

CARING ECONOMICS AND THE NORDIC MODEL

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Abstract

Faced with the current spectrum of global crises, Riane Eisler's suggestions for socio-economic and ecological solutions are embedded in the theoretical concept of caring economics (Eisler, 2017). The concept of caring economics was developed alongside feminist positions, mainly from a United States angle, based on the welfare state systems of the Nordic countries. The study presented in this article focused on the underlying understanding of caring economics from a Nordic perspective. Based on an explanation of the Nordic Model, this article outlines the theoretical presentation of caring economics, which was scrutinized in the framework of a qualitative pilot study. Data was collected from interviews with 20 scientists from Norway, Sweden, and Finland. Three central statements of the interviews are presented and discussed with respect to Eisler's theoretical assumptions. Although Eisler's theses have been largely confirmed, the emphasis of the interviewees on the importance of cooperation is in slight contrast to the "caring" elements of empathy and compassion. The study indicates that further research should focus on investigating the importance of cooperation, especially in the context of trust, as a specifically Nordic element of the social state idea.

Keywords: Caring Economics, Partnership, Nordic Model, Cooperation, Trust

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INTRODUCTION

Given the current political, military, and environmental crises, global political stability seems increasingly vulnerable. However, the ecological and economic issues

as well as the question of social justice and security are global challenges. Thus, they have to be scrutinized and solved on a broad global scale. As the neoliberal developments of the past 30 years can be seen as broadly responsible for the effects depicted above, neoliberalism is not a viable means to a solution (e.g. Eisler, 2007, 2014; Alestalo, Hort & Kuhnle 2014). Economic and social alternatives are suggested by representatives of the “The Commons” such as Elinor Ostrom (2008; 2012), Niko Paech (2012), Christian Felber (2018), Silke Helfrich (2016), Kate Raworth (2017), and many others. Riane Eisler’s concept of Caring Economics, which she elaborates on in the *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics* (2007) can be assigned to the same tradition. Eisler’s concept, however, is appealing from the author’s German perspective for two reasons: (i) the exemplified illustration of the theoretical concepts of the Nordic countries, which show many similarities to Germany but are distinct in certain issues, especially in terms of social security; (ii) the highly interdisciplinary systemic approach including economical, political, social, and neurological research and empirical results.

Eisler refers to the Nordic countries as an example of partnership-oriented societies. In contrast, in her model she outlines the antipode as well: domination-oriented societies. As the author was intrigued by the extent of interdisciplinarity in Eisler’s approach, the theoretical-analytical frame of reference, and the empirical suggestions, a pilot study was done in 2016 to examine Eisler’s premises about the model character of Nordic countries. The qualitative study of 20 scientists from Norway, Sweden, and Finland was motivated by the question of whether and, if so, which aspects of, caring economics could be transferred to other societies, especially Germany - a premise that Eisler’s model implied. The results of the qualitative content analysis largely confirm Eisler’s theoretical assumptions: The “caring” motif is widely implemented in the welfare state concept of the Nordic countries. Furthermore, interview partners in Norway and Finland are investigating elements of it in two independent research projects. In Norway, Nina Witoszek and Atle Midttun are exploring a concept called “Ecomodernity” (Midttun & Witoszek, 2016). In Finland, Anne Birgitta Pessi is head of the “Co-care” and “Co-passion” projects (Pessi & Hakanen, 2018). The Norwegian as well as the Finnish projects are examining

the motivations and practical realization of “care” from economic, anthropological, and sociological perspectives.

In addition, the notion of cooperation was explicitly emphasized in the interviews. Cooperation was outlined as being founded on the elements of equality, solidarity, and trust - elements also stressed by Eisler. The roots of these frames of orientation for Nordic societies were metatheoretically reflected on and discussed by the interviewees. From a sociological perspective, arguments were put forward based on institution theory. Nevertheless, the emergence of the institutions responsible for the success of the Nordic Model was repeatedly explained in terms of cultural and religious history on the basis of the strong Protestant influence. Another influencing factor repeatedly mentioned was the strong position of the trade unions. A further line of argument mentioned the geographical situation of the Nordic countries and its implications for the development of cooperation. In general, the overarching interdisciplinarity and complexity of sociology, cultural anthropology, economics, and economic psychology, as well as evolutionary biology, which was applied in the systemic model of caring economics, were only partially reflected by the interview partners. Aspects that could motivate further research can be seen in the connection between the strong importance of trust in Nordic societies and the neurobiological foundations of trust - especially in terms of cooperation and the importance of trust and cooperation in evolutionary contexts.

In contrast to the above-mentioned analytical categories, the interviews did not provide any significant references to the Nordic Model and its caring elements concerning the first refugee movements in 2015 and 2016, as well as the subsequent developments in Europe and the discussion about closing borders. As one of the strongest influencing factors, migration is transforming current macro-sociological circumstances and institutional structures, in addition to demographic change and globalization. In which direction this transformation will take place could not be elucidated on the basis of the expert statements at the given time. It remained unclear whether the transformation will consolidate itself in the “ingroup” by the closing of borders. Another direction of development might be that border closures are part of the temporary transformation process. The temporary transformation

process may break up distinctions of the "we" and the "other" and thus create new structures of caring economics.

The following is an overview of Eisler's analytical approach and a reference to the "Nordic Model". Subsequently, selected key arguments from the interviews are presented. Finally, a summary discussion and an outlook are given.

CARING ECONOMICS

Eisler's theoretical frame of reference is based not only on feminist roots, but also on insights into systems theory/systemics and neuroscience. In addition to the traditional segments of the market economy, the government economy and the illegal economy - she emphasizes the need to recognize the "life sustaining economic sectors: the household economy, the natural economy and the volunteer economy" (Eisler, 2017, p. 3). Due to the appreciation of care activities, Eisler expects a mutual influence on all social levels. Based on the conviction that economics does not emerge and flourish in a "vacuum" (Eisler, 2017, p. 4), Eisler anchors her theory assumptions in the "larger social system in which they are embedded": Due to the historical failure of the theories from, for example, Adam Smith about liberal market capitalism or Karl Marx about socialism, a consideration of social contexts and an overcoming of conventional sociological categories such as "socialist vs. capitalist, religious vs. secular, rightist vs. leftist, Eastern vs. Western, industrial vs. postindustrial" is urgently required. From Eisler's point of view, none of these categories describes "what kinds of relations - including economic relations - a particular social system supports" (Eisler, 2017, p. 5).

In *The Real Wealth of Nations. Creating a Caring Economics* (Eisler, 2007, p. 104), partnership systems are characterized by "democratic and economically equitable structure", "equal valuing of males and females and high regard for stereotypical feminine values", "mutual respect and trust with low degree of violence", and "beliefs and stories that give high value to empathic and caring relations" (see Fig. 1). Thereby Eisler sets a radical counter-design to the traditional concept of man

inherent to economics: the homo oeconomicus as adopted in *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith (1937). In her broad socio-economic and global ecological perspective, Eisler emphasizes the importance of human relations, including the "caring" aspects of social relatedness, mindfulness, and care as fundamental human characteristics. At the Kiel Institute for the World Economy the neuropsychologist Tanja Singer and economist Dennis Snower guided the research project "From Homo Economicus towards a Caring Economics", where they developed this concept of man into the figure of the homo relationis (e.g. Bosworth, Singer & Snower, 2016).

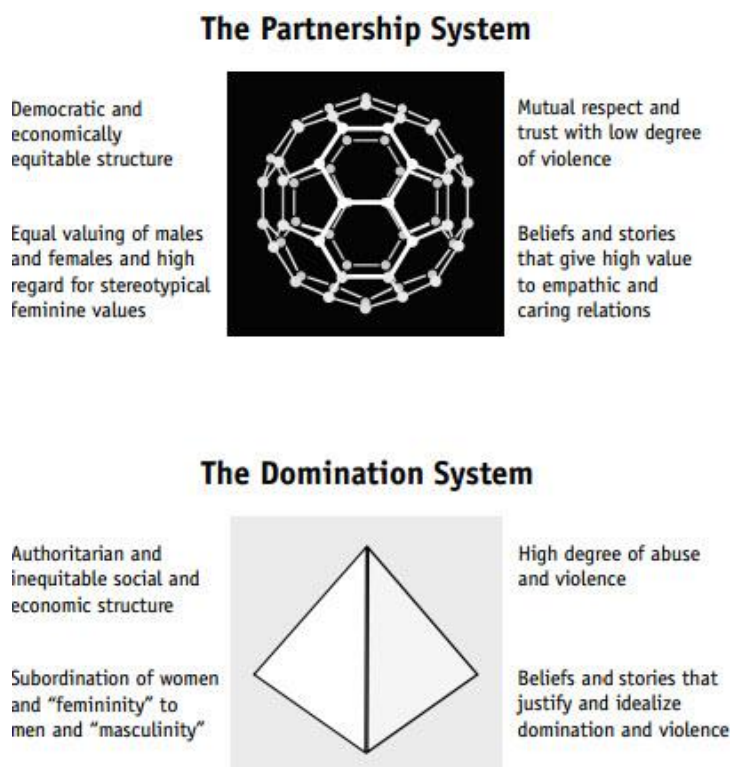


Figure 1. Dynamics of the Partnership/Domination Continuum (Source: Eisler, R. (2007, p. 104).

In contrast, the traditional domination system is characterized by social and economic inequality, as well as by gender inequality. It is described as a masculine power orientation based on functional mechanisms of fear and violence, with narratives glorifying violence and domination (see Fig. 1). In order to illustrate the system mechanisms, Eisler presents examples of countries whose social structures are traditionally hierarchical and domination-oriented (China or the former Soviet

Union). However, by explicitly referring to the dominance-specific characteristics of current neoliberalism, she doesn't exempt Western industrial societies from the case of domination orientation. Thus, she describes the freedom metaphor of neoliberalism as: "Neoliberal rhetoric is about freedom rather than control, but what this really means is for those in control to be free from government regulations so they can do what they want" (Eisler, 2017, p.7- 8). Neo-liberal politics is decried as a policy "in the hands of those on top" whose goal is mainly to maintain power, and which is characterized by an extensive armaments policy to preserve or expand this power. A further source of neoliberal power politics is seen in an alliance of the religious right and its conservative, hierarchically structured family concept, with the superiority implications of male family members over the female ones. On the basis of this "ranking" of the male over the feminine, neoliberalism represents another characteristic of dominance systems: the disrespect for the "soft" or stereotypically "feminine". Neoliberal economic systems are characterized by the fact that they fundamentally react to welfare state programs through restrictions. Examples are health and education systems and support programs for poor families, which serve the care of the human being (Eisler, 2017, p. 8).

With the two social core categories of dominance and partnership systems (Eisler, 2017, p. 5), two opposing patterns of relationship are described. They can be attributed to all system levels involved, from intimate relationships to international relations. In doing so, Eisler (2017, p.5) not only looks at psychological aspects of care, but postulates that "the degree to which a time and place orients to either end of the partnership-domination social scale affects every social institution - from the family, education, and religion to politics and economics" (Eisler, 2017, p. 5).

Concerning her analytical concept as well as her empirical references, Eisler is explicitly focusing on the Nordic countries. In her 2017 article "Roadmap to a Caring Economics: Beyond Capitalism and Socialism" she stresses the following characteristics of partnership-oriented Nordic countries:

Nordic nations such as Sweden, Norway, and Finland are the contemporary countries that have moved most closely to the partnership side of the partnership-domination continuum. They have more equality in both the family and the state; a higher status of women (approximately 40 percent of their national legislators are female); and concerted efforts to leave behind traditions of violence: they pioneered the first peace studies and the first laws prohibiting physical discipline of children in families, and have a strong men's movement to disentangle 'masculinity' from its equation with domination and violence. (Eisler, 2017, p. 8-9).

Besides feminist perspectives, Eisler's global systemic approach comprises a complex theoretical framework. The strength of her approach lies in the integration of current systemic, neuroscientific, biological, and evolutionary-theoretical insights that justify and further develop her arguments.

Before referring to the empirical results of the current pilot study, the Nordic Model is presented below. Eisler largely relies on it, even if she does not name it explicitly.

THE "NORDIC MODEL"

Within the enhanced welfare state typology of Esping-Andersen (1993), the Nordic countries are classed as the "social-democratic" type of welfare regime, different from the "liberal" (e.g., Britain, USA), "conservative" (e.g., Germany, France), and "mediterranean" regimes (e.g. southern Europe). In terms of their welfare systems, the Nordic countries form an independent typology whose characteristics are known as the Nordic Model. Despite the relatively high country-specific variance within the social-democratic typology of the Nordic countries, it can still serve as a rudimentary framework: according to Maass (2015, p.21), "the historical genesis [...] shows longer social-democratic reigns and close cooperation. Despite all the country specifics - in historical genesis, politics, economy and society - the Nordic societies are characterized by a number of similar structural elements, which allow for speaking of speak of a Nordic Model."

The literature on the Nordic Model repeatedly points to the constructivistic character of this phenomenon of social welfare regimes (for example, Lundberg, 2014; Henningsen, 2014). What is astonishing, however, is that the interpretation of the term and its ideological roots within the Nordic countries and within the party landscapes have escalated into “cultural wars” (Alestalo, Hort, & Kuhnle, 2014, p.121). In 2011 the term “Nordic Model” was even patented by the Swedish Social Democrats (Lundberg, 2014, p. 92). Even though this procedure was interpreted very ambivalently, it illustrates the political relevance of the Nordic Model.

Historically, the Nordic Model describes its own, third Nordic way of social and economic and socio-political structuring - beyond capitalism and socialism (Lundberg 2014, p.95). According to Maass (2015, p.15), one particular current characteristic is a pronounced social partnership with strong trade union commitments, whereby collective bargaining regulations are given priority to legal regulations. "A high level of competitiveness and innovation on the basis of free, largely unregulated markets with strong ownership merges with high, collective social risk protection, a stable, consolidated banking sector and a dual tax system (high individual income and low capital taxation)" (Maass, 2015, p. 1). High values in trust, a stable understanding of democracy and solidarity, and low levels of corruption form further characteristics of the Nordic Model. These constitutive elements are reflected in the socio-political profile of Nordic countries as tax-financed welfare states with universal rights. The welfare state "not only ensures well-equipped social networks and a strong public service sector and education system, but also a high level of female employment and gender equality" (Maass 2015, p. 1-2).

Based on a variety of historical changes that the Nordic countries have mastered, and perhaps due to the high plasticity (Lundberg, 2014, p.101) and pragmatism inherent in this model, Alestalo, Hort, and Kuhnle conclude:

Despite transient economic downturns, Scandinavian countries have so far managed to combine high taxes, low social and economic inequality, and comprehensive welfare systems with good (even very satisfied) economic

growth. Crucial to this apparent success story was the ability to reform the welfare state, adapting it to demographic and economic challenges, and thereby maintaining economic dynamics. A broad commitment to the common good has been demonstrably accompanied by good economic and stable political development in times when Scandinavia has been increasingly confronted with globalization. (Alesto, Hort, & Kuhnle, 2013, p. 128).

The international assessment of these welfare structures tends to be either overemphatic in appraisal of the "the secret of their success" in *The Economist* (Wooldridge, 2013) or harsh criticism of the "Scandinavian miracle" in *The Guardian* (Booth, 2014). During the U.S. presidential campaign in 2016, the Nordic countries were given high attention by the Democratic Party's presidential candidate, Bernie Sanders. Currently, Nordic countries almost exclusively dominate the ranking of the happiest countries in the world. Finland is in first place, followed by Denmark, Norway, and Iceland (Helliwell, Layard & Sachs 2019).

From an American perspective, Riane Eisler highlights in particular the Nordic social security systems and services such as child care, universal health care, care of the elderly, and generous child benefit arrangements. Eisler (2017, pp. 8-9) depicts the Nordic policy of caring as one of the main causes of poverty reduction after the great economic crises of the early 20th century, as well as the current high standard of living in the Nordic countries.

Although Eisler is aware that the Nordic countries must not be idealized, she points to the absence of large differences in income and of gaps between rich and poor - classic characteristics of domination-oriented societies. In addition, she emphasizes low crime rates and high longevity statistics. Referring to McKenna & Miller (2016), she cites another empirical feature of Nordic countries' educational status: "They are the world's most literate nations, as measured by both behaviors and supporting resources, as well as library and computer availability" (Eisler 2017, p. 9). Besides the social component of caring relationships, environmental aspects play a central role in the countries' holistic approach, for example, emphasizing ecological industries such as Sweden's "Natural Step."

In addition, Eisler stresses the experiments of democratic corporate governance in Nordic companies, participatory enterprise structures, and features of self organizational units. Furthermore she sees elements of partnership systems being realized with regard to the historical cooperative negotiation traditions: "Moreover, Nordic nations have a long history of business cooperatives - jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprises that, as one of their guiding principles, have concern for the community in which they operate. These cooperatives have also been heavily involved in renewable energy projects" (Eisler, 2017, p. 9).

In large parts and in relation to certain historical periods, the expert assessment from the pilot study conforms with Eisler's interpretations from a political, sociological, and economic perspective. From an international comparative perspective, a low level of gender discrimination, a high employment rate of women, and equal pay for equal work were confirmed as well. Radically different and grounded in theory, however, are the conclusions that Eisler draws from the characteristics of the Nordic societies. She considers the equality of men and women as a prerequisite for the emergence of caring economics.

"The Nordic nations' success has sometimes been attributed to their relatively small and homogeneous populations, and in Norway's case to rich supplies of fossil fuels. But small, homogeneous societies such as some oil-rich Middle-Eastern nations, where absolute conformity to one religious sect and one tribal or royal head is demanded, have large gaps between haves and have-nots and other inequities characteristic of domination systems. So, we have to look at other factors to understand why Nordic nations moved out of poverty and developed a prosperous, more caring and equitable economic system in a relatively short time. When we do, we see that what made these nations successful was that moving toward the partnership configuration made it possible for them to become what they sometimes call themselves: "caring societies." And one of the core components of their more caring democracy

and economy, in contrast to the domination system, is equality between the male and female halves of humanity. (Eisler, 2017, p. 10).

In her argument Eisler is not only concerned with social structures arising from a fundamental equality, but primarily with the esteem of values, attitudes, and competencies which are traditionally referred to as "soft" factors or assigned to the "feminine". From her point of view, this implies that both men and women are committed to a universal health system and generous parental leave for mothers and fathers, as well as other political programs that give value and visibility to caring for people and nature. The high level of investment in development cooperation is also regarded as a transformation of these attitudes and values. They are perceived as a key to the development of the successful Nordic Model. Concluding, she stresses that neither socialism nor capitalism led to the development of the specific phenomenon of the Nordic Model:

This takes us back to where we started: the need to restructure economic systems in ways that go beyond the old capitalism vs. socialism debate. When societies move toward the partnership side of the partnership-domination social scale, women and the 'feminin' are not devalued, and this benefits not only women but also men and children of both genders. (Eisler 2017, p. 10).

Eisler finds evidence for her assumptions in numerous international studies that reveal a connection between equality and appreciation of women, with a high level of quality of life. In addition to a large-scale study by her own Institute for Partnership Studies (Eisler, Loye, & Norgaard, 1995), she refers in particular to the World Value Survey: "In 2000, this survey focused attention on attitudes about gender. Based on data from 65 societies representing 80 percent of the world's population, it found a strong relationship between support for gender equality and a society's level of political rights, civil liberties, and quality of life (Inglehart, Norris, & Welzel, 2002)" (Eisler 2017, p.11).

Nevertheless, the Nordic countries currently have to meet a variety of challenges. Alistalo, Hort, and Kuhnle cite "international migration, demographic change, the

need for fiscal stability, European integration, more open economies, changes in social structure as well as ideological and political currents" that have "shaken the once strong bastions of the welfare state" (2014, p. 128). Despite the Nordic government's main financial contribution to social services, one can observe a tendency of the state to withdraw. Private enterprise and competition, especially at the local level, are pushing the formerly strong state back: "Although universalism is still the backbone of the Scandinavian welfare state, for the last two decades it has to be said that the use of social services depends more and more on income." Similar to Eisler, Alestalo, Hort, and Kuhnle see neoliberalism as a threat to the open societies and economies of the North. International migration is also increasingly discussed controversially in the Nordic countries. The consequences for the welfare state are becoming increasingly evident: "Domestically, the broad political legitimacy of the welfare state can be partially undermined by demographic change and the loss of homogeneity of Scandinavian societies" (Alestalo, Hort & Kuhnle, 2014; p. 128).

PILOT PROJECT IN NORWAY, SWEDEN, AND FINLAND

Based on the global socio-economic and geopolitical challenges of our time, this article examines the following questions:

1. Can the Nordic countries actually be described as "partnership-oriented countries", thus testing the affirmative assumption of Riane Eisler's concept of "Caring Economics"? The underlying working hypotheses assume that an explorative investigation design allows the identification of a variety of underlying value orientations; historical, cultural, and institutional elements; and causal relations, which distinguish the specific characteristics of the Nordic countries. Despite the well-known and above described features of the Nordic model, the research design is aimed at identifying new connections and multi-causal correlations. For that reason, interview partners from Norway, Sweden, and Finland, the three Nordic countries explicitly referred to by Eisler, were

invited to participate in the pilot study. They were intentionally selected from a broad variety of scientific backgrounds.

2. Will the gathered and analyzed elements and correlations correspond exclusively to the Nordic context? If so, how will they correspond to the generalized theoretical framework of caring economics? Will they differ from Eisler's theoretical framework and/or provide additional insights?

In order to investigate these questions, an explorative, *hypothesis-generating* qualitative research design was chosen.

In order to scrutinize the question of whether Nordic societies, from their own perspective, can in fact be described in terms of partnership orientation as proposed by Riane Eisler, 20 scientists from the Nordic countries were interviewed as part of a pilot project. The expert interviews were conducted in April, May, and August 2016 in Norway, Sweden, and Finland. The scientists interviewed represented fields of sociology, demography research, medicine, nursing sciences, religious studies, economics, ethics, international cooperation, agricultural science, and anthropology. In addition, a (left-leaning) freelance journalist was interviewed. All the interviews were in person or online video by the author. Audio was recorded, and transcribed by an English native speaker.

The aim of the project was not primarily to grasp specifically Nordic structures, but to gain generalizable statements about the underlying values, structures, and mechanisms of societies that are said to show solidarity and caring in the sense of caring economics. In this respect, the interviews began with general and country-specific value orientations. In the second part they focused on structures, historical facts, and institutional references. The third part concentrated on possible neurosocial and neuropsychological meanings of narratives. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 2 hours. Some interviews had the character of an expert interview related to existing publications by the interview partners. Two interviews were continued on two separate appointments. At the request of some interviewees a rough project description was provided to all participants in advance. The interviews

were transcribed and analyzed according to qualitative content analysis subject to the regulations of Kuckartz (2018) and Mayring (2010) respectively. Understanding qualitative content analysis as a “method for describing selected text meanings”, the “description is made by explicating relevant meanings as categories of a content-analytic category system, and then associating passages with the categories of that category system” (Schreier, 2014, p.2). As the structuring qualitative content analysis can be regarded as the core of a qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2014, p.3), the following steps are repeated several times: “Familiarizing yourself with the material; Derivation of upper categories from the question / interview guide; Determining references / encoding units; Development of subcategories and category definitions; Testing the category system; Modification of the category system; Encoding the entire material with the revised category system; Presentation of results, interpretation, answering the research question” (Schreier, 2014, p. 4).

Concerning the foundation of the category system, different positions exist: Philipp Mayring, one of the founders of the development of qualitative content analysis in the German tradition, “emphasizes the need for a theoretical foundation of structuring dimensions” (2010, p. 92f.). Udo Kuckartz (2012), one of the authors of MAXQDA, a software tool for qualitative text analysis, is open to a mixed combination, “as long as at least some of the categories derive from the material and thus the fit of the category system to material is ensured” (Schreier, 2014, p.5).

The following statements relevant to the present research question were deduced from the categories (codes), which were dense in terms of content and focused on a broad variety of key aspects and the various disciplines of the interviewees. Some of these aspects were:

1. Equality, trust, and solidarity represent a central conglomeration of formative value orientations.
2. These value orientations referred directly to specific forms of cooperation and collaboration (eg. *dugnat* in Norway: cooperation for the preservation of the community), which were related to geographical, historical and political rationales.

3. The intention and objectives of the research project were repeatedly discussed from a metatheoretical perspective. In particular the question was raised whether the foundations and prerequisites for the Nordic Model should be considered culturally (historical and/or values) based or institution-founded.

Formative value orientations: trust, equality, and solidarity

Norwegian economist and tax expert Karine Nyborg emphasizes trust as a central element of Nordic economic relations, with a reflection on the structural conditions for its development. The idea of equality and the resulting solidarity is seen as a prerequisite for strong values of trust within society. She sees this in a direct context with the phenomenon of collaboration and cooperation:

Trust is something that is really pervasive to the Norwegian society. You'll find it at all levels, in all kinds of interactions, even in the marketplace. When people trust each other in the markets it's really easy to trade things, because you don't need to check and control everything. So it's very efficient, even if somebody is going to trick you every now and then. In a society where most people are reliable, trust is very [useful] - it pays. And perhaps there are three parts of this. It's not really about compassion. It's more about the idea that everybody is created equal. [That's] very strong here, which supports the idea of solidarity. This solidarity and equality is one part of it. Another part is trust, that we actually do trust each other. And whether people are trustworthy. [T]he third thing is this element of collaboration, which is linked again to the equality idea. You're not supposed to push somebody around just because he's more poorly educated than yourself. You're supposed to listen to him and think he is serious. I think that's perhaps the three most important elements when it comes to normative orientation and social values. (K. Nyborg, personal communication, 20.04.2016).

The relevance of trust, equality, and solidarity was confirmed in all three countries, with a slightly stronger focus on equality in Sweden and on the element of honesty in Finland. In all three countries, interviewees pointed out that these value orientations are still prevalent and form the basis of the welfare state model.

However, simultaneously a risk of erosion was observed with varying emphasis. For Sweden this was expressed most strongly: Besides the general risk of heading towards an erosion of the welfare regime, the regulations of the European Union, privatization, and commercialization trends were mentioned. In addition, people in Sweden were said to increasingly distance themselves from the value orientations and structural foundations of the traditional welfare state. Norwegian social scientist and senior advisor in the Public Health Division in the Directorate of Health, Tone Poulsson Torgersen, interprets this in the context of an intensifying austerity policy:

[I]f [in Sweden] they increase inequalities and they partly privatize some of their work insurance schemes, and if this process continues, the austerity policies are going to influence trust. In the short run it looks as a rescue plan for national economists, but I think in the long term it may erode social cohesion and trust. (...) But so far yet, we [in Norway] haven't had the same but of course, in many, many policy areas we have had changes in a more individualistic way. (T. Puolsson Torgerson, personal communication, 21.04.2016).

Trust, solidarity, and equality referred to specific forms of cooperation and collaboration (e.g. *dugnat* in Norway). Cooperation, in particular, was ascribed central importance in geographical, historical, political, and economical contexts. Polish-born anthropologist Nina Witoszek defines cooperation as the constitutive element of Nordic societies, basing it on the frequently quoted argument of homogeneous societies and harsh geopolitical conditions. One characteristic of cooperations is that they are structural elements that penetrate the societies both horizontally and vertically:

[C]ooperation is highly interesting because it's part of the Nordic Model. I think that all of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, and to a degree Finland - I don't know Iceland very much, but Iceland could even be an ideal example - have had long training in social cooperation. This is partly due to the fact that they have been relatively homogeneous societies, so it was easier to cooperate

and without any religious conflict going on, cooperation was relatively easy. Unlike, let's say, in very multicultural societies, where there are lots of tensions and cooperation is difficult. So, they are in this lucky position.

They have a long tradition of a very strong social cooperation, and the social cooperation goes across classes, meaning cooperation between the employers and the employees, cooperation between workers and the capitalists, cooperation between the trade unions and again the employers, and the social cooperation at the lower level. So, they can be called *dugnat* societies. *Dugnat* means they work for the common good, very often based on idealism. All these countries have this very, very strong and long tradition. It's partially justified by the fact that they've been living for a long time in very difficult ecological conditions, on the margins of the possible. Geopolitically, they were there fighting to survive with the very strong forces of nature and if you didn't cooperate, you were dead. (N. Witoszek, personal communication, 19.04.2016).

Despite the strong appreciation that Witoszek has for Norway's tradition of cooperation, she emphasizes another feature that is frequently mentioned (at least in Norway and Finland): competition. In doing so, she does not necessarily contrast cooperation and competition as opposites, but considers them as complementary, especially in the economic sector. Interestingly, however, she does not consider the basis of this correlation in competition, but in cooperation.

[W]hat is interesting about the Nordic Model is that there is a very nice balance between cooperation and competition. Of course, you have to have a bit of competition not to stagnate, and you have to compete successfully on the international arenas; you have to - your economy has to compete. But at the same time, this competition has been very nicely, beautifully modified by the cooperative efforts, by the cooperative mind-set. So, on the whole, you are programmed to cooperate rather than compete. You compete after you've cooperated. That's my definition of the interesting aspects of the Nordic states, which is worth studying.

Irrespective of this, she and a number of other interview partners regard the Nordic Model as endangered. In her own research context, Witoszek deals with the question of cooperation as an essential element of the Nordic Model, following the thesis of American evolutionary biologist David Sloan Wilson (2015) and Norwegian evolutionary biologist Dag Olav Hessen (Wilson & Hessen, 2014). They regard the Nordic societies as a model of evolutionary development and a kind of blueprint for the development of human society. Wilson, Hesse, and Witoszek follow the assumption that human social behavior in evolution is more co-operative than self-serving, which is the traditional understanding in evolutionary biology. Thereby they share one of the central theses of Martin Noack (2011) and other evolutionary biologists.

The consideration that behavior is co-operative, and its implications, are evident in Witoszek's research, especially as skepticism and concern about the survival of the Nordic Model are motivating her work. She and her spouse, Atle Midttun (2018), see a strategy in the Nordic version of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and caring economics. When asked about implications of the present political and economical situation, the globalization and the influence of the the European Union on the Nordic Model, Witoszek responded:

Yes, it is threatened. I must admit. That's why we are studying it. There is a group of international researchers now, including American evolutionary biologists, who are interested in human evolution. They believe that the Nordic countries have achieved something interesting in human evolution because they believe, these American evolutionary biologists, that cooperation is more constructive in human evolution than competition. So, the Scandinavian countries are a proof of it. It creates a higher quality of life, and better functioning institutions and all that. So, your question is very important, we believe that this Nordic cooperative Model is now under siege. It's challenged, by neoliberal forces, by the American Model, it's challenged by globalization, it's challenged by short time employment, by outsourcing,

by all kinds of phenomena; which are, actually, undermining this cooperative model and therefore we need to study it and to see and find how it can renew itself. And renew also the corporate social responsibility and preserve this care economy that you are talking about. Because this care economy is under threat. Even among the Nordics. It is under threat and it has to be studied and some remedies have to be proposed. (N. Witoszek, personal communication, 19.04.2016).

The economist Karina Nyberg describes collaboration and cooperation as a central element of labor and wage negotiations, and stresses their significance for the marked equality of income. From her point of view, the high approval of the population for the comprehensive welfare state is based on the idea of equality. By considering each individual as equal, the social welfare system functions as a kind of general insurance system that contributes to strengthening relatively homogeneous income relationships. The wage bargaining is based on a kind of circle, since it promotes equality to a great extent and thus causes solidarity.

So, the basic idea is that you have a sort of collaboration. You have a very highly organized labor market. With labor unions, with employer associations. Both of them very strong. And in several of the countries also collaborating with the government. So, the 3 of them have active interaction. This leads to a relatively equal distribution of wages before taxes. And then that, in turn, gives a very strong political support for a generous social welfare state. Because everybody is relatively equal. Then you can regard the social welfare system as a sort of a common insurance system. So, you have a strong support for that. And that, in turn, makes the workers strong in negotiations with the employer. Not all the workers, but the lowest qualified workers. The reason for that is that if you're bargaining with your employer, you're very low paid. And then you know if you become unemployed you will have a good social security payment. So, if he's going to pressure you to work, he'll have to pay you at least more or less at level. So that strengthens the equal wage distribution. Again, because it prevents the very low wages. So, it's a sort of circle where each part supports the other part. Since this circle supports high

equality, it also makes it easier to develop solidarity. Because we're more or less on the same boat, everybody. (K. Nyborg, personal communication, 20.04.2016).

The emphasis has repeatedly been put on the strong consensus orientation, which is held to be a prerequisite for the success of cooperations, including the overall labor market policy. In particular, with reference to the historical development of the Swedish welfare state, Swedish physician Mats Marshall Heyman outlined the historical development, stressing especially the 1930s and their historical context for the emergence of a strong consensus culture.

In the 1930s there was a system developed in Sweden that made the system less confrontative. It was outspoken that the labor market should be left to the parties of the labor market, the employers and the trade unions, to negotiate. And whatever they negotiated and agreed was transferred to law. A very, very important part of that was to see that when there was growing affluence in society generally, both the trade unions and the employers saw the win-win situation in this. And they had much more to gain from agreeing than from disagreeing. I think that was transferred to the political system and to society in general. I think the Swedish society is very much less interested in confrontation in many ways. We are really striving for, not perfect consensus perhaps, but we have a very narrow political playing field in some ways. (Heyman, personal communication, 07.05.2016).

For Norway too, the culture of consensus is emphasized and described by Marianne Takle, a social scientist who is conducting comparative research in a Norwegian-German research project:

You can also see that Norway is very consensus-oriented and the way to solve things, all from the lower level into the higher level. Comparing it to Germany, the polarization is much bigger in Germany. You see that we stand on different sides and we discuss. And you are not willing to meet each other in the same

way as in Norway. We try to find the consensus in the middle. So, the compromises are always there. You can also see people from the voluntary sectors going into the state institutions and vice versa. So, people move around in the system, from the voluntary sector on the left side or the right side and into the state's system. So, it's more of a consensus; it's easier to reach a consensus. (M. Takle, personal communication, 21.04.2016).

With regard to the terminology of “partnership orientation” as used by Riane Eisler, Hannah Bradby, professor of sociology at Uppsala University, sees a stronger anchoring in the idea of cooperation. “[T]he idea of... partnership sounds wrong to me although in Swedish it works better: *samarbete*, to work together, is ‘cooperation’ more than ‘partnership’, if we’re doing it in English.” (H. Bradby, personal communication, 10.05.2016)

Foundations and Prerequisites for the Nordic Model: Culturally Based or Institution-founded?

In addition to content-related aspects, the underlying intentions and objectives of the project were metatheoretically discussed. In particular the question was raised whether the foundations and prerequisites for the Nordic Model should be considered culturally and religiously (historical and / or values) based or institution founded. Repeatedly, this was expressed by humourous-ironic comments from the interviewees, that you would not find “better people” in the Nordic countries. “I think that’s perhaps the three most important elements when it comes to normative orientation and social values. I don’t think it’s really about more intrinsic altruism, or kindness, or something like that.” (K. Nyborg, personal communication, 20.04.2016).

And then you have these sociologists like for example, Putnam, who looked into social capital and what shaped social capital. There are different ways of understanding it. Some of the understanding is that it’s more from an individual point of departure. That if people engage in voluntary organization, if they care for the neighborhood, then you have social capital in the

population. (...) I also think now they have changed more the understanding of it. Because I think it is very much the structure and also the institutions of society that also influences our attitudes. (T. Poulssen Torgerson, personal communication, 21.04.2016).

The question of whether culture, religion, history, and values or institutions are to be considered as shaping social development, political stability, and economic prosperity reflects a controversial debate concerning the Nordic welfare systems. *Just Institutions Matter: The Moral and Political Logic of the Universal Welfare State* (Rothstein, 1998) represents a theoretical approach which plays a central role in sociology as well as in economics and political science. However, this author's suggestion would be to combine the contrasting positions of culture and institutions as follows: In general, the interviews confirm the assumption that institutions play a major role. However, the importance of the values, history, religion, and culture of a society is not denied. Rather, it seems that values, history, and culture play a role when they are converted or transformed into norms and narratives, "informal institutions" (Lowndes & Roberts 2013, p.57, 63). The foundations of these social norms and institutions were repeatedly located in Protestantism. Klaus Helkama, a Finnish expert in social psychology, explicates that Protestant roots are the basis of even contemporary Nordic norms and value orientation. "I think that Protestantism was a contributing factor for the formation of the norms and that's what keeps the Nordic countries' cohesion and functioning." (K. Helkama, personal communication, 23.08.2016). Martha Middlemiss Lé Mon, a British expert in religions and sociology at the University of Uppsala, adds the following statements: "The one being this idea that rights are to do with what you do; you can justify this point very strongly from the strong Protestant tradition of, you pay your taxes, you behave well in relation to the state. The state, in turn, looks after you. Which is very much the basis of the welfare state to one extent." (M. Middlemiss Lé Mon, personal communication, 12.05.2016). Anne Birgitta Pessi, a Finnish researcher in altruism, elaborates the correlation between Protestantism and the welfare state: I think there are these Lutheran roots. The church and the villagers have been promoting that it's part of being a good Lutheran citizen to pay for the taxes. But also the Lutheran ideal of

paying your taxes is part of your religious service, in a way.” (A. B. Pessi, personal communication, 22.08.2016).

Following Lowndes and Roberts, the authors of *Why Institutions Matter* (2013), it makes sense to regard institutions as “rules of the game” (p.9), thus “rules of society”. These authors describe a distinction between formal rules (laws and regulations) and informal rules of living together (p.46-76). Informal institutions are reflected in norms and observable in concrete practices as well as in narratives about the way societies should work. If institutions are defined in this broad sense, the Nordic Model itself can be regarded as an institution, namely the way in which Nordic societies function. It was evident in the interviews that disregard of a central norm - the cooperation and participation based on active participation in the labor market and society, for example via the contribution of tax payments - elicits a social stigma. On the basis of the informal institution of cooperation, which is repeatedly described in the interviews as the geographical and historical requirements of the harsh climate in the sparsely populated northern countries, a norm crystallizes through the practices of *dugnat* or cooperation. Thus, historical survival was secured. However, also in the present society, cooperation still plays a central role in organizations (kindergartens, schools, neighborhoods), associations, and other civil society formations. At the same time, the value or norm is perpetuated as a collective narrative. Cooperation is seen as “how we do it, how we live together” - as a common rule of society.

DISCUSSION AND OUTLOOK

The present qualitative pilot study was based on the theoretical construct of caring economics, a term coined by Riane Eisler, and on the exemplary representation by the Nordic countries. To a large extent, her premises have been confirmed, especially in international comparisons: Eisler identifies partnership systems ideally through equitable democratic and economic structures; through gender equality, mutual respect, and trust, with low degree of violence; as well as through beliefs and narratives that have a high regard for empathy and concern. In particular, in an international comparison and from a US perspective, the aspects of “just democratic

and economic structures" can be confirmed. "Gender equality" was also confirmed on the basis of numerous institutional requirements such as parental leave and continued pay, but was still perceived as insufficient, especially by female interviewees. Surprisingly, for Sweden, gender equality was described as a "myth" with reference to a sociological publication.

Traditionally flat hierarchies, ideals of equality stigmatizing the "salience, standing out" of the individual from society, also confirm the aspect of mutual respect. A tendency towards a low incidence of violence reflects the crime statistics in an international comparison (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018).

The element of "beliefs and narratives that have a high esteem for empathy and concern" is described in Eisler's conception of a partnership-based society as the fourth supporting element, and has been discussed controversially by some of the interviewees. Neither in the first, very open part of the interviews, which dealt with value orientations of the respective countries, nor on questions on the subject of empathy, compassion, and care, were these values of empathy and compassion confirmed explicitly and affirmatively. On the contrary, it was noted with mild irony by interviewees that "one does not believe that there are better people to be found in the Nordic countries." The only explicit exception is the Finnish altruism researcher Anne Birgitta Pessi:

I'd say Finland as a country or sort of society, the first word that comes to my mind as a Nordic person and Nordic scholar would be equality and care. Nobody should be left behind and alone so taking care of every single person would be the core value. (A.-B. Pessi, personal communication, 22.08.2016).

In this sense, the care aspect of the school system was named for Norway as well. "The reason to have no grades until the seventh grade is that "everyone should come along" (G. Ernst, personal communication, 22.04.2016).

The element of cooperation and consensus has been emphasized comparatively more strongly. The associated value orientation was portrayed in the interviews as a conglomeration of trust, solidarity, and equality. On the other hand, metatheoretical explanations for the emergence of stable democratic structures and pronounced welfare systems were described as being based on institutions. Apart from geographical particularities, the influence of Protestantism and trade union structures were ascribed an important role in the formation of these stable institutions.

Based on the current sociological and economic research based on the findings of social neuroscience or (social) evolutionary biology, it seems reasonable to work on the following questions as a next step:

- What is the significance of trust - in addition to the microsystemic interpersonal relationship - on the meso and macro system levels of societies, especially concerning business and economic aspects? Do the Nordic countries provide sufficient evidence for further research in trust studies?
- Are theoretical concepts referring to partnership orientation related to the results of trust research and cooperation? Do the Nordic countries offer clues for this?
- Can evolutionary conclusions on cooperation be illustrated using the example of Nordic countries?

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