

Wrestling with(in) the welfare state. An overview of Nordic Youth Research

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Abstract

The article outlines the development of youth research in the Nordic countries into a cross-national field that is characterised by interdisciplinary cooperation across national boundaries and openness towards different international strands. The field is structurally conditioned by the strong welfare states of the region. On the one hand, they have facilitated varied research into the living conditions, transition and attitudes of young people, and on the other hand, these bonds have created considerable tension between the clientelist perspective of the welfare state and more autonomous positions of youth researchers that have stressed the agency of young people and youth cultures. The article argues that it has been crucial for the different degrees of success in the Nordic countries whether this tension has produced a schism between welfare research and culturalist approaches or a fruitful and dialogue-oriented strain based on the recognition of the different structural positions of researchers and public authorities.

Key words: youth studies, welfare state, the Nordic model, youth culture, agency.

Resum. *Lluitar contra/en l'Estat de benestar. Visió general de la recerca sobre la joventut nòrdica*

L'article explica el desenvolupament de la recerca sobre la joventut als països nòrdics cap a un àmbit internacional caracteritzat per la cooperació interdisciplinària que travessa les fronteres nacionals i per l'obertura cap a tendències internacionals diferents. L'àmbit està estructuralment condicionat pels poderosos estats de benestar de la regió. D'una banda, han facilitat una recerca variada sobre les condicions de vida, les transicions i les actituds dels joves, i, de l'altra, aquests vincles han creat una tensió considerable entre la perspectiva clientelista de l'Estat de benestar i les posicions més autònomes d'investigadors sobre la joventut que han recalcat l'agència dels joves i les cultures juvenils. L'article sosté que això ha estat essencial per als diferents graus d'èxit en els països nòrdics, independentment de si aquesta tensió ha produït un cisma entre la recerca sobre el benestar i els enfocaments culturalistes o una tensió fructífera i orientada al diàleg basada en el reconeixement de les diferents posicions estructurals dels investigadors i les autoritats públiques.

Paraules clau: estudis sobre la joventut, Estat de benestar, model nòrdic, cultura juvenil, agència.

Summary

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The Nordic countries have been fostering a flourishing research field of youth studies for about a quarter of a century. The several hundred researchers who have engaged in the field have not built distinct schools of approach or theory in youth research, but have rather excelled in interdisciplinary openness and combinations and in seeking improvement in theories and methods. In several regions of the world, youth research has been a meeting ground for different traditions, not least cultural studies and social research. In the Nordic countries social research traditions are strong and intrinsically linked to the strong welfare state of the area. This article has a double aim: to present some central developments of Nordic youth research and to explore the meaning and consequences of the strong welfare state for youth studies in the region.¹ In theoretical terms the perspective of the article is informed by the field theory of Pierre Bourdieu, but in a general way, which does not necessitate a separate discussion.

The article starts with a summary of the historical development that has formed the specific «welfare regime» of the Nordic region and its youth policy practices. Thus the gradual emergence of youth research from the 1950s is contextualised within welfare policy. Starting in the early 1980s the burgeoning field of youth research became rooted in the crisis of the Nordic Welfare society, while the consolidation of the field since the 1990s is presented as a part of the transformation of the Nordic Welfare Regime during a period of intensified globalisation. From this perspective the topics and approaches of Nordic youth research during these periods are explored, and the article ends with some analytical reflections on the potentials and limitations of the youth research that has developed within the «people's home» in the Nordic countries.

1. In rural areas, strong youth organisations almost monopolised the social life of youth combining sports and other healthy social activities with nationalistic and constructive participation in public affairs. In urban areas, YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) and YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) had stronger competition from unorganised leisure life, but gradually labour unions and the youth departments of political parties assumed part of the responsibility for integrating young people into morally sound activities. (Pétursson, 1983; Waara, 2001).

1. The Nordic Social Contract

The Nordic countries now consist of five nation states (Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland) and three areas with home rule (the Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands). The area features great differences in climate and until modernity, economic activities varied from hunting, fishing and reindeer herding in the north to agriculture, craftsmanship and trade in the south. There were also huge differences in population density, different languages were spoken and the cultural heritage was heterogeneous. The area was politically decentralised as the two kingdoms of Denmark and Sweden split into five nation states in 1905-18, and later three home rule areas received differing degrees of autonomy. However, at the same time the area became culturally closer and socially, economically and politically less heterogeneous, not least as a reaction to modernisation and to the threats from greater military powers from the East, South and West.

The Nordic countries were drawn into the whirlpool of modernisation much later than their neighbours, such as Great Britain, Germany, Netherlands and France (Sørensen & Stråth, 1997). Most of the area belonged to the poorer part of Europe until late 19th century, although modernisation had slowly begun to take off starting in about the middle of the century. The engine of modernisation was the export of agricultural goods and raw materials to richer countries like Great Britain and Germany. The agricultural production was based on a social structure with strong independent farmers, while the city bourgeoisie was rather weak and the nobility was hastily losing its grip on economy and politics. The late 19th century became a period of strong social movements based in the rural areas. Production and distribution was largely taken over by cooperatives, and religious, educational, social and political movements rose from the land—most of them based on principles of enlightenment and egalitarianism. There were national and regional differences. For instance, Sweden had a strong centralised state that was challenged by the new movements, while in Denmark the state was weaker, relying on minimal administration and developing in fairly peaceful coexistence with the growing organisation of civil society in matters of economy, trade, education and social problems.

During the last decades of 19th century and until World War I the economy of the Nordic countries prospered and gave rise to industrialisation, urbanisation and the growing importance of capitalists and wage labourers. Compared to neighbouring countries the class struggle was relatively peaceful. In Denmark, the basis for a new social contract was laid between the parties of the labour market already in 1899 by the so-called September agreement, which has regulated labour conflicts ever since, and which has gradually been adopted as a model in other Nordic countries. New social movements were formed by workers and by urban intellectuals and together with the older farmer movements they were gradually incorporated into state affairs.

Although the Nordic countries managed to stay neutral in World War I their economy was affected by it. The trade channels developed during decades

of expanding export were strongly affected and the Nordic countries had to develop a highly regulated war economy. Especially in Denmark and Norway the minimal state administration utilised the strong networks and organisations that had been developed for decades, and Sweden, too, started to include such networks into its stronger state administration. At the same time new players entered state administration: The economists. Starting in the late 19th century economists in the Nordic countries had in close collaboration with German colleagues developed ideas of state regulation and welfare development, and these ideas were applied to some extent in the World War I economy. These ideas were not particularly associated with social democracy, as their main protagonists were conservative economists, inspired by the «academic socialists» that had assisted Bismarck to develop the initial German social state. But the social democrats could certainly see some potential in this state regulation, and as the regulation was prolonged after the war, because of import restrictions, a growing number of young social democratic economists entered the state administration. In Denmark these young men became pragmatic bureaucrats, but Sweden fostered economists that balanced academic brilliance with pragmatic flair: people like Gustav Möller and Gunnar Myrdal.

When the economic crisis of 1929-33 took liberal governments by surprise, social democrats and economists were better prepared. Franklin Delano Roosevelt took the international ideological lead with his New Deal policy from 1933, but the Nordic countries could show more extensive practical results by drawing up a social contract that was based on the previous development of state and civil society to a much greater degree than was the case in the US. In the spring of 1933 new social contracts were negotiated in Denmark and Sweden. Unions, employers' organisations, organisations of agriculture and fishing and liberal and social democratic parties signed a packet of agreements, that among other things secured a steady labour market, increased social support and support to small independent farmers and fishermen. Furthermore, the administration of these measures was laid in the hand of corporate bodies, where representatives of the social classes worked together with state officials. A precondition for this order of things was that the organisations mentioned covered the overwhelming majority of the players in the field. Not only were the vast majority of workers organised by the labour unions, but also the employers, farmers and fishermen were organised so their leaders could represent them with strong legitimacy.

The most influential literature on Nordic welfare states (Korpi, 1983; Esping-Andersen, 1990) emphasises the crucial and often hegemonic role of social democracy. However, it should not be forgotten that the Nordic model of social organisation was founded in the 1930s as a social contract between three strong social forces: capital owners, wage labourers and independent producers in the primary sector. Furthermore, the model was not only administrated by the state but to a large extent through collaboration of social organisations based on these three main classes and on various social organisations within education, social welfare, public enlightenment and other areas. On the other

hand, this multiple enterprise became more centralised in the state during World War II and by the construction of state regulation that extended into more and more sectors after the war. However, participation of various organisations has remained an integrated part of this regulation and has in some ways been reinforced by decentralisation efforts since the late 1980s (Gudmundsson, 1997).

2. Welfare State Youth Policy

Youth policy developed within the general framework of the social contract made in the 1930s. At that time a host of social organisations and (semi-)independent institutions monitored various activities of youth work. Educational institutions had to a certain degree their own lives. While grammar schools and universities were state funded and rooted in strong traditions, the new merchant schools, agricultural schools and vocational schools were primarily administrated by organisations of the related professions. Organisations of Christian Youth, associations of rural youth and the youth divisions of political parties organised leisure and educational activities². During the 1930s public concern about youth grew, focusing on the massive unemployment of young people and the danger of extremist movements like the communists and the Nazis. During the war several concerns were raised, not least about young people associating with the Nazi occupation forces in Norway and Denmark and with the British and American armed forces in Iceland and about young people's participation in the resistance movements. More generally young people were seen as increasingly detached from the social cohesion and as indulging in immoral behaviour such as dancing to jazz music, having active sex lives and drinking. After the war, the question of moral rearmament of society was seen as a question of re-socialising young people and loose women. In all of the Nordic countries programmes for state regulated economic development were accompanied by programmes and interventions targeting youths.

In Finland, for instance (Nieminen, 1998), youth houses were built to provide conditions for healthy leisure activities and for citizen education of the new generation. At that time Finland was facing the huge problem of integrating Finnish Karelians, who had been ethnically cleansed from areas now occupied by the Soviet Union, and the communists, who had been mostly illegal since the Civil War in 1918-19. In Denmark, the Government appointed a Youth Commission in 1945, in order to examine the needs of young people and to propose a youth policy. This gesture was announced as a token of gratitude to the young people who had been the backbone of the resistance movement and as a necessary step to integrate youth into society after the

2. References in English are preferred in this overview. This implies i.a. that most of the articles in English, that are referred to, are based on books or longer reports in the native language of the author.

abnormal situation during the war. The Commission made several surveys about young people's work, education, leisure and values and wrote several reports but few steps were taken to implement youth policy, allegedly because of the deteriorated economic situation that did not allow for any costly measures (Sode-Madsen, 2003).

The Danish Youth Commission paved the way for more general social research in Denmark, and in 1956 an Institute of Social Research was founded. By that time such institutions had already been established in Norway, Sweden and Finland under the tutelage of sociologist like Erik Allardt (Finland) and Vilhelm Aubert (Norway). Until then the scientific input to the Nordic welfare state had overwhelmingly come from economics, although people like Alva and Gunnar Myrdal (1935) had extended their interests into social matters. After World War II a handful of Nordic scholars received American grants to study social sciences in the US and when they returned they coupled the American Structural-functionalism and quantitative methodology with the political aims of the welfare state. By this time the Nordic governments were regulating their national economies in a more systematic and extensive way than any other capitalist countries, combining economic regulation with closely monitored social policy and labour market policy. American sociology seemed to fit well with that practice, extending economic regulation to social engineering.

Despite the role of the Danish Youth Commission in the birth of social research in the Nordic countries, its interest in obtaining comprehensive knowledge of youths was not continued. The social research was sector specific and strongly connected to short-term social policy. Its central focus was the labour market and in particular, on giving social support in such a way that the labour force would be sustained through periods of unemployment, that qualifications would be improved and that sufficient labour could be supplied. Gradually women re-entered the labour force, and a great concern was providing childcare to enable mothers to take jobs. Welfare state activities were increasingly aimed at young people and there was a strong growth in secondary and vocational education and a slow growth in higher education. Furthermore, youth clubs and other forms of youth work were expanded. However these activities were seen as relatively unproblematic and dependent more on experience than on scientific knowledge. The status of pedagogy increased, so that it was recognised as a field of scholarly knowledge, but dealt almost exclusively with children, while research on youth concentrated on social and geographical recruitment to education from the perspective of social mobility (Hansen, 1965; Ørum, 1971). During the late 1950s and early 1960s large longitudinal research projects were designed in all of the Nordic countries, in order to map the generation that was caught in the first explosive wave of educational expansion, especially with regard to questions of upward mobility and social equality. These included projects like the Scandinavian Metropolitan project (which was never completed due to methodological and ethical problems), the «Generation Project» of the Danish Institute for Social Research (Hansen,

1995), and the Icelandic «Children in Reykjavik» (Sigurjón Björnsson, 1980), but most of their results did not surface until much later. Whereas phenomena like juvenile delinquency, youth promiscuity and teenage consumption, which fuelled academic debate in the USA (Cohen, 1955; Cloward/Olin, 1960; Coleman, 1961); were studied in the Nordic countries, they did not give rise to research but rather to public debate and works of art. In the early 1960s one of the most popular shows at the Royal Danish Theatre was the musical *Teenage Love*, which satirised mass consumption and teenage culture.

This picture was soon to change.

3. From youth revolt to youth research

In 1967 a youth cultural revolt emerged in the form of happenings and love-ins in the Nordic countries as in many other regions, and it was followed in 1968-69 by a more political student revolt. These revolts were in many ways an extension of the prevailing welfare ideology and combined egalitarian demands of equal access to education and democracy in educational institutions and the workplace with a liberal claim for alternative lifestyles. They were also a sign of the coming crisis of the welfare regime as they challenged the clientelism and the moral governance of the welfare state. During the 1970s they developed into part of a more polarised political, social and cultural climate, with radical students, artists and hippies challenging the welfare state from the left, while the challenge from the right came from populist movements and emerging neo-liberalism. Underlying these challenges was a structural crisis of the welfare state, with the oil crisis, economic recession and state expenditures on welfare that seemed to be growing out of control.

With the revolt of 1967/68 youth entered centre stage as problems and/or agents of change. The debate raged, and «experts on youth» were in demand. Psychologists and sociologists responded, armed with works such as Erikson's *Identity, Youth and crisis* (1968), translated into Danish in 1971, and Margaret Mead's *Generation Gap*, translated into Swedish in 1970 and Norwegian in 1971. The revolting generation soon rejected such perspectives and preferred to view its own rebellion within the framework of general politics, especially imperialism, and Marxism.

The student revolt in the Nordic countries was less spectacular than in Germany and France but it changed the universities more profoundly. The traditional elite universities were transformed in a complicated interaction between social democratic, liberal reformists and revolutionary students who demanded that universities should serve the masses. Especially the faculties of social sciences and humanities changed radically. Positivism and elitist cultural studies were questioned and at some universities they were overthrown and replaced by studies in Marxism and the living conditions and class struggle of the working class. Youth studies were only a minor part of this agenda, focussing on the dreary living conditions of suburban youth, and emancipatory child pedagogy was extended to the phase of youth. Strands such as radical

criminology in UK were adopted and youth work was often turned into emancipatory work or even training for the revolution.

The radical movement of 1967/68 was largely transformed into radical socialist or communist movements and during most of the 1970s they became established as a main force in cultural politics, university life and the political activities of the young generation. However. While the student revolt contributed greatly to cultural change and the transformation of everyday life, it had no major political impact in the long run. The youth rebels never managed to turn the working class into a subject of revolution, and gradually other categories of agency became more central. The women's movement came to the forefront and gradually youth attracted more attention as agents of change.

The transformation of academic life in the 1970s had implied, among other things, a turn from a discipline-oriented approach to a problem orientation and interdisciplinary approaches. Women studies were backed up by a strong force of liberation, and in addition, media studies and cultural studies became arenas for interdisciplinary studies that focussed on agency and change. In the intersection between these fields, youth studies emerged in the early 1980s as one of the promising new fields.

At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s two major contributions in youth research drew attention in the Nordic countries. The critical socialisation theory from Germany, represented by Lorenzer (1972), Bruckner (1974) Krovoza (1976) and others rejuvenated the Freudo-Marxian approach and extended it to questions of repression or emancipation of young people. Thomas Ziehe (1975, 1982) became especially influential with his theories of «new socialisation typus» and «cultural liberation». Ziehe emphasised the breakdown of norms and conventions that through early modernity had sheltered the individual and rendered his own version of the theory that the Oedipal conflict no longer could be seen as the root of the crises of youth. This should instead be found in very early socialisation and in questions of fragile selves, unstable relations and a perpetual search for identity and meaning. A major influence from the UK came from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham (Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Willis, 1977; Hebdige, 1979), where youth cultures were seen as active, albeit often misguided, responses to cultural and social change.

During the early 1980s these two strands were disseminated and discussed in study circles at universities and at the national and Nordic level. Inspired by this, Nordic studies soon appeared in Denmark (Bay & Vind, 1979; Hansen et al., 1980; Gudmundsson, 1984) and Sweden (Bjurström, 1980; Fornäs et al., 1984). Ziehe and CCCS were certainly also discussed in Norway and Finland but were met with more critical resistance and were later mixed with other inspirations in approaches that combined several strands (Bjerrum Nielsen & Rudberg, 1994; Lähteenmaa, 1991; Puuronen, 1997).

In a Nordic perspective the main importance of Ziehe and CCCS was to provide strong positions that gave rise to an exchange of ideas between youth researchers across national and disciplinary boundaries in the Nordic coun-

tries. Through the CCCS attention was drawn to the relation between cultural expression and social change, and a series of theoretical and methodological tools for exploring this relation were introduced. Thomas Ziehe offered a perspective that looked deeper and more radically into the relation between the individual and society. Both approaches provided scholars with tools for addressing current problems of youths and current youth cultures, and both approaches enabled Nordic youth researchers to detach themselves from the habitual welfare state approach of Nordic social sciences and to look for fruitful interdisciplinarity across the barriers between humanities, social science and psychology.

The impact of these positions consisted not least in the provocation they represented towards other approaches and the debate they caused was a critical debate. Feminist positions criticised their male bias and social researchers demanded that more attention be paid to the material situation of youth. Most importantly the debate gave rise to interdisciplinary discussions and cooperation across disciplinary boundaries and across the national boundaries in the Nordic countries. Sociologists, psychologists, and scholars from media studies, the humanities and several other disciplines and interdisciplinary fields were drawn into a common pool. Research projects that had been carried out within several traditions also became also a part of the area of youth research. A research field emerged.

In the mid-1980s a handful of Nordic youth researchers took the initiative to organise the independent multidisciplinary youth research network NYRI, which hosted biannual conferences, NYRIS, starting in January 1987 and developed a common bibliographic database of youth research in the Nordic countries. National networks were also developed. In Denmark two cooperating networks in Copenhagen and Aarhus started already in 1983 (Bay et al., 1985). In Sweden the FUS network («The Research Programme Youth Culture in Sweden») came into being in 1987 (Fornäs & Bolin, 1995). In Finland a Youth Research Society was founded in 1987 (Hoikkala and Suurpää, 2005). In Norway no such network was formed but instead, a state-financed research programme in youth studies, called Ungforsk, started in 1989.

In the early days of the 1980s these networks were characterised by an underlying tension between welfare research and youth culture research. The first pole was as a rule connected with quantitative research and the second with qualitative research. Some positions took a clear stand at one pole or another, while others tried to reconcile them. The leading voices in Denmark and Sweden (Bay, 1982; Drotner, 1983; Fornäs et al., 1984) defined their work as youth culture research, while in Norway this label was rejected in favour of a social research approach and a generation perspective (Öia, 1991) while Finnish researchers more often aimed at the integration of cultural and social approaches (Hoikkala, 1983).

It must be borne in mind that at this time the academic scene was much more a field of open battles, where supporters of different positions «shot» at each other, as opposed to today, when the battles are carried out with much

more subtle means, like citing one's friends and not mentioning one's enemies. In the 1980s the young scholars of youth research (they were almost exclusively under 40) were busy drawing lines and developing distinct identities in contrast with other positions.

However, Nordic contributions to the youth research from this early period onwards were characterised by efforts to draw upon a variety of inspirations from different traditions. Unlike the cultural insularity of bigger national states, like Germany, France, Britain and USA, the Nordic countries have been receptive to cultural and scholarly impulses from many different areas, and youth research has become an arena where this heritage has been cherished and developed. The windows have especially been open towards the four countries mentioned above, and another dimension has been added with interdisciplinarity as the basic rule of Nordic youth research, resulting in a polyphonic choir of inspirations to build on. Nordic youth researchers have never tried to build a distinct school, but rather to combine different traditions and push the development of youth studies a bit further, in small steps.

4. The 1980s: Establishing autonomous positions

Certainly, radical positions fuelled by the student revolt became a power centre of Nordic youth research, but the field was established in a period (the 1980s) when the political agenda was set by neoliberalism. The welfare state was not dismantled in the Nordic countries but its services were reduced, social and economic differences grew larger and social mobility through education came to a halt (Hansen, 2003). The radical transformation of the universities was turned back and traditional academic values were again cherished. However, at the margins of the scientific communities critical positions carved out their niches in interdisciplinary fields such as women's studies and media studies, where new radical positions of feminism, postmodernism and deconstructionism challenged the orthodoxy of the 1970s, mainly Marxism. Youth studies became one of these fields.

During this period all kinds of flowers and weeds grew in the garden of Nordic youth research, but it is possible to single out a few areas of achievement in the early period of Nordic youth cultural research in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Firstly, the origins of the field in the CCCS/Ziehe debate led to an early emphasis on *cultural practice*. This emphasis was taken in different directions. Several attempts were made to interpret how youth cultures had contributed to the production of meaning during previous decades (Bay, 1982; Mitchell, 1982; Hoikkala, 1983; Gudmundsson, 1984). Growing attention was given to active media reception. Kirsten Drotner emphasised in several works (Drotner, 1983, 1991) how young people create their identity and world view through active media reception. Bolin (1994) studied the distinctions made and tastes developed in subcultural consumption. The appropriation of rock music by young people has been studied in an everyday context (Fornäs et al., 1988/1995)

in national contexts (Gudmundsson, 1993; Lilliestam, 1998) and in wider cultural contexts (Berkaak & Ruud, 1992). Since the 1990s the emphasis in youth culture has largely been absorbed by/mainstreamed into the areas of media studies and studies of popular music, but its more omnipotent claims have not disappeared.

Another movement away from youth culture studies was already stated in an early platform (Bay et al., 1985: 178), where some of the leading Danish youth researchers stated that the goal of youth research was to develop a new cultural theory. This goal has later on been pursued most consistently by Johan Fornäs, one of the leading figures in the creation of the youth studies field, and it guided the umbrella programme, FUS, that Fornäs led 1986-92. The programme resulted in several PhD theses and other publications (summarised in Fornäs & Bolin, 1995) and the search for new cultural theory resulted in Fornäs' *Cultural Theory in Late Modernity* (1995). The result was not a new theory but a «polydimensional and heterological approach to culture in late modernity. The aim is to build bridges [...]» (9). Focus should be on «fertile hybrid crossings, free play and resistance towards power» (10). All in all the book contains one of the best presentations and discussions of cultural theory up to the time of publication, but at the same time represents a movement away from youth cultural research towards more general cultural studies.

Still another strand in youth studies took the opposite direction from CCCS. While the younger generation of CCCS researchers, like Dick Hebdige (1979) and McRobbie and Gerber (1976), distanced themselves from the historical materialism of the early generation and especially from Willis's Bourdieu-inspired analysis of homologies between cultural practices and class position, Nordic researchers like Roe, (1993) and Bjurström (1997) moved closer to Bourdieu's approach, applied to studies of media, music and lifestyle tastes. One of their central findings was that the old high-low division of culture is giving way to a new situation, where parts of popular culture have become part of cultural capital.

Nordic women researchers (Drotner, 1983; Bjerrum Nielsen & Larsen, 1985; Sørensen, 1985) picked up the torch of McRobbie and Gerber (1976) who criticised the male bias of youth studies, and *gender perspectives* became 'mainstreamed' into Nordic youth studies approaches from the late 1980s (Aapola, 1997; Tolonen, 1998). Some of the strongest Nordic contributions from this period combined a gender perspective in a fruitful and innovative way with post-structuralism, social history (Drotner & Rudberg, 1994; Ekerwald, 2003), theories of psychological development (Bjerrum Nielsen & Rudberg, 1993), and textual analysis (Ganetz, 1995).

While feminism became mainstreamed into Nordic youth research from early on, post-modernism never became more than a challenge. This can be partly explained by the early influence of writers like Thomas Ziehe and Dick Hebdige, who opened up for an understanding of the profound changes in culture and subjectivity in late modernity, without trying to turn these insights into a paradigm shift.

The Nordic field of youth studies comprised several other approaches in this period. For example, important studies were made in the history of youth and youth discourse (Guttormsson, 1983; Sode-Madsen, 1985; Thorsen, 1993; Wennhall, 1994; Stafseng, 1996). Studies of youth values were inspired by Inglehart's distinction between materialistic and post-materialistic values and explored the changes in values between youth cohorts and during the life course (Helve, 1993; Gundelach, 1995), as well as changes in political participation (Carle & Hermansson, 1991). Studies in immigrant youth and in youth in local communities were also carried out, but were later to become a stronger strand.

5. 1990, Into the hallway of the welfare state

They sentenced me to twenty years of boredom
For trying to change the system from within

Leonard Cohen

During the 1980s welfare policy in the Nordic countries was characterised by attempts to bring the escalating growth in welfare expenditures to a halt, through cut-backs on social benefits and reforms that reduced the cost of the health system and other public services. Welfare policy did not have a special focus on youth and the emerging field of youth studies, with its emphasis on youth culture, was largely seen as a marginal extravagance of research policy. By the end of the 1980s this picture changed. The economic growth of the early 1980s was replaced by stagnation or even a fall in BNP and the reaction was to combine restrictive economic policy with various measures to stimulate economic growth. Privatisation and New Public Management helped reduced state deficits and a renewed active labour policy, educational reforms and support to develop high-tech production and «the information society» were applied. The growing unemployment of young people and youth came into focus as a central part of both the problem and the solutions. All Nordic countries applied new measures to combat youth unemployment and reformed their educational systems in order to raise the educational level of coming generations.

Between 1987 and 1993, youth unemployment rose dramatically in the Nordic countries. Denmark, which had the highest youth unemployment in the 1980s, had the lowest growth, from 10% to 15%, while Sweden and Norway experienced a growth from 5% to 15% and Finland from 8% to 33%. Iceland had for decades had much lower level of unemployment in general, but even here youth unemployment rose from 2% to 10% in this period.

At the same time attention was turned to the fact that the education explosion of 1960-90 still had not reached a considerable part of the young generation: between one-fourth and one-third of a cohort.

Extensive reforms were made in secondary education in all of the Nordic countries in the early 1990s, supported by several measures aimed at reduc-

ing and preventing youth unemployment, which targeted youths who had already left school. In some cases, these youths were offered a second chance to return to education.

In this situation the Nordic welfare states applied youth research to illuminate the complex mechanisms of participation in education and the labour market. From the perspective of the states, youth research was just another branch of welfare research, and they expected figures and analyses of the factors that stimulated or hindered such participation of youth. From this perspective the youth cultural perspectives of the 1980s were not seen as useful. Within fields such as criminology and media studies youth cultural studies had to struggle with approaches that focussed on social control.

In this situation the self-organised networks of youth researchers were gradually and partly integrated into public institutions. On the national level Norway established an institute of youth research in 1989, and the Finnish youth research association intensified its cooperation with public authorities, a development that eventually would lead to the establishment of the Finnish youth research network in 1999. Nordic cooperation became a major impetus, as the Nordic Council of Ministers appointed an advisory group of youth researchers from all of the Nordic countries in 1992 and sponsored a Nordic coordinator of youth research. These coordinators, Joi Bay (1992-94), Ola Stafseng (1994-98), and Helena Helve (1998-2004) engaged in the organisation of the Nordic Youth Research Network (NYRI) and the biannual conferences (NYRIS), and they facilitated and raised funds for research projects that combined and compared studies in the five countries. In 1993 *YOUNG – The Nordic Journal of Youth Studies* was launched as a forum for Nordic researchers and for interdisciplinary dialogues with a grant from the Nordic authorities. It opened an arena where Nordic youth researchers could present themselves to the international research community, not only as individuals but also as representatives of a Nordic profile of dialogue between disciplines and traditions. Gradually *YOUNG* would attract scholars from other parts of Europe, and later other parts of the world, and it consolidated its status as one of the leading international journals in the field, when Sage Publications in London took over the publication of *YOUNG* in 2003.

This institutionalisation did not only mean consolidation, but also that tensions and struggles for influence and dominance became stronger. During the 1980s youth cultural studies had expanded without much contact with the welfare studies into the living conditions, lifestyles and attitudes of young people that built on the traditions of the 1950s and 1960s. The growing interest of Nordic governments in youth studies was not so much linked with youth culture studies but rather to social problems of youth seen from the habitual perspective of welfare research as part of social engineering. Through this lens the goal of research is to develop indicators of social development, especially of social dysfunctions that should be reduced by the machinery of the welfare state. This has implied strong emphasis on quantitative variable research, supported by qualitative inquiries into the immediate context of central variables

(Nordisk Ministerråd, 2002). A few widespread figures in youth research can be listed as examples of this way of thinking:

Example one. A central variable in studies of the unemployed is their educational level, and all surveys show that unskilled youth have higher unemployment rates than other young people. This information is used as an argument for more state expenditure on getting more young people into education.

Example two. Studies in young people's use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco raise questions about other elements of lifestyle and draw particular attention to the participation of young people in sports activities and youth organisations. Almost all surveys show that there is a considerable negative correlation between substance use and such activities. This information is used as a main argument for higher state expenditure on youth organisations and sports activities.

Example three. Local community studies raise questions about young people's attachment to their community and find that most young people are highly attached to it. Many young people report that their educational and occupational ambitions cannot be realised and that they experience severe external and internal obstacles against moving to bigger cities to seek education and jobs. This information is used as a main argument for public investments in local education and job development.

Of course, research into these issues is more sophisticated than this, but in the mechanisms of the welfare state it is boiled down to such trivia, and often the bulk of research funding for youth research goes to the examination of such questions. This is the case in my home country, Iceland, but in other Nordic countries it is also easiest to get public funding for this type of research.

This narrow perspective of public funders frustrated many of the founders of youth research. It became apparent that no funding was to be gained for large research projects dealing with youth research that departed from the knowledge development in the field. Such understandings were more likely to be met by the funders of neighbouring fields, such as media studies, cultural studies, gender studies and studies of popular culture, with the consequence that developments in the youth research field were transformed into new research questions that addressed general cultural issues or focussed on children rather than youth. There was a considerable brain drain from the field of youth studies.

Despite these difficult conditions, the field of Nordic youth studies survived and became broader and more comprehensive. The uneasy coexistence of welfare studies and the emphasis on youth as agents developed from a schism to a tension that is constantly present, as will be demonstrated in the discussion below of some recurrent themes.

The youth unemployment of the early 1990s drew attention to the huge change in issues relating to opportunities for youths in education and the labour market, so, just as in British research, the question of transition became a central theme. Advanced data from the bureaus of statistics mapped the huge

general changes in educational attainment. In all of the Nordic countries the percentage of young people who completed grammar school and a compatible general upper secondary education rose from 10-15% in the early 1970s to 40-50% at the turn of the millennium, while the percentage of youths completing vocational education remained rather stable at 20-30%. The so-called remainder group that did not finish any upper secondary education decreased rapidly in the 1970s and 1980s, but seemed to stall in the 1990s at a level of 20% or more. Through large quantitative studies youth researchers (Fauske, 1996; Skogen, 1998) and social researchers (Hansen, 2003) dug deeper into the social background of this change and found that the growth of the 1970s and 1980s had largely been carried by women's greater participation, while other social inequalities in education had remained almost unchanged. Young academics are still overwhelmingly children of academics, and the «remainder group» overwhelmingly comprises children of unskilled workers. A host of qualitative studies explored different facets of transition. Special attention was given to the minority who managed to reach upward mobility (Trondman, 1993; Elsborg, 1999) and to the segment of boys who seem most immune to educational offers and are hit by the decline of unskilled industrial work. Great attention was given to the changed subjective perception of youth towards questions of transition, and Thomas Ziehe became once again a major inspiration, together with Beck, Giddens and Bauman. Especially in Denmark these perspectives have made the concept of «new youth» (Illeris et al., 2002) a new mantra, picturing contemporary youth as individualised and constantly focussing on the choices to be made and the possibilities to be kept open.

The research questions of post-materialistic values and of cultural practices have been combined and transformed into an emphasis on consumerism. Identity is decreasingly shaped through the transition from sheltered childhood into pre-shaped adult positions or occupations, and increasingly developed through consumption choices (Falk, 1994; Wilska, 2003; Autio & Heinonen, 2004).

In the 1980s Nordic youth research was rooted in urban milieus, but gradually the situation of youth in smaller and often remote communities drew greater attention. Internationally such research tends to focus on the deprivation of youth in remote areas, who are seen as «reflexivity losers» (Lash & Urry, 1994) in the age of globalisation. In contrast, Nordic research has avoided automatically painting the periphery as deprived in comparison with the centre, and has instead seen it as different. The lack of job and study opportunities in remote areas is not only a problem but also a challenge that encourages mobility and creative solutions (Heggen, 2000; Paulsgaard, 2003). Globalisation by no means excludes young people in remote areas—they can easily connect through the Internet and satellite television AND at the same time enjoy rich nature and wide spaces (Rygaard, 2003). This less-deprived picture of peripheral youth in the Nordic countries reveals some of the most positive sides of the Nordic welfare state, which has aimed at ensuring that the people of the periphery have the same standard of living as the urban population and has

put extra effort into providing remote areas with maximal opportunities of education and cultural participation, at the same time as the older ways of living—for example, fishing, hunting and reindeer herding—are supported. Identities and life plans of youth in the periphery show ambivalent attitudes toward local roots and the urban magnets (Waara, 1998; Jukarainen, 2003; Yndigeñ, 2004)—ambivalences that can become productive or destructive in different circumstances.

Migration was a minor issue in the public and scientific debates of the Nordic countries until the 1980s, but has since then moved to the centre of the public arena as the most polarising topic of today. While the public debate is more polarised on this issue than on any other contemporary topic—between anti-foreign sentiments and multiculturalist attitudes—the scientific debate rather implies a tension between welfare research and culturalist perspectives. On the one hand, integration of immigrants is seen as one more task of the Nordic welfare state, which has successfully opened up for educational mobility of working class kids and for women's participation in all arenas and at all levels. The thought mode of welfare studies has been extended into studies of immigrants, not least immigrant youth. Quantitative studies (Hummelgaard et al., 2002; Lauglo, 1999) have examined educational achievement and integration into the labour market, with emphasis on the explanation of the apparent deficits of immigrant youth in both arenas, dividing their attention between problematic background factors such as the limited education of parents and limited command of the Scandinavian languages and indicators of discrimination. On the other hand, qualitative culturalist studies have mainly dug into the cultural meetings between natives and immigrants. Several studies have mapped the various «hyphenated» identities of immigrant youth who creatively mix elements of their ethnic background with elements of their host countries and international youth culture (Mørch, 2000). The emphasis can vary between the bridges built between natives and ethnic groups (Røgilds, 1995; Vestel, 2004) and the obstacles and young immigrants face in the Nordic countries, despite the alleged humanism of the welfare states (Sernhede, 1998).

In a long-term perspective, scientific debates often seem to move in circles—or spirals—as abandoned themes and positions are restored or reinvented. A recent example in youth studies is the comeback of subcultural studies in north-west Europe (Great Britain, Netherlands and Nordic countries). For more than 20 years the CCCS has been the favourite «prügelknabe» in youth studies, especially for their emphasis on youth subculture. This emphasis has been criticised for being male biased, for focusing on a disappearing trend in youth culture, for false constructions of symbolic wholes, for a reductionist view of the relation between material conditions and symbolic solutions and for an outdated conception of class as a basic structural element. Despite all these, and more, heavy attacks, subcultural theory has recently risen from the grave or, more accurately, has been reinvented, focussing less on simple homologies between material conditions and symbolic responses and more on subcultures as «taste cultures». This reinvention has been fuelled by the rise of

club cultures (Thornton, 1995), the hip-hop culture (Klein) and distinct immigrant cultures, and currently there is a wave of subcultural studies in the Nordic countries as well as in neighbouring countries (Perho, 2000; Jensen, forthcoming).

Studies of the democratic participation of youth were at the core of the first youth research in the Nordic countries, which was fuelled by diminished participation in youth organisations in the wake of World War II (Sode-Madsen, 1993) and ever since political and organisational participation has been mapped constantly (Carle, 2000). In the 1980s and 1990s interest was directed at the so-called «new social movements» of environmentalists and feminists (Peterson & Thörn, 1994; Gundelach, 1995), as well as non-formal subcultures or taste cultures (Bjurström, 1997; Bolin, 1998). Since the late 1990s attention has been turned towards networks and communications through the Internet (Svenningsson, 2001; Lövheim, 2004). Thus the questions of community, participation and networking are examples of areas where traditional welfare state research has been challenged by societal development and a youth culture orientation — a tension that is likely to create new empirical and theoretical developments in the near future.

Although the youth research community is in many ways more pan-Nordic than national, studies have until recently been almost exclusively national in their empirical focus, due to a large degree to the national systems of funding. However, a few Nordic networks and focussed seminars have brought about Nordic perspectives in such national studies (Drotner & Rudberg, 1994; Hoikkala & Waara, 2002) and even cross-national and comparative research projects (Julkunen & Carle, 1998). In recent years Nordic youth research has apparently become riper for undertaking and participating in comparative studies across all Europe (Drotner, 2001; Oinonen, 2003), hereby introducing new perspectives that often lead to fruitful theoretical innovations, as for instance Beccaria and Sande's (2003) concept of «rite of life projects».

6. Concluding remarks on the history and present state of Nordic youth research

The Nordic countries have had different experiences with regard to youth research, a fact which can be illuminated from two aspects of the field: first, how successful the different countries have been in developing a youth cultural field of relative autonomy and second, how the tension between welfare research positions and youth culture positions has developed.

In the 1980s Danish and Swedish youth researchers were leaders in the development of the field. Prominent scholars such as Kirsten Drotner, Joi Bay and Johan Fornäs raised an autonomous voice of youth research and demanded the recognition of academia and public authorities. This recognition was attained in academic life in general and institutionalised in the NYRIS conferences and the journal *YOUNG*. On the other hand, public authorities remained sceptical towards the emphasis on youth cultural agency that pre-

vailed in the field, and no universities offered to develop centres of youth research or even to establish chairs. The result was not only that the field was institutionally weak but also that a dichotomy developed between strongly autonomous culturalist youth research and heteronomous (i.e. governed by social engineering knowledge interests) quantitative research focussing on life conditions and measurable quality of life. The hostile attitude of governmental funders towards the autonomous positions led to a brain drain of ambitious academics towards media studies, cultural studies, education and the traditional disciplines and a decreased participation in activities within the field. Towards the end of the 1990s attempts were made to restore the strength of the field, for instance through the establishment of the Centre for Youth Studies at Roskilde University in Denmark, which was later moved to the Danish University of Education, and of a network of youth researchers in Sweden. Thus, a research field undeniably exists in both countries, but it still lacks autonomy against both the public funders and academia, and most of the players in the field are more strongly positioned in other fields and do not identify themselves as youth researchers. The voice of youth research is often raised in public debates but it is not reflected within policy making —except when it happens to reinforce the presuppositions of existing policy.

At the other extreme we find the field of youth research in Finland, which has developed from a weak and peripheral position in the 1980s into the strongest national field in the Nordic countries. The secret lies primarily in the reciprocal recognition of public authorities and youth researchers. The researchers accept the notion that their research should result in practical recommendations to policy, and public authorities recognise that youth research is not merely an instrument for public policy and needs to have its own voice (Hoikkala & Suurpää, 2005). Since 1999 the Finnish youth research network has coordinated the research of several dozen publicly funded researchers, some of whom are carrying out academic research as PhD students or research fellows, while others are engaged in applied research addressing current youth problems. These two types of research are often combined in various ways.

Somewhere in between is the youth research field of Norway. It is not as cohesive as the Finnish field; during the 1990s a centre was developed in a youth research institute (UNGFORSK) that later became a unit of a larger institute of social research (NOVA), but at the same time youth researchers were scattered around the many universities and university colleges of Norway. After the turn of the millennium a less centred network has been developed, with its own journal that has a profile similar to that of the Finnish journal. The field also resembles the Finnish field in the peaceful, although not tension-free, coexistence of academically and welfare state oriented positions.

The smallest nation state among the Nordic countries, Iceland, has the weakest field of youth studies, primarily serving as an instrument of social control (see Gudmundsson, 1999), and youth research is just taking off in the home rule areas of the Faroe Islands and Greenland (Rygaard, Gaini).

These differences can be explained in part by the different strategies of the research communities and youth organisations, and also by different traditions of how policy is based on knowledge in these five countries. Denmark has the weakest tradition for basing policy formulation on extensive gathering of knowledge, including research. Tactical manoeuvres in the multi-party system of Denmark complicate the preparation of reforms, and knowledge is often supposed to be a post festum confirmation of such reforms. In Sweden reforms are prepared through research but with a strong preponderance of social engineering approaches. In Norway and Finland government has developed a tradition of seeking different kinds of knowledge as a basis for policy making, with fruitful consequences for youth research.

In recent years the Nordic welfare policies have in many ways moved in the direction of more liberal welfare states, but it is still highly meaningful to talk about a Nordic welfare regime based on universalism and participation of social organisations. All five nation states have developed and fine-tuned their complicated mechanisms of social engineering in order to balance economic growth and welfare with a synergy effect. In youth life and within youth research, as in many other areas, the welfare state as a highly developed paternalistic «people's home», reveals itself as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it takes care of its population and calls for research that explores the life conditions, quality of life and expectations of young people as a segment of the population that needs to be taken care of. On the other hand, it turns the members of its population into clients, and researchers into the servants of the state, and it is sceptical towards autonomous research voices and emphasis on agency.

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