioritizations, which will highlight areas that, from a Nordic perspective, can be developed in dialogue with the outside world, are based on two key questions:

1. What can the Nordic region offer the world around us?
2. How can relationships with the world around us benefit the Nordic region?

Certain branding activities may only concern one or two of the prioritized branding areas, while others will concern all of them.

- **A green Nordic Region** – together, we will promote a green transition of our societies and work towards carbon neutrality and a sustainable circular and bio-based economy.
- **A competitive Nordic Region** – together, we will promote green growth in the Nordic Region based on knowledge, innovation, mobility and digital integration.
- **A socially sustainable Nordic Region** – together, we will promote an inclusive, equal and interconnected region with shared values and strengthened cultural exchange and welfare.

We will work on these three strategic priorities in the period up to 2024. Work done within the frameworks of branding the Nordic region must contribute to these priorities, as well as achieving Nordic Cooperation's vision and its objectives.

Subthemes which the branding initiatives such as Nordic Talks can touch can be:

A green Nordic Region

- Fighting climate change
- Sustainable energy
- Sustainable consumption and production
- Life on land
- Life in the sea

A competitive Nordic Region

- Quality education for all
- Decent working conditions and sustainable economic growth
- Sustainable industry, innovation, infrastructure
- Sustainable cities and communities
- Freedom of movement

A socially sustainable Nordic Region

- Good health and well-being
- Gender equality
- Reduced inequality
- Peaceful and inclusive societies
- Strong cultural scene
- Nordic cooperation as an example of sustainable democracy

Other activities

Selecting a few major initiatives does not preclude other activities in the countries, in the sectors, or within the Nordic collaboration. As described earlier, the strategy will not limit the work of the individual countries or actors on branding. The aim of a joint Nordic branding strategy is to supplement and strengthen each country's individual trademark, while also helping to present a clearer and more consistent image of our common region.

The Branding Model



All the Nordic countries work separately with national branding and public diplomacy initiatives. Each country also promotes its own brand through its tourist and business organizations, educational institutions, culture institutions, etc. The common denominator for these initiatives is that they showcase, to the world, the best of their respective country. This concerns business, culture and nature, but also the countries' positions of strength in areas such as sustainability, equality and design.

The aim of a common platform for branding The Nordics is to add value to the countries' own branding initiatives, not only when the branding involves a joint Nordic initiative but also when the countries brand themselves individually. Consequently, it has been important to develop a communications model that does not create communicative interference and cannibalize the initiatives the countries are already implementing. In other words, redefining the common perception of how place branding is planned and implemented, so that the Nordic brand will make a positive contribution to the common Nordic storytelling.

A basic character trait of humans is that, in order to understand and relate to a given situation, people try to connect the situation with the context from which they come. In business, politics and cultural exchanges of all kinds, the encounter between people and cultures is based on this mechanism. And it is precisely this mechanism that we will strengthen and develop when we are branding The Nordics in other parts of the world. For example, it is far easier for a Chinese delegation to understand Nordic competencies in elderly care and health care if we can refer to a Nordic-inspired elderly care home in Guangdong Province. Such examples or traces of our region and our competencies can be found all over the world. It is perhaps not possible to connect a certain area in Pakistan specifically with, for example, Åland, but it can certainly be connected with traces that link to other parts of the Nordic region. And because we in the Nordic region have a common set of values, these

traces can be used to tell a common story about The Nordics.

We are eight different countries, but when we consider each other, we are often regarded as one unit by the rest of the world. And if we change the perspective in the common branding initiative, from trying to get the world to see us as individual countries to instead show that we are already present in the world, it will suddenly become obvious that we all have a better chance of getting our messages across, and starting collaborations and dialogues, when we stand together as one region.

The strategy is simple. By looking at ourselves outside our own region, we have a better chance of branding ourselves as a single entity.

The concept is quite simple:

We will *not* be showing The Nordics *to* the world

We will be showing The Nordics *in* the world.

Target Groups



Branding of The Nordics concerns creating preferences for the Nordic region, including our positions of strength, businesses and solutions to global challenges, but also attracting talents, tourists and businesses to the Nordic region.

Consequently, branding of The Nordics has many different target groups, and the messages that work in China are not necessarily the same as those that work in Mexico. Branding therefore requires a combined effort by many different actors, including embassies and consulates, but also business organizations, companies and creative Nordic talents. These different actors are already active in their respective markets, and therefore know the end target groups better than we do here in the Nordic region. They also know what it takes to get the target groups to engage in conversations.

Therefore, the primary target groups for the project to brand The Nordics are initially the actors mentioned above. Secondary target groups are everyone who can be defined in the broadest sense as being interested in 'something Nordic', for example in culture, business, politics or innovation. Naturally, this group is enormous. But with assistance from the primary target group, it is possible to reach the secondary target groups.

Target groups

Primary target group:

- Nordic embassies and consulates
- Business and tourist organizations
- Nordic businesses
- Creative industries and entrepreneurs
- Previous project partners
- Nordic Council of Ministers
- Nordic organizations and associations

Secondary target group:

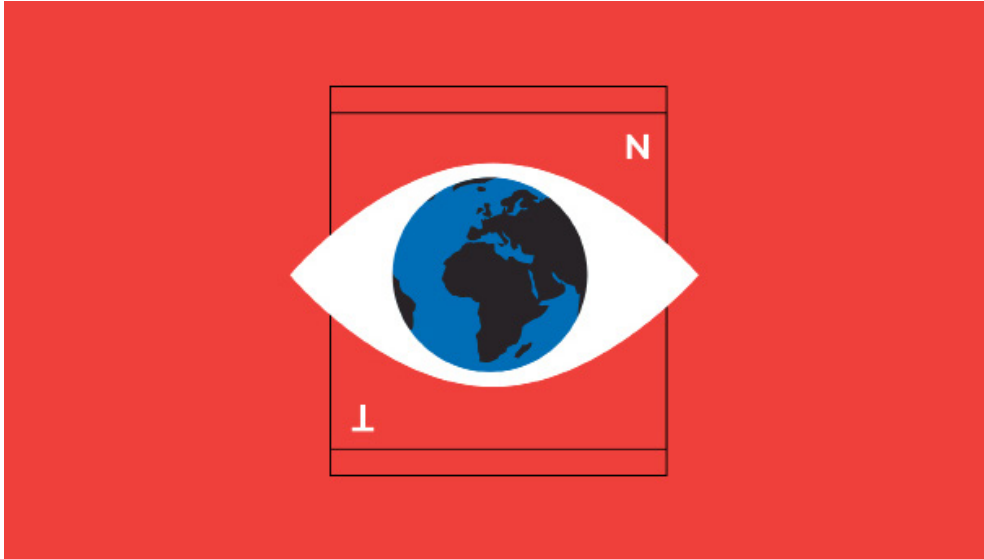
International media

Nordic media and PR

First movers

Everyone with an interest in the Nordic region

Strategic Initiatives



The Nordics will continue to be branded through the framework of the Traces of North and the Nordic Talks concepts. The Nordic Council of Ministers has initiated a number of initiatives that will support the actions of different actors within these concepts, to ensure that the common branding initiatives live up to the vision of *The Nordic region will become the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030*.

Connector role

One of the main aims of branding The Nordics is to promote increased Nordic collaboration on branding activities. The branding project must therefore work strategically to act as a connector between different Nordic actors. The project should aim to include all relevant partners in the process of branding activities, thereby bringing a wider range of Nordic actors/competencies into play and ensuring that actors think across sectors in their initiatives.

This involvement will also help to ensure the common Nordic narrative, and that the initiatives will be linked to ongoing political initiatives, such as presidency programs and prime ministers' initiatives.

Traces of North

We are turning traditional place branding upside down, by focusing the branding initiative on all the traces that the Nordics have left in the world. A trace can be large or small. They can be anything from a feeling and a mindset to a building or a product. What is important is that a trace always have more than just a geographical link – it relates to and is a carrier of the Nordic values;

trust, equality, sustainability, innovation and openness.

We call the concept *Traces of North*.

Traces of North has, and will continue to, shed light on Nordic competencies and our common values, consequently making it easier for the Nordics to engage in dialogue with the world. In other words, a trace is a catalyst that helps to promote dialogue with people, businesses and organizations outside our own region, and thereby help to build up preferences for The Nordics. Traces of North works as feel-good content for our social media, showing the world that the Nordics is not just a geographical area - it's much greater than that.

Nordic Talks

Nordic Talks is a new concept, in line with The Nordics' ambition to inspire dialogue and collaboration with the world around us and designed to support the Nordic Council of Ministers' vision towards 2030; that the Nordic region will become the most sustainable and integrated region in the world. When the Nordic Talks concept was evaluated in 2021, a survey of the recipients of Nordic Talks grants show a high degree of satisfaction with the format and help offered. Respondents, a mix of embassies, tourism organizations and the arts and sciences etc., clearly indicate that working with Nordic Talks facilitates Nordic cooperation abroad, helps them reach new audiences and make new contacts in innovative ways, and provides effective ways to boost outreach by combining national and Nordic forces. The positive feedback and results have led to the active decision that a large focus of the International Branding initiative lies on Nordic Talks.

Nordic Talks is a series of live talks and podcast episodes addressing the biggest global challenges we as human beings are facing. Through conversations with some of the brightest minds in the Nordics and their counterparts from around the world we want to inspire each other to act – for a better, more sustainable future. By starting conversations about the challenges, we face as a global community, such as climate change, social inequality and biodiversity loss, we are not only meeting the world in a dialogue, we also set the Nordic perspective on the global agenda.

Nordic Talks occur worldwide, and anyone with a good idea for a talk can apply for funding. We welcome both online and offline events and encourage both independently organized talks as well as plug-ins to existing events, such as festivals or conferences. The format is a plug-and-play, where guidelines and materials can be retrieved directly from the Nordic Talks toolbox. The aim is to offer a concept/tool for Nordic embassies and other Nordic stakeholders that will make it easier for them to brand The Nordics while reaping the communicative benefits afforded by being part of something bigger. This inclusive, interactive and hands-off approach to place branding is what makes the Nordic branding project so unique.

One of the strategic aims behind Nordic Talks is to enable as many as possible to talk about the Nordics, our values and our strategic focus areas. Simply because it always works better to have someone from the outside speak highly about you, rather than doing it yourself - especially when those who speaks highly about you is the Executive Director of UN Women, a European Commissioner or a world-renowned author. Our speakers become our brand ambassadors – both those who have a Nordic passport and those who don't – and in return we amplify their voices and share their ideas worldwide. In other words, they amplify our voice and we amplify theirs, making 1+1=3. This strategic aim is what makes it possible for ideas and innovation to spread from Tokyo to LA and Svalbard to Somaliland.

In addition to being based on the Nordic Values, each Nordic Talks are formed on the backbone of these four dogmas:

1. The Nordics in dialogue with the rest of the world.

Nordic Talk is a conversation between at least one Nordic citizen and at least one speaker holding a passport from outside the Nordic Region. By bringing together people from around the world with different perspectives, we ensure curious conversations in which we exchange thoughts and ideas.

2. Facilitate dialogue.

Nordic Talks is about starting conversations, not monologues. We believe that action and inspiration thrive in a setting that facilitates an open and curious conversation.

3. Address the Sustainable Development Goals.

In order to live up to the Nordic Co-operation vision 2030, both the topic and the event must reflect the SDGs and their message. We want to inspire action and should lead by example.

4. Inspire To Act!

How can we act on this issue? Every Nordic Talk must provide the audience with tangible actions that they can implement in their daily lives starting right now.

Podcast:

Nordic Talks are always recorded as a sound recording, and most often also a live video stream, consequently lengthening their lifespan, both as an event and a potential podcast. When Nordic Talks organizers stream their live events, we amplify their voices by cross-streaming and re-sharing to the best of our abilities. After each Nordic Talks event, the sound recordings are assessed to see if they fit into the podcast format. Those who fit the requirements are turned into an exclusive podcast episode, featuring the highlights of the independently organized live talk. Re-sharing some of the best content as a podcast episode allows the dialogue to move across borders and oceans. Additionally, the recordings make the great ideas shared on each talk easy to share through digital media.

Social media:

Social media is an essential communication platform, as it enables The Nordics to enter into a dialogue with the rest of the world and share content and results beyond the Nordic region. Through Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, Nordic Talks promotes its upcoming live events, podcast episodes, speakers and their quotes, and much more, directly with both the primary and the secondary target groups. Prior to a podcast episode launch, we send out a communication package to the organizers of the live events to help them share the great content. In that way, we have a mutually beneficial relationship and act as each other's brand ambassadors. Again, with a mentality that $1+1=3$.

Website:

A website has been created and are consistently updated to be able to better communicate our live events and podcast episodes, with our stakeholders and audiences. Nordic Talks website: www.nordictalks.com

Even during a global pandemic, Nordic Talks has managed to travel from Svalbard to Turkey and from Estonia to the U.S. and have inspired people at a time where it was much needed. Despite being in its starting phase, Nordic Talks has managed to host

more than 100 live talks, resulting in 30 podcast episodes. Nordic Talks has, and will continue to, initiate conversations about the Nordic region, our values and strategic focus areas.

Open Calls for Nordic Talks

In order to activate the Nordic brand out in the world, and thereby reach the end target groups for the branding initiative, input and commitment is required from many different actors. Nordic Talks aims to be an open concept, where the best ideas and thoughts are brought to life. Therefore, everyone is invited to apply for a Nordic Talks grant through our Open Calls. Through Open Calls, Nordic embassies and other Nordic stakeholders can apply for financial and content-related assistance for projects that can help to tell the Nordic story, place a focus on our values, and promote the strategic focus areas.

Through Open Calls, Nordic Talks has been able to engage global citizens who all have a Nordic agenda and find inspiration in the Nordic values. Moreover, the Open Calls concept has assisted the International Branding Strategy with creating new Nordic collaborations across countries. The branding project prioritizes applications with a strong Nordic narrative that can help bring about change and attract attention.

Summary of the branding model

WHY We want to inspire other people to see life through the Nordic perspective, based on the values of openness, trust, creativity, sustainability and equality. Additionally, we want to further Nordic Co-operation's vision to become the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030.

HOW By inspiring the world to see life through the Nordic perspective and by meeting the world in dialogue and share our knowledge across country borders, we are able to set the Nordic perspective on the global agenda.

WHAT We will use our concepts, Traces of North and Nordic Talks, to start these conversations in collaboration with Nordic embassies and other Nordic stakeholders.

Larger branding initiatives and events

Through its active years, Nordic Talks have supported and contributed to some of the biggest international events and initiatives, such as the United Nations Climate Change Conferences, SXSW Conference and Festivals, as well as Nordic cultural initiatives in the UK and Canada.

The branding project will continue to do so, in interaction with this strategy.

Evaluation

Before the duration of this strategy ends in 2024, the project will be the subject of a thorough evaluation. Based on this evaluation, an assessment will be made as to whether and, if so, in which form, the project will be continued.

About this publication

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Nordic co-operation

Nordic co-operation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, economics and culture and plays an important role in European and international forums. The Nordic community strives for a strong Nordic Region in a strong Europe.

Nordic co-operation promotes regional interests and values in a global world. The values shared by the Nordic countries help make the region one of the most innovative and competitive in the world.

The Nordic Council of Ministers

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