
The Nordic human rights paradox

An interdisciplinary workshop · University of Oslo, 11-12 December, 2012

Call for papers

THE PUZZLE

The Nordic countries demonstrate a puzzling ambivalence towards human rights. On the one hand, citizens of these five countries appear to enjoy a level of rights realization that few other states can rival. In their foreign policies, the Nordic countries pride themselves to be staunch defenders of human rights, seeking to promote human rights in bilateral development aid and advancing a progressive human rights agenda in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the World Bank. Yet, on the other hand, Nordic policymakers often – and perhaps increasingly – question the legitimacy of domestic and international judicial review of human rights within their own polities. Moreover, Nordic governments are frequently criticised for quietly sacrificing their foreign policies' noble human rights ambitions whenever they collide with national or corporate interests overseas.

Existing interdisciplinary scholarship underscores the puzzling nature of the Nordic states' relationship with human rights, as research has tended to focus on either horn of the paradox. For instance, comparativists in law and political science point to deep-seated traditions of Nordic reluctance towards constitutionalism, judicial review and individual rights. By contrast, students of Nordic foreign policy assert how these small powers have successfully carved out a niche for themselves as norm entrepreneurs supposedly extending domestic norms of equality and solidarity, while International Relations scholars treat the Nordic countries as comparatively exemplary cases of human rights commitment and compliance in both domestic and international politics. Taken jointly, these disparate literatures in existing research seem to reflect rather than capture the puzzle that the Nordic states pose in the field of human rights.

Thus, the Nordic ambivalence towards human rights deserves more comprehensive analysis, taking both the domestic and international domains of policy and law into account. Additionally, exploring this intriguing puzzle has a potential to produce pertinent policy implications, for these polities as they continually revise their human rights commitments at home and abroad, but also wherever the Nordic model is used as a point of reference.

THE ISSUES

For this interdisciplinary workshop, the organizers welcome papers that seek to unpack the Nordic states' possibly paradoxical behaviour in the human rights area. We invite contributions from scholars in Political Science, International Relations, History, Sociology, Law, and cognate disciplines. Treating the Nordic human rights paradox as a working hypothesis to be explained or entangled, challenged or qualified, we welcome papers that contribute to answering the following two questions:

1. Is there a Nordic human rights paradox? In particular, how is it manifested and how consistent is it across Nordic countries?
2. What can account for the paradox? What hypotheses and arguments would best explain it?

Moreover, we especially encourage papers that are *explanatory, agent-centred, comparative* or *multi-level*, in other words, papers that seek to account for the causes and effects of the paradox by an intra-Nordic or international comparative design, using different quantitative or qualitative methods and that approach the politics of human rights in the Nordic states as a space of political contestation between various societal agents and institutions at different levels.

We are particularly interested in papers addressing themes such as the following:

- Ratification of international human rights conventions and complaints protocols and their implementation in national legislation.
- State and society relationships with international human rights review, particularly the European Court of Human Rights.
- The varying effectiveness of international and domestic legal rights provisions for the *de facto* fulfillment of human rights.
- Domestic courts and adjudication of constitutional rights.
- The relationship between foreign policies and domestic policies concerning human rights.
- Social democracy, social welfare states, social citizenship and their relationship to human rights.
- Human rights agendas in multilateral organizations and bilateral relations.
- Practices of transnational and domestic civil society activism, strategic litigation and mass mobilization.

THE DETAILS

- We invite those interested in presenting a paper to submit a 250–500 word **abstract** and a link to their professional, institutional homepage using this online form by 31 August 2012: <http://bit.ly/NordicHRparadox>
- The organizers will select up to ten papers in order to have a coherent set of contributions fit for joint publication in a **special issue** of a scholarly journal.
- A **draft paper** is to be presented at a one-day workshop will take place at the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, University of Oslo, on 11-12 December 2012 (midday to midday).
- Where required, we will seek to cover travel and accommodation expenses for presenters.

ORGANISERS

The project is a joint collaboration between the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights and the MultiRights project. Please feel free to contact the conference organisers Dr. **Johan Karlsson Schaffer** (j.k.schaffer@nchr.uio.no) and **Malcolm Langford** (malcolm.langford@nchr.uio.no) if you have any questions.