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Making democracy work through the logic of practice

– a study of the bureaucracy at the Nordic Council of
Ministers and the art of acting by producing texts

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- a study of the bureaucracy at the Nordic Council of Ministers and the art of acting by producing texts

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Negin Nasiripour

Abstract

We live in an increasingly globalized world in which we humans are linked to each other within and across transnational and national social fields that make up totality of modern societies. Governance and democracy are enacted on various levels, from districts up to international levels, such as the European Union (EU). All these levels affect and mediate the lifeworld's of residents in Sweden. The Nordic Council of Ministers fills a function as an intergovernmental organisation. Compared to the EU, the Nordic Council of Ministers is less federal as an intergovernmental organisation, with less authority as it is not supranational. Less conspicuous to the public, however, are all bodies, organs, councils and committees where decisions are being prepared, elaborated and formulated. Such entities tend to constitute black boxes in Latour's sense of the term, i.e. essential organs for the political and bureaucratic systems whose function nonetheless are concealed, or at least opaque, to residents who do not directly interact with these bodies.

The Nordic cooperation is an extensive regional partnership. It is politically, economically and culturally anchored to the Nordic countries, playing a part of European and international cooperation. The ambitions of the Nordic Council of Ministers are both high and vague at the same time. They position themselves in the centre of the political arena wanting to take responsibility by being a mediating institution, but the actual work is relatively unknown for the residents in the Nordic countries.

I have chosen to explore the practical work carried out at the institution by interviewing a selected number of advisors within the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council, to understand how ideas and projects are elaborated on, i.e. to study the working processes of the institution.

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Abbreviations

ANT	Actor Network Theory
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
EK-M	Committee of Senior officials for the Environment
EU	European Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KR	Department of Culture and Resources
MR-FINANS	Nordic Council of Ministers for Finance
MR-FJLS	Nordic Council of Ministers for Fisheries, Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry
MR-K	Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture
MR-M	Nordic Council of Ministers for the Environment
MR-NER	Nordic Council of Ministers for Business, Energy and Regional Policy
MR-SAM	Ministers for Cooperation
MSc	Master of Science
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NORDBUK	Nordic Committee for Children and Young People
NordGen	Nordic Genetic Resource Centre
NSK	Nordic Cooperation Committee
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TEG	Terrestrial Ecosystem Group
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VK	Department for Growth and Climate

Introduction

We live in an increasingly globalized world in which we humans are linked to each other within and across transnational and national social fields that make up totality of modern societies (cf. Bourdieu, 1992, 2003). Governance and democracy are enacted on various levels, from districts up to international levels, such as the European Union (EU)¹ (European Union, 2018), and all these levels affect and mediate the lifeworld's of residents in Sweden. The EU has numerous institutions in the governing of the policy areas and aims them to be transparent and democratic. European citizens may be informed through media broadcasting which larger issues are being discussed and will be affected by decisions on both international and national levels.

Even though Sweden and some of the Nordic countries are part of the EU, they are as well members of a Nordic cooperation which in some aspects would be an even more important cooperation between its members. The Nordic Council of Ministers fills a function as an intergovernmental organisation. Compared to the EU, the Nordic Council of Ministers is less federal as an intergovernmental organisation with less authority as it is not supranational. Less conspicuous to the public, however, are all bodies, organs, councils and committees where decisions are being prepared, elaborated and formulated. Such entities tend to constitute black boxes in Latour's sense of the term, i.e. essential organs for the political and bureaucratic systems, whose function nonetheless are concealed, or at least opaque, to residents, who do not directly interact with these bodies.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has the role of the official cooperative body for the Nordic governments while the Nordic Council is the Nordic Parliament's cooperative body. The cooperation is an extensive regional partnership. It includes Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Norway as well as the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. It is politically, economically and culturally anchored playing a part of European and international cooperation. The Nordic Council of Ministers' is supposed to strengthen the importance, visibility and role of alleged Nordic political values in Europe (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2016b). The institution works for, what they call, a clear Nordic synergy (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2014). The Nordic Council of Ministers, as a major organization, process and formulate decisions taken within the EU. They are not obligated by law to implement international conventions but do help the Nordic countries' implementation processes in cases where it is considered to benefit the Nordic countries, such as creating action plans and implementing them primarily through projects.

The ambitions of Nordic Council of Ministers are both high and vague at the same time. They position themselves in the centre of the political arena wanting to take responsibility by being a mediating institution, but the ways they go about it, the actual work, is relatively unknown for the residents in the Nordic countries. The Nordic Council of Ministers are divided into the following political subject arenas: children and young people, sustainable development, energy, art and culture, education and research, equality, language, health and social affairs policies, freedom of movement, integration, digitalisation, and Nordic bioeconomy (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018e). The work within the sections of the Nordic Council of Ministers

¹ The European Union is an economic and political union between 28 European countries that together cover much of the continent of Europe.

has both direct and indirect impacts on residents in Sweden. Yet, how the work within the work groups is conducted and how the decisions are transmitted and executed is a black box, in the Latourian sense of the term, to most Nordic residents. How this process works practically differs depending on which topics are relevant and prioritised in the agenda of the different ministerial, their action plans with projects run by working-groups, and how they have been working with these topics in the past, hence the institutions previous experience. I have chosen to explore the practical work carried out at the institution by interviewing a selected number of advisors within the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council, to understand how ideas and projects are elaborated on, i.e. to study the working processes of the institution.

Purpose and research question

This thesis aims to show how the ideas and projects that the Nordic Council of Ministers mediate and work with are processed by the various advisors and bureaucrats employed by the Nordic Council of Ministers, that is, to show how bureaucracy is enacted in practice. In short, what do the advisors and bureaucrats actually do when they state that they give advice, facilitate ideas and processes and turn them into action?

The aim of this thesis is divided into three principal research questions:

1. What constitutes the daily work of the advisors and bureaucrats at the Nordic Council of Ministers Secretariat?
2. How do people who become employed at the Nordic Council of Ministers turn into advisors and bureaucrats, and what activities do they perform?
3. What role does writing and documents play for the advisors and bureaucrats of the Nordic Council of Minister?

Theoretical frameworks

Forming the bureaucratic habitus within a field

I will draw on Bourdieu's concept 'social field' in this thesis, both to demarcate a specific bureaucratic field and to argue that it creates its specific forms of coveted assets, i.e. capitals, strategies, practices, norms and values, and that the actors within the field gradually adapt to its specific "rules of the game" (cf. Bourdieu 1990, 1992, 1994). When investigating this specific field, I need to identify the assets associated with different positions, mapping the actions that the advisors take, what strategies they have and what space of manoeuvre is available to them. The concept of field and notion of assets are used to describe the specific form of disciplining that moulds the bureaucratic habitus of the actors within this field.

The advisors in the bureaucratic field that I investigate are working for something in common. There are several shared denominators among their positions, such as certain goals their work should generate. How they work practically and perceive the journey to reach those goals is interesting to investigate as there are some differences between individuals. The advisors could either stay within the frames of the working processes in the field or choose to use their space of manoeuvre in different ways. This in turn may be perceived by other advisors or actors as something positive, or on the contrary, more negative. To answer the research question '*What constitutes the daily work of the advisors and bureaucrats at the Nordic Council of Ministers Secretariat?*', one must understand the field they are part of.

Aspects of Actor Network Theory (ANT)

Bruno Latour goes to great lengths to describe processes without taking any detail for granted. I use his metaphor 'the black box' to account for issues and practices which are essential for the functioning of politics and bureaucracy yet seeming so banal that it does not merit study. Latour (1999, p. 304) defines the black box as "the way scientific and technical work is made invisible by its own success. When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need to focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become".

To answer the research question '*How do people who become employed at the Nordic Council of Ministers turn into advisors and bureaucrats, and what activities do they perform?*', I will analyse what actually happens in the bureaucratic field. That is, I will use the concept of ANT to describe the formation and network of advisors studied in this thesis. I will also use Latour's black box to explain how the advisors interpret their own line of work; what are the processes that the advisors take for granted and do not see, do they feel able to affect their line of work with given tools thus their space of manoeuvre, what are their function due to the development of the bureaucratic habitus?

In Latour's & Woolgar's (1979) study of a laboratory they closely followed the daily routines of the scientists; what they do, say and think. They first state that an outside observer, when entering an unknown social arena such as the bureaucratic field of the actors, might feel confused by the practices. Questions such as "What are these people doing? What are they talking about?" (ibid. p. 43) and so on, will arise. Latour & Woolgar describe when asking a worker in the laboratory in which area of expertise he works, he would for example answer, "in neuroendocrinology" (ibid. p. 54) as something obvious, and then continue explaining the

science in detail. As an observer I experienced the fact that such an answer facilitated the correspondence between a particular group or network of advisors, and that it contained a “complex mixture of beliefs, habits, systematised knowledge, exemplary achievements, practices, oral traditions” and so on (ibid. p. 54). So, sharing the same knowledge within a particular field helps the group to understand one another. In turn, they will repeat the practices and thus continue taking them for granted. I will combine Bourdieu’s (1987) concept of doxa that people take things for granted rather quickly by giving examples on how this can be problematic for an outsider when entering the field, as he or she will not understand it at first.

Within this Latour-inspired strand I also draw on Matthew Hull’s (2012) focus on the materiality of documents, writing and registering. In this thesis, I will make an attempt to show the moving of papers within the Nordic Council of Ministers through narratives from interviews and my own experiences as an apprentice, in order to answer the research question ‘*What role does writing and documents play for the advisors and bureaucrats of the Nordic Council of Minister?*’.

I have chosen an explicit department for my study within the Nordic Council of Ministers, working with questions related to Culture and Resource. I have tried to see how this department relates to the larger bureaucratic field, how the advisors work, what is meant by being an advisor, how they act and thus produce and reproduce the field they are part of, and how they themselves seem to talk about their work and the field at large.

Bruno Latour (2005, p. 7) defines the social as “not as a special domain, a specific realm, or a particular sort of thing, but only as a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling”. Empirical analysis can be used to describe, instead of explaining, social activity. Thus, Actor Network Theory (ANT) can be used to understand how network of actors are formed or assembled.

ANT can also be used in analysing how the assembled groups, or clusters, go about to reach the goals set at work. The advisors act to create meaning and legitimacy. They use different elements, such as people and tools, to act in coherency. The relations must constantly be ongoing, performed and repeated, otherwise they will dissolve. As Latour (2005) mentions, in ANT, these networks are potentially transient. They do exist in a constant making and re-making. But if dissolved, for example by elements in the network, or as related in this thesis, if some actors are changed, or if any of them act on the contrary to the group they would all be aware of the network as a whole. Latour explains this by opening a black box. When opened, all the elements or parts of the network, are visible to the group. When closed, it is not seen upon as anything else than a box, an ongoing cluster of actors.

Methodology

Qualitative method

Empirically I have intended to describe and analyse where the practical policy work is made. Therefore, the advisers and experts handling of key documents such as action plans and policy work of the Nordic Council of Ministers will be relevant for this thesis. Semi-structured and open-ended interviews will give an enhanced understanding of the structures and processes of everyday life at work that the advisors experience. A glimpse into the work will show where and how policy is being made, thus how bureaucracy is created. Interviews with relevant interviewees are made at the Secretariats of the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council in Copenhagen, Denmark. The interpretations of relevant documents and interviews will be analysed through narratives.

Participant observation and interviews

The main methods I have used are participant observation (Bernard, 2006) at the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers of Fisheries, Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry (FJLS), where I did an internship for four weeks in May 2014, as well as semi-structured interviews with seven advisors at the Secretariats of both the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council, in April-May 2015. Furthermore, I was involved in the work of arranging a conference in 2013, which provided additional knowledge of the work process of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

At first, this thesis aimed to look at how the Nordic Council of Ministers work with international conventions such as the convention of biological diversity. Therefore, some interview questions are related to international conventions. During the participant observation, I found it more and more interesting to research what the advisors at the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers actually do, as it was not clear what results their working processes would conclude in.

By participating and studying the work and actions taken by the advisors at the unit of FJLS, I have gained a greater understanding on how they carry out their work in using their given tools, what they think on specific matters, how they talk and act with co-workers and external actors, what they choose to say and what is not mentioned. For example, I got to ask questions before and after meetings and also got a background to a specific topic from their different point of views.

An observer who is somewhat familiar with the field, i.e. already have some knowledge about it, will not experience the field with brand new eyes. The prior knowledge and impressions create less question marks. Inspired by Latour, and as I participated in the daily work of the advisors, I gained more knowledge and understood their work, almost took it for granted, as time passed. I found a balance between an outside observer and a member of the group.

Selection of informants

To be able to answer the questions of this thesis, a number of interviews were carried out. The selection is based on the Department for Culture and Resources (KR) where I worked as an intern in 2014 and made several interviews. I had gotten acquainted with the staff and participated in many of their meetings, could observe them daily at work, and got involved in the topics and information of the department, which was both an asset and necessary in order

to gain knowledge of their work and to conduct my method of participant observation. They were, as Bernard (2006) would call it, my key informants. They are people who have a lot of knowledge about their own area of expertise as well as the work culture and were willing to share this knowledge with me. As people they are easy to talk to and able to provide me with information.

I also made one interview at the Department for Growth and Climate (VK) with a specific advisor who had knowledge and experience with working-groups, action plans and international conventions. Here, I made a strategical selection as I asked one of my previous informants for recommendations of advisors with specific criteria, such as knowledge of workings groups and information on working- and implementation processes. It was necessary for me to do an interview with an advisor involved in working-groups, which the unit FJLS lacked at that time. Since the working-groups carry out actions in the form of seminars, conferences, work-shops and so on, it was important to get an insight in how the practical work was done in detail and to analyse the process.

Three interviews were conducted at the Secretariat of the Nordic Council in order to gain knowledge in what their work consist of, how they work with the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers, what specific bureaucratic processes take place, and to gain an understanding of the totality of the working processes between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council. I used the snowball-technique (Bernard, 2006) when choosing informants from different sectors to give their perspective of work with the secretariats and of their working processes. The snowball-technique means that I used a key informant to locate one or two people in a population, in my case the institution. Then I asked those people to list others within the institution and recommend someone from the list whom I could interview.

How the interviews were conducted

By having made a structured interview template I could follow how the advisors daily work was structured as well as how specific work was conducted, for example certain meetings processes. I wanted to start off with talking about the advisors themselves to get to know them better and to understand their backgrounds, then get into their work more and more. The template consisted of seven to eight fixed questions, which I could evolve during the interviews depending on how the informants responded.

The questions asked were the same for all informants; background, the role of the division, of the advisor and the perception of the role, conventions related to his/her work, how/if the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council work with international conventions, how he/she works with implementation formally and informally, and finally, how their education and experience have prepared them for the work at the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council.

Since my first aim was to investigate how the institution work with international conventions, the template had questions concerning the advisors' working processes linked to international conventions. By having such questions, I could receive examples of working processes relating to the advisors' field of expertise.

The aim was to leave space for reflections and unplanned comments in order to elaborate on interesting remarks. I was looking for expressions or words that could intertwine with

concepts and noteworthy events. A tape recorder has been used for all interviews to be able to return and reproduce important breaks, tones, verbs and expressions that could convey the correct feel for the conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The seven different interviews ranged from about 20 minutes to an hour. Background material in the form of free speech, around 5-15 minutes, was added at each interview.

All names of the informants have been modified to insure they cannot be identified.

Materials

The key documents concern what the advisors call “meeting-packs” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2017a) and (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2017b). A meeting-pack is a large file including several documents such as meeting agenda, aim of topics, abstracts, notes, decisions, developments, conclusions, reports and written documents on further actions that should be taken by, for example, a particular steering committee, the involved countries, or specific working-groups. Each meeting-pack is written by the advisor on specific topics raised, concerning the advisors’ field of work, during a certain period of time (normally twice a year). Materials such as abstracts written by advisors has also been analysed (Nordic Council of Ministers 2016a).

Other key documents consisted of documents on the reformation processes called *Nyt Norden* (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2014) and *Nyt Norden 2.0* (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2016c), as well as the policy document named the *Nordic Environmental Action Plan 2013-2018* (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2012). I gathered and analysed information about the previous reformation process that further took place when I conducted the interviews, as well as discussing the action plan in one of my interviews and furthermore analysed the content for the aim of this thesis. The documents of the reformation processes were of importance to understand the history of the institution and what their work had looked like previously. The action plan gave an understanding of how policy documents were written and talked about by advisors.

Delimitation

In this thesis I aim to delimit the information by presenting the knowledge that I gained at the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers, as well as the interviews; I am therefore not aiming to describe the overall organization of the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council as that is not the purpose of this thesis.

This thesis delimits by mainly looking into the work of the secretariats of KR, and partly at VK, at the Nordic Council of Ministers as I want to analyse the actual work of the advisors on an operative level. The interviews made at the Nordic Council are used to gain an overall understanding of the work that the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers do apart as well as together, to be able to connect the dots.

Background

The Nordic Council of Ministers is officially the cooperation body of the Nordic governments. Its role is to facilitate and develop decision and political processes of cooperation between the Nordic countries. It is part of an overarching bureaucratic social field but differs from national bureaucratic fields in several ways: it does not take decisions but has rather an advisory function to the Nordic Council and the ministers. It is hard to identify the exact role the Nordic Council of Ministers has played in national and joint Nordic decisions. Below I intend to show how the advisory work of the institution is organized, what the work process looks like, how the assemblage of the advisory projects are constructed and who the advisors are.

The role and purpose of the institution

The Nordic Council was formed in 1952 as a body for cooperation between parliaments and governments after World War II, as there was a need for closer cooperation in the Nordic region. At present, the Nordic Council consists of 87 members from Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. The members are appointed by the parliaments on the recommendation of the parties. Dagfinn Høybråten is since the 4 March 2013 Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers, where there are somewhat 90 employees across the Nordic region.

The Nordic Council of Ministers was established in 1971 and is the Nordic governments' official cooperation body. The prime ministers have the overall responsibility for Nordic cooperation within the Council of Ministers. Each country's government has appointed a Nordic Cooperation Minister to a council (MR-SAM), which is responsible for the overall coordination of cooperation. The Nordic Council of Ministers is not one, but many ministerial councils that appear in different configurations.

The Nordic Council of Ministers are assisted by committees of senior officials, such as the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Fisheries, Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry (EK-FJLS). One of these is the Nordic Cooperation Committee (NSK), which assists the Ministers for Cooperation (MR-SAM) in its work. The Nordic Cooperation Committee is also the Board of the Council of Ministers' Secretariat in Copenhagen.

The Nordic Council of Ministers together with the Nordic Council claims to be working for joint Nordic solutions that provide visible benefits for the people living in the Nordic countries. The institution needs to cooperate with the Nordic nations to apply strategical work, which at the end of a process should generate visible benefits. The Nordic Council does this primarily by proposing, consulting and influencing the Nordic governments in the form of statements and questions. Members' most important tools to influence the political arena are to make suggestions and ask questions, which either can be addressed to the Nordic Council of Ministers or to one or several Nordic governments.

The Helsinki Treaty (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018f) is the foundation of the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council and sets the framework for their cooperation. The treaty is a political agreement between Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden and entered into force on 1 July 1962. The treaty has had several amendments and the most recent amendments entered into force 2 January 1996. There are several agreements within the framework of Nordic cooperation which have status of international law, but different resolutions hold different weight. The Helsinki Treaty is the fundamental treaty. Within its framework various treaties and statutes, also called understandings, agreements and

conventions, have been signed (Nordic Council of Ministers (2018d). An example of one of these agreements is the Nordic Language Convention, which concerns the right of Nordic citizens to use their own language in another Nordic country. In recent years, the Nordic cooperation has been strengthened through decisions and declarations by the prime ministers. These take place at Nordic prime ministerial meetings, and the spur took place in Finland in 2007 by decision on deepening Nordic cooperation within issues related to globalization. The Nordic Council of Ministers' decision must be unanimous, thus including consensus (Article 62 in the Helsinki Treaty). The decisions are binding for all member states, sometimes also with the proviso that decisions must first be approved by the country's parliament.

Member States and territories

The Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden are member countries of the Nordic Council of Ministers since 1971. In addition to these countries, Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland, representing an extended representation and position as the other countries. The Nordic Council of Ministers also operates offices in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as cooperating with other countries and exchange knowledge in various areas.

Description of the different ministerial councils

There are eleven ministerial councils. One is the Ministers for Cooperation (MR-SAM), which in practice are the Nordic Cooperation Ministers responsible for coordinating Nordic government cooperation on behalf of the prime ministers. They roughly work as a "board" of the remaining ten ministerial councils. The ten other ministerial councils are divided into different sectors such as the Nordic Council of Ministers for Fisheries, Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry (MR-FJLS), the Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture (MR-K) or the Nordic Council of Ministers for Business, Energy and Regional Policy (MR-NER). Every ministerial work with different topics within their specific area but also somewhat cross-sectoral, for example with certain questions in projects led by working-groups such as the Terrestrial Ecosystem Group (TEG). Furthermore, some of the departments have previously been merged and thus been able to work closer with various questions.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat

The Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat is responsible for the day-to-day running of cooperation between the Nordic governments (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018c). It is here that the preparatory work is done before issues are raised at the eleven ministerial councils and the committees of senior officials.

Thus, the secretariat's task is to prepare the issues raised by the Ministers for Cooperation, the Council of Ministers and the Committee of Senior Officials. It is also the secretariat which, after decision in any of the instances, monitors the execution of the decisions. So, the secretariat prepares and follow up on the issues and discussed decisions. The decisions can result in agreements, conventions or other common Nordic regulations. Decisions may also pave the way for setting up activities such as programs, projects, support schemes and operation of joint Nordic institutions. The activities highly involve writing of various kinds of documents and their importance in the overall work.

The secretariat's structure is dynamic, which means that the agenda and day-to-day work could change for the employees if new decisions are taken by the national governments.

Mission statement

The overall mission of The Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat is to develop the Nordic regions and make them attractive to its citizens and the rest of the world (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018c). The secretariat does so by:

- initiating, implementing and following up on policy decisions
- generating knowledge on which to base Nordic solutions
- building networks to exchange information and ideas.

But what does this work mean in reality; how are these catchword descriptions transformed into concrete plans and documents by the advisors at the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers? This thesis describes and analyses this process. Quoting Latour (2005, p. 12) on ANT "you have 'to follow the actors themselves', [...] in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish". That is, the secretariat's mission statement is in practice defined by the actions taken by the advisors themselves, using the set of tools given, and acting within, on the edge or outside the given frames, thus their space of manoeuvre.

The two secretariats

As previously mentioned, the Nordic Council of Ministers has a secretariat, and so does the Nordic Council. The secretariats are furthermore divided in different departments. This thesis mainly explores the work of advisors who work at the Department for Culture and Resources (KR) as well as the Department for Growth and Climate (VK) at the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The Department for Culture and Resources coordinates Nordic cooperation in the unit of MR-Gender Equality and MR-Culture, which handle art and culture projects, media, the Nordic houses and questions concerning children and young people, etc. The department also hosts the unit MR-FJLS that deals with questions on fisheries and aquaculture, agriculture, food and forestry, including New Nordic Food.

The remit of the Department for Growth and Climate coordinate Nordic cooperation on business, energy and regional policy (MR-NER), the environment (MR-M), financial policy (MR-FINANS) and multi-sectoral work, including on the Arctic and sustainable development.

Working-groups

There are several working-groups within the departments of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Depending on the council the number of working-groups vary.

An example is the working-group within the Nordic Council of Ministers for the Environment. This ministerial council has numerous working-groups that work cross-sectoral, that is, when working-groups from different departments and/or ministerial councils work together on specific topics. One of the councils working-groups is the Terrestrial Ecosystem Group (TEG) (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018a). The work of the TEG is mainly related to the fields of biological diversity, ecosystems and climate change, and are described in chapter 3 of the Nordic Environmental Action Plan 2013-2018 (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2012), a work program where the work and priorities of the group are presented in detail. The latest work program had instead of a five-year consecutive run, as some previous action plans, a

mid-evaluation after three years. The duration of an action plan varies depending on the decisions made by the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for the Environment. TEG reports directly to the Council of Ministers for the Environment and the Nordic Council of Ministers' Committee of Senior Officials for the Environment. The group is coordinated by a secretariat which is located to the Environmental Protection Agency in Östersund, Sweden. The work of the group is rooted in several international agreements including the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the European Landscape Convention.

It is The Nordic Council of Ministers for Environment that has the overall policy responsibility for the Nordic Environmental Cooperation. The Committee of Senior officials for the Environment is constituted under the Nordic Council of Ministers for the Environment and is responsible for the implementation of the Nordic Environmental Action Plan 2013-2018. Within the environmental cooperation there are plenty of Nordic experts, official agencies, research institutes, companies and politicians.

The framework for TEG's work is presented in the group's mandate (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018b). TEG provides annual support to a range of projects that work with either a specific theme within the mandate of the group, or several themes within a broader context. TEG normally gives about four million DKK in aid each year for five to ten projects. Although, sometimes, projects obtain grants from several environmental groups when themes are handled by more than one group. Every year TEG establishes a theme for the year in which the projects are encouraged to seek funds for a specific question. The group normally meets twice a year.

The participant observer

In order to better understand the Nordic Council of Ministers Secretariat and the work they carry out, this section will show a sort of punctuated entry to the everyday work of the advisors, aiming to answer the first research questions “*What constitutes the daily work of the advisors and bureaucrats at the Nordic Council of Ministers Secretariat?*”.

The institution is situated in the heart of Copenhagen in Denmark. When you first enter the building, you are struck by the quite impressive architecture. You lay eyes on the two staircases that take you up to the reception, where you will wait for the person you have arranged a meeting with to come and pick you up. The employees have a tag or entry card, so they easily can get to their offices whenever needed. While in the building, there are several floors all consisting of corridors that take shape of a rectangle, and in the middle of the rectangle, i.e. the house, there is a courtyard on the bottom level. The departments and units are divided between them on different levels and corridors. During the observations of the unit FJLS and the department KR, it was quite easy to encounter other employees of the Nordic Council of Ministers as they worked in an open floor environment. The advisors of the Nordic Council had their own offices and were not as easy to run into.

The logic of practice

At the time of my observations four people worked with the issues of bioeconomy. I joined their work as an intern. They all had different roles because of various expertise and background. All senior advisors had an academic background of at least five years, in addition, some of them were researchers in fields such as energy, chemistry, physics, natural resources and more. They also had experience of work such as chief of staff at different institutions in the European Parliament in Brussels, from embassies, and within governmental and non-governmental organizations.

In addition, there were employees who had other areas of work, such as coordinators and the head of department. There were three people who worked as advisors in various sectors of FJLS, including the food sector, bioeconomy concerning forestry, agriculture, marine and fisheries, but also somewhat with gender equality which was applied on all departments within the Nordic Council of Ministers. In total, the group consisted of seven people, plus student employees which usually varied between two to three people. The subject of bioeconomy included a very vast area of knowledge that mostly consisted of policies, which ended up in the form of projects and workshops. The advisors had their own desks in the open space area, and there were also some meetings rooms, an additional round table where the weekly-meetings with the department took place, as well as a room for the copying machine and other materials. On every floor there were also bathrooms and a small kitchen with utilities for the daily coffee breaks. Below entry level there was a restaurant for the staff that had a varied buffet food that people seem to enjoy much.

There was a number of tasks largely concerning the broad aspect of bioeconomy. In the many meetings between the advisors and other groups of people, both from the institution as well as external actors, I got an understanding of the variety of the subject. The advisors came in contact with politicians, researchers and ministers from different countries. Working with bioeconomy addressed issues relating to the Nordic countries, the Baltic Sea area, but also other parts of the world. As an example, one meeting took place with a politician discussing water management within fisheries and marine issues at the Seychelles and Barbados. The

meeting was on a steering committee- and expert level, where information about policies and strategies on water management was exchanged. Topics on natural resources and technology were on the agenda. It seemed bioeconomy addressed no borders but bonded many sectors and countries. One of the advisors asked me to make copies of the printed agenda to be delivered at the meeting. He also wanted me to help bringing in coffee and cake, which I arranged in the middle of the large meeting table in the middle of the room. I got the feeling that the meeting was quite informal from the way the invited guest talked and behaved. The man, who had a formal dark suit with a matching tie, said that he felt free to take the tie off as other members of the group did not have a tie on and as some of them took off their jackets. It was a hot summer's day, the windows were opened to let in some air, and it seemed that the advisors from the Nordic Council of Ministers did not care too much about strict codes and standards. During the rest of the meeting I could join the group of people at the table and take my own notes. I did not give any comments on the subjects discussed, as it did not seem appropriate for an intern to give her point of view on the topics. After a few hours, at the end of the meeting, the same advisor that wanted my help with the practicalities asked me if I could help clearing the table. I did not mind helping them with these things as I felt it was part of my work as an intern.

Instruments

Generally, the tasks that the advisors carried out involved; preparation of meeting material, formulation of case preparation and proposal for decisions and/or discussions. Preparation of notes and minor analysis of data, such as reading and summarizing analysis reports and evaluation of conferences and seminars. Following up on political initiatives and decisions such as tenders for analysing reports, prepare conferences and seminar, and following up on ongoing projects such as projects within the Baltic Sea Strategy. Updating sector-specific websites with text, news, corrections, calendar, etc. For example, writing a specific text on bioeconomy with an attached weblink. Administrative support such as print jobs, archiving, copying and so on. Participating in weekly meetings of the department. Discussing ongoing matters and upcoming ones, such as events and overall questions arising. Participating in meetings with external actors and organizations, such as meetings concerning the Baltic Sea Strategy at the unit FJLS, but also meetings about food, forestry, agriculture and aquaculture. The intern's role was to help the advisors in their daily work of document writing, preparation of conferences, seminars and meetings, as well as taking notes and learn more about how the Nordic Council of Ministers work with these questions. As time passed, I got more advanced tasks such as writing abstracts and other documents as well as administrating the website. This was more challenging, so when needed I would ask the advisors of the unit FJLS for help. I also helped with the practicalities, printed the agenda and helped serving food and beverages. Participation of meetings and conferences such as booking of meeting rooms, print-jobs, nameplates, and abstracts were also a typical practical part of work.

Consequently, the main work consisted in meeting procedures and in analysing and writing documents of various kinds for different purposes. A lot of it was preparation for different assemblages of people. An example of preparatory work was when the unit FJLS created a workshop and held seminars. For the occasion, my job was to make an invitation and send it out to people and organisations interested in the event. I had a discussion with the IT-department on how to use a specific program that the Nordic Council of Ministers used to send out invitations, and how it handled and stored all information such as names,

organisation, food preferences etc, of the people who signed up for the event. In earlier conferences the unit had been using a normal Windows Office-program to handle the booking information, which had its disadvantages such as the need to handle it manually. This could be a time-consuming administrative burden as every time something in a booking changed, the advisor needed to update the changes manually. It was also hard to keep track on all changes and information, therefor an easier automatic system was needed.

Organising a conference

A large part of the work at the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers consist of arranging conferences. Many times, these are arranged in cooperation with external partners. In 2013, one of such conferences was arranged with stakeholders. This time a group of university students of which I was part of, was handed the assignment of preparatory work.

A day before the conference the student group arranged the settings of the event. It included arranging the round tables, chairs, papers, pens and notebooks, lightning, computer and related equipment, nametags, etc. We were set to handle the microphone and deliver them whenever a participant of the conference had something to say. During some group exercises we would also act as facilitators for the different round-table groups, although there was a main facilitator employed by the institution. Another part of the role was to follow up with a questionnaire on what the participants thought of the conference, and what could be better in the future.

The participants were told to form groups of four to five people and seat themselves at tables spread across the room. The main facilitator urged people to form the groups, preferably with people they did not know. The conference was initiated by a short introduction of the Nordic Council of Ministers involvement in bioeconomy. It was made clear that bioeconomy would be a part of the Baltic Sea Strategy, an ongoing topic that was discussed by the unit FJLS at the Nordic Council of Ministers and their network. The round-table groups were to discuss several topics, such as new technical innovations that would benefit the environment of the Baltic Sea, to reduce eutrophication, improve water quality, and so on. Each group were instructed to gather their thoughts and write them down on posters. The posters were then presented to the other groups after each session. Each discussion was proceeded by a few minutes of individual brainstorming in silence. The outcome of participants ideas was to some extend revealed during the presentations. I understood from the participants that it was difficult to come with ideas and to match them with people from the business sector. A goal for the Nordic Council of Minister was indeed to be able to match different sectors so that actual projects would be created in order to 'follow up' on the Baltic Sea strategy. Later that day, the main facilitator continued to briefly describe next related conference in Stockholm on September 11 the same year. It would involve 100-120 people. He emphasized that all participants in this current stakeholder conference were welcome to contribute with names of useful people for the next conference in Stockholm, saying that mixing and matching ideas and projects were important. This example highlights the method of constantly working with conferences as part of an ongoing work that includes new conferences. One platform generates another.

Summary

A large part of the daily work of the advisors at the Secretariat of The Nordic Council of Ministers is preparation of meeting materials and other documents for discussion or decisions. Reading reports, analysing them, participate in meetings, arranging conferences as well as following up on initiatives and decisions, are part of the role of the advisors. To understand the practical work there is a need to investigate some specific aspects of the role.

The work of an intern is a light-version of the role of an advisor. It highlights some of the important elements of the work at the Nordic Council of Ministers, such as creating platforms and networking with different actors. There is some practical work needed when carrying out tasks. Concerning a conference, it would for example involve preparatory work in the form of contacting stakeholders, create an invitation, make an agenda, read documents and prepare oneself on the subjects discussed. Thereafter, gather the thoughts and ideas of the stakeholders and starting to prepare for the next conference by stating the interest of involving new stakeholders.

The outcome of the conference illustrates the Nordic Council of Ministers as a mediating institution, using the expertise as well as cultural, social and organizational capital of the advisors in the role as mediators. The advisors need to use their areas of knowledge to analyse texts, information and decisions. This is important when summarising and furthermore handing on the information forward in text as well as verbally, in meetings with co-workers, to committee members and politicians.

Making democracy work by playing the game

This chapter will attempt to answer the second research “*How do people who become employed at the Nordic Council of Ministers turn into advisors and bureaucrats, and what activities do they perform?*”.

The question will be divided in two sections. The first section will give a description of the background of the advisors and how they narrate being advisors in relation to the activities they perform. The second section will discuss to what degree they influence the practical work.

The making of an advisor

Who are they, what do they do, and what do they require to be successful in their fields?

This section will give a background of the limited number of the so-called advisors, that is, what they have been studying, working with and done in the past that is related to their work as advisors today. In order to describe and analyse the context I will draw on Bourdieu’s term social field, the assets which are coveted and drawn on in the field, how the actors relate to the field and the process in how the persons recruited are socialized into the specific field, where their bureaucratic habitus is moulded.

I will discuss the forms of capital competed by the actors within the bureaucratic field and argue that the people recruited as advisors need to have an entry capital to get in to the field, mainly cultural capital as well an organizational capital.

In the making

Miriam has a Swedish and Norwegian background. She has nine years of education in biology and on top of that, a three years PhD based on the biology of dolphin populations. At the Nordic Council of Minister, she works as a senior advisor with environmental questions and describes herself more as a generalist than specialist, which means her function is not to deliver expert knowledge in just one specific field but to have overall knowledge and understand how the institution work in more than one sector. Her function is to facilitate the work at her department, that is, make sure that the day-to-day work is running, that people at different positions deliver on their missions between different units, working-groups, sectors and departments involved. She is like a spider in the web; she needs to moderate and mediate between departments and sectors at different levels, hence her function is specifically to make sure people cooperate. In Latour’s (2005, p. 39) definition of the term, “Mediators transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry.”. So, how she does it is up to her, but she needs to understand the specific norms of the field and the working order of the institution to mediate between people. Miriam has also been a coordinator for two different working-groups in the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Previously she worked at national agencies such as Denmark’s former environmental agency, but also at a private consulting firm on issues concerning environment and climate change. She feels “*it is a strength to have been both up and down, inside and outside*”, that is, both worked within the governmental and private sectors.

Torvald is from Iceland and has an education in agronomy, both a MSc and a PhD, from the University of Copenhagen. He focused on animal husbandry, and has since then worked as a

university teacher, a consultant, as well as an official in the Ministry of agriculture and rural development on Iceland. He emphasizes that he has done volunteer work, such as leading the sports club of a district in west Iceland for about five years. Furthermore, he was involved in local politics for four years in a municipality board on Iceland. Since 2015 he has been working for the Nordic Council of Ministers as a senior advisor in agriculture and forestry, under the department of Culture and Resources, with Fisheries, Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry. He is responsible for questions related to agriculture policy, while his co-workers are responsible for fish, food and forestry.

Iris is from Sweden and works as a senior advisor at the department of Culture and Resources in the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Her area of expertise concerns children and young people, as well as gender equality. Previously she has worked in the Agency for Youth and Civil Society issues in Sweden, but also in Brussels with EU-questions concerning youth and regional politics. She has also experience of working for Amnesty International with human rights issues. She has a MSc in social and cultural analysis at Linköping University.

Gunnar is from Iceland and works as a senior advisor under the department of Culture and Resources, with Fisheries, Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry, since 2012. His area of expertise at work are marine resources, fish and aquaculture, but has also worked with bioeconomy in the Baltic Sea area. Gunnar has a MSc in statistical modelling and ecology as well as a PhD in natural resource economy. After his studies he started a marine conservatory program with one of his previous professors. The program involves 40 different projects in five continents and is one of the largest nature research organisations in the US. Furthermore, he has been a director for the environment research institute on Iceland, where he started a cross-sectoral MSc program in environment and natural resources. Additionally, he was employed at the Public prosecutor's office of Iceland. Gunnar has an extensive career ranging from science and research to bureaucracy, working at the United Nations, the European Bank and the Icelandic state. He believes that one of his biggest accomplishments was being able to influence Iceland's natural resource politics. Gunnar has also been involved in volunteer work on Iceland coaching a basketball team on a high level, as well as football and ice hockey. He was in the board for the ice hockey team. Furthermore, he was involved in work on integration, as well volunteering in the Red Cross.

“I founded an NGO, working with immigrants, migration and integration.”

“I support good governance, good policies and research.”

Mentioning volunteer work enhances the cultural and social capital brought in to the bureaucratic field. Even though he has enough experience and knowledge from previous careers he still feels the need to mention the different types of volunteer work. This shows the importance of bringing in entry capitals such as the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990). Gunnar is an ideal candidate working in Nordic Council of Ministers, as his knowledge and experience gives him status in the assembled group.

Martin, from Sweden, has been working as a senior advisor in the Nordic Council since 2016. His primary areas of work are the field of culture, research, education, sports and issues on the role of the civil society. His former position was as an advisor at the Nordic Council of Ministers. He has previously worked for the national Cultural Council of Sweden as an administrative official, dealing with child and youth questions. Before that, he was a theatre producer in Sweden. He emphasizes that he does not have a formal completed education, but nonetheless possesses an academic education in English and business administration, which gives him a certain amount of cultural capital. Martins previous experience from the theatre are not common in comparison to other advisors. His experience from the cultural sector, and the fact that he lacks a higher education, are exceptional but nonetheless important cultural capital that qualifies him working with his area of expertise.

“I do not even have a degree. Today it seems like most people do, just look at all the students here. It was not like that at the good old days, I managed just fine.”

Thomas is from Iceland and is a senior advisor at the Nordic Council where he focuses on energy issues. He has worked for 15 years, both at the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers. These different positions enabled him to accumulate a vast network of politicians, officials and experts, and to assemble within several groups. As he says he knows the organisations from both sides, he can make his social, cultural and organizational capital useful in many ways by knowing the field that he is already adapted to. He recognises how different groups of people work, if it is politicians or experts, and how to talk to them, what information to bring up, and how to act within the groups (Latour, 2005). The capital he possesses generates a strong tool to facilitate his daily work. It gives him the power to choose when, and how much, he will act in a matter when interacting within groups.

Before working with Nordic energy issues, he worked with finance and economy in Iceland, and later in the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Within the civic society he has experience of an Icelandic environmental organisation. He explains knowing the Nordic countries on various levels, that is, he has gathered both cultural and social capital from practical work and from interacting with different groups of people at different levels. Therefore, he can easily understand where the politics overlap the bureaucratic fields. Once again, the social, cultural and organizational capital is important to facilitate his everyday work and gives him a certain social status in the assembled groups where he acts as a mediator.

Cultural capital can in the bureaucratic and adjacent fields (such as the political), where power is exercised, be an important entry requirement and power instrument. Broady (1991) mentions that people having cultural capital usually have the ability to keep themselves thoroughly informed on what the stakes are in the social game. He explains that in politics, the ability to keep oneself well informed is highly valued (ibid.).

Thomas has a MSc in economy, and has studied political science and languages in Norway, Mexico and the USA. He has also done volunteer work, mostly in environmental organisations and the scouts. He says he does not have any volunteer work from the social sector but hopes to in the future. The civil society is mentioned as an important aspect of his life. What is interesting is that he does not mention why it is important, but he answer in such

a way that it should be obvious to the interviewer that volunteer work in the civil society is important. He takes the collective understanding between himself and the interviewer for granted. As an advisor he needs to act as a whole to create meaning and legitimacy. He uses people as tools to act in coherency to keep the assemblage ongoing. Both cultural, social and organizational capital are relevant in the bureaucratic field where these advisors operate, to repeat social activity.

Jacob comes of Sweden and works at the Nordic Council where he is responsible for the Committee of growth and development. His primary areas of work are the labour market, industry and enterprise, transport, energy, regional policy, fiscal policy, innovation policy and border barriers. Jacob has studied political science. His first relevant work was an organization developer for the Green youth party in Sweden. He then moved on as a union secretary within the Green Party and coordinated the marketing in the election campaign for the EU-parliament. Furthermore, he worked at the Association of Nature Conservation in Stockholm, both as a lobbyist as well as an organisation developer with issues related to aviation, densification of the city centre in Stockholm, and exploitation at places where ports are located. He later was employed at the organisation Association Nordic Sweden where he worked with information on how to help Nordic citizens who want to work, study or move within the Nordic region. Subsequently, he got an employment at the Nordic Council of Ministers concerning questions on information and barriers between the Nordic countries. Fairly large and diverse areas of work, or as he would put it; *"a lot of Scandinavia, environment and Scandinavia, it's my thing"*.

Jacob have some experience in volunteer work where he is still active. Earlier in life he was going to Africa for volunteer work but changed his plans just before he was supposed to start. He describes himself as impulsive and fickle and could drop out of things in the spur of the moment.

Keep the wheels running

By giving the reader examples of how the advisors, studied in this thesis, perform their day-to-day work and discuss their role will give an understanding of what they actually do. The advisors Miriam, Torvald and Iris all work at different units, and to add the perspective of some advisors from the Nordic Council, Thomas and Martin will be represented in this section.

We start off with Miriam. She prepares meetings at the level of the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Environment affairs (EK-M) and the level of the Minister for Environment. A part of her role is to follow up on what is said and done on these meetings, which basically means she need to make sure that there is an agreement between the officials or ministers and that the proposed ideas will be taken further by the Nordic Council of Ministers to be implemented, for example through a working group. Under the Nordic Council of Ministers for Environment (MR-M) there are eight working-groups. As Miriam would put it *"to secure the bridge"*, that is, the information and communication between the working-groups, the Environmental Ministers and the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials

for the Environment (EK-M). The decisions taken on a high-level subsequently are conveyed to the working-groups. As Miriam says,

“Ensure that the decisions that are being taken up there falls down here and gets a relevant reaction from the system, [...]”

Miriam says that she has been part of many working-groups in the past in the Nordic Council of Ministers, so she knows how the working process goes about. EK-M as well as MR-M order information needed from the working-groups. All of them are supposed to cooperate and her role is to make that happen. Decisions and initiatives are taken by EK-M and MR-M, but also from the working-groups through their yearly based working-programs within the frames of their budget. At the end of the year the working-groups report back to EK-M on what activities they made and how it went. The EK-M then responds to it and give feedback. It could be activities that the group carry out themselves, like arranging a seminar. It could also be activities that they hire consultants to perform. She shows that the MR-M ministers have a superior position in relation to experts or officials in working-groups regarding their form of work. There is obviously a clear hierarchy in the structures of the institution between the elected ministers from the Nordic countries and the officials.

“EK-M answers: that’s good, or that’s good but... we don’t understand this. Come back with something new.”

There are experts or advisors in the working-groups from the Nordic Council or the Nordic Council of Ministers with quite long-lasting positions of several years. But as the ministers are being replaced there is a new dynamic every time, for example, in meetings where there is a mix of new ministers and the same delegates from EK-M that has been representatives for ten to fifteen years and possess a large amount of power due to their knowledgeability and part of the scene. The new ministers also have some power as they can question what actions previously have been taken and bring a new approach on how to work forward. There are cases, although less common, when an informal atmosphere takes place and permeates the structures to break. She explains that the discussions take a different turn; there is a greater bonding between people, the language changes and results are made much faster. Miriam’s perception of her role is interesting, as she sees these different people with various capitals entering the common space, acting differently depending on the situation and the assembled groups. It is here that the bureaucratic field overlap the political field as new ministers come and go. Clearly, this has an effect to the dynamics and thus the practical work in terms of influence and will. People's different roles appear to be linked to their different personalities, according to her. She says the effect on the dynamics of every presidency makes the presidencies term of office extremely different, with different perceptions and results.

She believes that her and her co-workers previous experiences is important in everyday work. Many of her co-workers are political scientists or sociologists. The form of cultural capital her co-workers bring with them to work contributes to enhance her own knowledge. She says that she did not share their working methods, ways of thinking and methodology from social science when she started to work at the Nordic Council of Ministers, but it is something that she has learned by time and feels very excited about. Thus, she gains tacit practical knowledge by being and working in the bureaucratic field. On the other hand, she has knowledge of environmental issues while her co-workers do not and says it can be a driving

force and give perspective to things. That implies seeing the values of her own cultural capital and use it to benefit her own work.

Torvalds main activity is to serve and assist the ministers of Fisheries, Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry (MR-FJLS). There are council ministers and five sectoral committees who meet two to three times a year. Torvald prepare these meetings, make abstracts and follow up on decisions taken at the meetings. His work involves the EU Baltic Sea Strategy on various levels, with a leading role in bioeconomy, agriculture and forestry. He also represents the Nordic Countries when in different arenas, mostly to assist the minister of council and to follow up on their decisions. The Nordic Council of Ministers has a platform for meetings, where Torvald assists in a more advisory role to the ministers. He has experience working with national governments and municipalities and believes it has prepared him for his work at the Nordic Council of Ministers because he can relate to the questions in a professional way, for example, in a pedagogic way explain what fertilizers do to the environment. He argues that he can relate to policies and what they do in practice due to experience of the agricultural sector.

“All end in what has to do with [agricultural] production, so I would have a difficult job if I had no agricultural education behind me.” Therefore, “it is extremely important that people have a niched background.”

On the contrary to what Torvald says, not every advisor has a niched background for the exact questions they are set to work with. Even though, like in Torvalds case, it helps to have specific knowledge to ease the work, the advisors still gain tacit knowledge within the bureaucratic field. Thus, it is important to have entry capital as a base of knowledge. It gives the advisor authority and a consensus that he or she can work in the field with like-minded people.

“I have the possibility to take initiative and do so increasingly.”

He explains taking initiatives in discussing ideas with committees of senior officials, who take the ideas to the ministers which decide on them. Torvald mentions that he takes more and more initiative at his work, something that is encouraged by their Secretary General due to the reformation process they have undergone. Normally, as a senior advisor he needs approval from ministers to go forward with projects. Torvald uses his knowledge and experience in agricultural issues as well as political and governmental organisations, thus his cultural and organizational capital, to adapt to the extensive role of an advisor. He can bring more of his expertise when consulting the ministers by understanding and listening to what they want. By having experience in working with politics, he knows on what level he should base his work. Where the bureaucratic and political fields overlap, he needs to find synergies, yet another buzzword which is not clearly explained. Nonetheless, as a mediator he knows how to “translate [...] the meaning” of his work into action (Latour 2005, p. 39). At the same time, in the process of writing and creating documents he follows the set processes of the field and uses, for example, templates when writing. He knows what information to bring forward and how to do it.

Torvald believes that most of the work he does is administration and bureaucracy, and emphasizes bureaucracy in a good way. He says bureaucracy can have a negative connotation,

which it had partly for him in the past. Torvald says that with age he does not glorify his work, but instead he accepts all aspects of it and continue because he needs to keep the wheels running, which represents good bureaucracy.

“Normal people might not realize how much work it takes to secure things between countries, such as hospital, maternity leave, passport, university, [...], many things we take for granted, and it relies on this huge mechanical system of bureaucracy that somehow just has to function. And this is what we do, we run this system which is like the engine of a big ship, nothing fancy, and in a few years, I will be gone and do something else and the ship will still go, and our part now is to make the engine run properly. To do so we have to do things in the right way, always. And part of what is important being here is to do things in a correct way and do things that are doing right.”

It is interesting to see that Torvald believe it is every-day work that brings him and the institution towards their goal of positive benefits for the Nordic countries. He says it is also important to work as a team, but as the maximum employment is eight years and the average is five years at the Nordic Council of Ministers, they are constantly circulating in their work. A constant circulation of staff can thus make the ties of the assembled groups weaker, as they all know they have limited time at the institution. This could affect the outcome and regularity of their work when introducing new advisors to the groups (Latour, 2005).

When it comes to Iris, she describes her role more as a person whose work extends across several issues compared to an expert. She has an overall responsibility for child and youth issues at the Nordic Council of Ministers and explains they derive from cultural questions which her department previously have been working with. Her ambition is to make the entire institution embracing a child and youth perspective in work. Externally, she looks at how organizations can work to involve children's rights in an overall perspective. Her role also includes managing the Nordic child and youth committee which formally is a working group. It is organized under the Ministers for Cooperation (MR-SAM) to get a cross-sectoral perspective of the entire organisation.

Iris feels her education has prepared her regarding the subject matters, but she was not prepared to tackle the structure of the institution, as well as having co-workers who were experts within their fields. This implies that advisors of the Nordic Council of Ministers have somewhat expert knowledge within their line of work. She says that her own role involves getting into other people's work, thus she has an extra number of meetings. With previous employers she says it was more common to work in groups and share knowledge, for example in regional politics. At the Nordic Council of Ministers, she says that they work much more individually, and she needs to gain and apply the knowledge herself but find intersections with her co-workers. She has one co-worker to discuss factual matters concerning equality, but all the written work is done by her, which also needs to be approved by her director. Feedback is something she appreciates due to the amount of individual work. There are less meetings with her director compared to her previous employer, the Agency for Youth and Civil Society issues in Sweden. She believes her supervisor has an overall knowledge of her daily work, but not in detail. She expresses a clear need for more collaboration and exchange of knowledge between colleagues. As previously mentioned, the advisors are only employed for an average of five years which means that the networks

changes from time to time. Thus, the knowledge within the groups changes as well as the tools that keep the assemblages intact.

The role of advisors at the Nordic Council

Martin feels his education and experience has prepared him, but not fully, for his current role at the Nordic Council. He says he has not really been working with questions concerning children and young people at the Nordic Council. His education in economics has on the other hand been put into practice. This is yet another example of tacit practical knowledge.

Although, he believes general knowledge of culture, such as art, literature, music and theatre are always good to have, which he has brought with him in his current role. Martin says that the Nordic way of working together is something special and he was not prepared for the Nordic working methods, the work culture and how it differs from his previous workplaces. He mentions that it has been incredibly fun to get to know people from all Nordic countries, the different working methods and the work cultures. He says having worked in a politically-managed organization such as the Cultural Council of Sweden and now the Nordic Council is an invaluable experience.

Thomas, who has been working both at the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers for a very long time, has gained a lot of experience and now sees his current position at the Nordic Council as his last in his working life. He says what is most important is knowing how political processes work, and to be able to work in political organisations with different nationalities. This means having certain capacities and capital such as a higher academic education and experience in working in political or governmental organisations. Basically, being familiar with the overlapping political and bureaucratic fields (Bourdieu, 1994). This entails being able to organise, think and plan for the long term, and he mentions that these processes may take a little longer time in internal work than on a Nordic and national level.

Summary

In the interviews, the advisors highlight their academic education, previous work experience and political work. They have in common experience of governmental institutions as officials on different levels, from academia, organizations and political institutions as well as social and civil society volunteer work. Although, there are some differences between the advisors. All of them but one has a higher academic education and degree. The person lacking a degree does have some experience of academia from studying courses. He emphasizes that he possesses other values such experience in cultural work and with child and youth issues, in other words, informal cultural capital. It implies there are to some extent a bureaucratic activism in the institution as many advisors show they are partly driven by engagement in their area of expertise, which make them either bring forward certain questions or elaborate more on some issues than others.

The mixture of both social, cultural and organizational capital is needed to enter the specific bureaucratic field of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Knowledge in an area of expertise, for example in agriculture, biology or in culturally related areas, are needed to be able to serve, assist and advise different people from various levels in the institutional apparatus. Previous working experience from political or governmental organisations and institutions is also relevant. Experience and education have helped the advisors to understand the ways of bureaucracy. With time, the advisors acquire practical skills and are gradually socialized into the field by engaging in it; learning what questions are important, how to introduce questions on their own, and finally having enough knowledge and power for decision-making. A space of manoeuvre is evoked. By understanding the norms and values of the field, they become successful in their work. As mediators, they transform and modify the meaning of the work. Thus, the tacit and implicit knowledge is gained by observing and analysing co-workers and the surroundings to be able to understand how to get results, both individually and in assembled groups. This implies developing a certain habitus within the bureaucratic field.

Advisors, such as Thomas, see the importance of being able to navigate within the bureaucratic field as it sometimes overlaps the political. Although, there are some contradictions in the experiences of some advisors, for instance, Torvald and Iris. Torvald experiences that his everyday work brings them closer to the goals of the institution, if working and doing things in a certain way within the frames. While Iris experiences a lot of individual work, a lack of feedback and believes group work is important to reach collaboration and eventually the goals. She has not entirely developed a bureaucratic habitus within the bureaucratic field, and the space of manoeuvre differs from other advisors such as Torvald.

Having a certain amount of cultural, social and especially organizational capital raises the advisor's status within the assemblages. It is interesting that all advisors mention that they have done volunteer work but not specifically said it is a significant work experience. It highlights the importance of social capital and the fact that the advisors take this collective understanding between them and the interviewer for granted. The creation of social capital is especially noticeable when new networks of people are formed, and other group-constellations are dissolved. Only then it is visible which routines are being changed and transformed into new ones, that is, when people enter or leave the assemblages. The regularity and outcome of the advisors' work could change as the knowledge that keep the assemblage's intact dissolves (Latour, 2005).

Influence on work

The following section intends to give the reader an understanding of how the advisors believe their practical work affects the issues of the working-groups and projects they are involved in. Does the work have an actual impact on the political scene in the Nordic countries, or is it merely perceived as so? It is important to outline what the advisors feel they can influence and what space of manoeuvre they have in order to find answers to the questions.

We start off with Miriam. The role of an advisor is to supply ministers and experts with, what the advisors call, relevant information. Such information is based on knowledge and their specific area of expertise. An advisor has the possibility to come with ideas to their co-workers but also on a higher level to the ministers. Miriam feels that she needs to have specific knowledge if taking ideas to a higher level. Generally, the ideas come from the ministers, experts from working-groups, and EK-M in combination with politicians from their member countries. The basic information presented must be clear and in order, as well as the schedule, budget, certain stakeholders and at least three Nordic countries must be part of a given project for it to go through. There are also initiative projects from the governments, which gives about 10 million SEK per year for three years. So, it is fully possibility to come with ideas as an advisor but somewhat difficult since it must stay within the frames of how the institution handles the working order.

“Then it goes straight down and money is being earmarked. And it [the idea] will be done, whether it suits or not. A difficult way of giving command.” [...] “So, I don’t get many ideas.”

Miriam believes there are different consequences of implementation in every day work. She appreciates the fact that there are experts from every country in the working-groups. A negative consequence is that it is not a joint organisation; there is a lot of working alone as the secretariats of the countries are placed at different departments. The advisors need networks and some experience, which is hard to get when you work alone. They need to work closer with co-workers and feel part of a team. It is especially challenging for the coordinators, who often are young and relatively new in their role. She points out that even experienced coordinators and experts feel lonely and are not always being seen by the head of the unit or department. In general terms, both new and experienced advisors need a closer work-relationship and to be part of a group, to exchange knowledge, enhance their networks and to receive feedback.

“They [new advisors] do not yet have the network and robustness, thus in need of co-workers. They are quite isolated.”

“As you [advisors] are not part of the national system and the managers success, you become invisible.”

Torvald explains his role in the decision-making process of the institution. Decisions taken by ministers are subsequently communicated to the advisors of the Nordic Council of Ministers, who are required to act upon the decisions and do so in several ways, partly in working-groups but also by writing them into policy documents, discussing them and suggest processing of the decisions. He believes he does so both in a formal and informal way, for example, he can suggest giving money to projects, create workshops and initiate other

processes such as negotiating with other chairmanship countries. As an observer, it is difficult to see the difference between the formal and informal actions. For example, the implementation of a decision can be the writing of a letter to an expert or a colleague or participating in a meeting and give your point of view on subject matters.

Torvald believes he takes initiatives on political decisions or ideas and does so more increasingly since the Nordic Council of Ministers started a reformation and modernisation process of their working routines in 2014, but he feels it is often difficult to follow up on decisions due to lack of time or unclear policy documents. This shows an uncertainty in how to perform ones work practically. Torvald does not give examples on how he takes initiatives. With reference to Latour (2005), could it be that since policy documents and other ideas are so vague it creates an uncertainty on how much space of manoeuvre an advisor has and on what decisions to take?

“Often policy documents are unclear and concern things that we do not have power on so we have to send letter to the countries and ask them if they could do something. We cannot write directives, it is a weakness here. We can give suggestions to partners how to follow up, it is what we typically do.”

Iris explains that the Nordic way of working is new to her as she previously worked on a European level, and she believes her work would be much more difficult if she did not have the UN child convention as a base for the new modernisation process of 2014 of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Her role involves working both internal and external with her area of expertise. This makes her work different from other departments at the Nordic Council of Ministers, as she says it crosses boundaries. That is, to implement policies on child and youth questions through the entire institution. All departments need to work with these issues, but the expertise lies with her unit and working-groups. She feels it is difficult to get through to her co-workers at most departments and especially the different committees, except the social sector, as they lack the knowledge of working with child and youth issues. Iris refers to silo-thinking and working with questions only related to your own sector and department.

“It is a special construction that has been here for long. There are lot of structures that might have gotten stuck.”

She gives an example of a meeting involving a remittance process with all sectors and the different Committees of Senior officials, where Iris was the head of the Nordic child and youth committee and reported on the strategy on child and youth issues that they all need to work with. The social sector understood the work and its importance and came with a lot of feedback, but the other sectors did not understand how the questions were related to them. Although, Iris believes the reformation process that the institution has gone through gives a certain development and feels that there is an enormous potential within the Nordic cooperation that is not fully exploited.

When Martin mentions his practical work, he explains that it involves making compromises within the Nordic countries, since not every country wants the same things. He says that the difference between the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers is that the Nordic

Council they vote on proposals while in the Nordic Council of Ministers must reach a consensus in every decision. Martins experiences from working in politically managed organizations such as the National Cultural Council in Sweden and the Nordic Council has given him invaluable knowledge and understanding of political decisions.

“I have ‘changed hats’, so it is a bit difficult, I am still learning.”

Another difference of work between the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers is the budget. There is no budget to work with in the Nordic Council, which makes the work freer in comparison. Instead, he needs to follow up on the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers and their use of budget. He and his co-workers need to see if the Nordic institutions live up to the goals set by themselves and the Nordic Council of Ministers. They do so through a control committee.

Besides following up on advisors, he must also give them suggestions and feedback in the working process. At the same time, he has parliamentarians to relate to; to understand them without directing them, and rather give them relevant information and comments.

“I give them recommendations. I am not like a robot here.”

Martins work suggest sticking to the frames of the bureaucratic field, following what is necessary of him in his role as an advisor. At the same time, he expresses the importance to understand the parliamentarians he works for, to give them relevant information and feedback on their ideas or suggestions. It is the details taken for granted (Latour, 1999) in every day work, but yet so important for the system to function. This implies understanding his role as a mediator, to be able to translate and transform information to parliamentarians.

Gunnar believes his international experience has had an influence in his work and to the unit FJLS. He feels his competences are necessary to understand what holds the institution and the Nordic countries together, and what priorities are important. He explains that he knows what to point at, when to be quiet, and believes there is much space to act.

“I am a bureaucrat activist. I have a responsibility for something to happen, not only in meetings, but to make things happen.”

As previously mentioned, several advisers argue that they engage in forms of bureaucratic activism, such as Gunnar, Iris, Miriam and Torvald. They are partly driven by engagement in the issues they work with, such as children’s rights, environmental and climate issues. Gunnar is well aware of the norms prevalent in the bureaucratic field and can easily manoeuvre within it, but he does not specifically explain how he believes he makes concrete action of the bureaucratic processes. The actual outcomes of his work might be obvious for him, but it is not clear for an observer. The doxa, the common social beliefs and actions of the assembled groups in the work-space, are taken for granted, and thus unquestioned in the field itself (Bourdieu, 1992). Thus, the actions that Gunnar and his co-workers take are seen as obvious choices for them, but if they start to examine or question the actions, they would not be self-evident any longer.

Thomas explains that in his role it is a must having certain knowledge in environmental issues, not being a specialist on everything, but to be able to embark on complex issues and present them in a short and precise manner. Again, he draws on cultural and social capital within the bureaucratic field he is part of. He also feels that within the Nordic Council, it is important to have experience from a political organisation. He mentions that the parliamentarians, who are elected by the citizens, have their own political agenda. He argues that it is necessary to be cautious so that his opinions do not sidestep the politicians' views in the decision-making process.

“[It is important] to have an idea, but a great understanding that the elected politicians decide in the end. Our main mission is to make it work, not what we want.”

Again, understanding the implications of what is necessary in the field would be obvious for Thomas, but not as an observer. For Thomas it is clear how and when he has the possibility to influence the working process, but when explaining it to someone outside the field it is not easy to relate to.

Jacob believes that his work has influence on policies and legislation between the Nordic countries, but the recommendations suggested by him and his co-workers take several years to implement. It is also important to know who to talk to at the right moment. That is, gaining knowledge within the bureaucratic and political field. Sometimes, a recommendation that has been turned down previously becomes a prioritised question at the Nordic Council of Ministers a few months later. That means the recommendation was put forward at a bad timing and did not follow in line with the work plan or agenda of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Therefore, it is important knowing when to bring ideas and who to talk to.

“You wonder, what happened? Who did I not talk to, and who did I talk to?”

Jacob says it is important to gain knowledge of the priorities of the different sectors of the Nordic Council of Ministers, and follow what the different presidencies prioritises, since it is easier for him to come with suggestions and recommendations within the frame of a subject that both the Nordic Council of Ministers and the parliamentarians has prioritised. He explains that it is important not to give completely different suggestions outside this framework because it will be rejected by the parliamentarians. It is also valuable to team up with other co-workers, and to keep up a dialogue between the secretariats and the different presidencies. Social and practical skills are thus needed to be able to mediate successfully.

Summary

The advisors perceive their role in the daily work as important and describe it as influential. Their role is to supply ministers and experts with relevant information. It is not always proven to be an easy process in providing this information as there are several steps to go through. The advisors need to base the knowledge on their own area of expertise, and together with different group-constellations, package the information so that it will be accepted by the politicians in the end of the bureaucratic process. That is, they must be successful mediators and understand what recommendations to put forward at the right time of the bureaucratic process. The advisors translate and modify the meaning of the work to make it viable (Latour, 2005).

To come up with ideas and take initiative to processes are constantly occurring but varies in level and between advisors. All of them do come with ideas as it is part of their work, but they usually stay within the frame of common routines in the field. For example, when suggest giving money to projects, creating workshops and initiating processes such as negotiating with chairmanship countries. The advisors are aware of the internal codes and methods at work; when to point things out, when not to speak, and in what situations there is space to act. This implies a certain space of manoeuvre that most advisors feel is restricted. When stepping outside the box the advisors still need to go by the rules of how the institution handles the working order. Thus, there is an uncertainty in how to perform ones work practically as the role of the advisor is unclear. The advisors learn the role by practicing.

Furthermore, some actions taken by advisors such as Gunnar, Torvald or Thomas might seem obvious and necessary to them, but when examining the actions into detail they could appear as vague. For example, writing a policy document or arranging a conference. For someone outside the field, examining or questioning the actions might no longer make them self-evident. Therefore, the advisors need to display their actions as legitimate in the working process, otherwise the actions might come across as unclear or unnecessary.

It can also be difficult for advisors to follow up on decisions due to lack of time or unclear policy documents. There is a time difference in the decision-making process before an action reaches decision. Some advisors will never see an actual decision materialize after having organized and gone through a paperwork exercise. Decisions taken by national governments in line with decisions of the Nordic Council of Ministers could take several years.

Some advisors mention the need for new and experienced advisors to work closer together and exchange information and ideas. Feedback is important in their roles as they need to feel they are being seen. This would imply that newly employed advisors are less aware of the routines, methods and codes and that they need to work closer to more experienced advisors. At the same time, new advisors would pay attention to routines and work that are not very functional, as they come in with an objective perspective to things. The space of manoeuvre is thus less obvious for less experienced advisors, but the inclination to work outside the frames with less bureaucratic codes could be even greater.

Writing and documents

This chapter will discuss the central role that writing and documents have in the daily work of the advisors. Thus, I will make an attempt to answer the third research question “*What role does writing and documents play for the advisors and bureaucrats of the Nordic Council of Minister?*”

First of all, writing and documents make up a large part of the preparatory work for meetings, as well as during and after meetings. The reader will be given examples of the interviews showing that writing is central for working-groups and other group constellations as well as for networking. Writing of meeting-packs² is especially important to the advisors. Secondly, there will be examples of how the advisors implement policies to understand to what extent, and in what forms, documents and writing are important.

Meetings

To understand the significant role of writing and documents, this section will give some examples of where they are used, namely on different meetings. The advisors spend many hours a week on meetings. One can wonder what the meetings are all about. What happens on the meetings, what is being said and not said, what do they write and how do they go about?

During my observations I learned that there are different type of meetings and procedures. One type of meeting is quite informal and is held between the advisors and his or her department. It is a weekly occasion to meet the closest team and co-workers to discuss ongoing matters for the upcoming week. The head of the department is also due to attend to get a briefing and discuss the matters.

Other examples of meetings are those between advisors and the working-groups they participate in. Each working group has a coordinator and a chairperson attending. On these occasions the members take notes. Experts are often invited to speak for a national point of view. At least three countries must participate in each project. A protocol or notate is taken during the meetings.

The advisors also meet with people from the public and private sectors; officials of national institutes and organisations, research institutions, consultants, politicians and other people of interest. When the advisors work with projects it is usually in the form of seminars and workshops. Therefore, it is important for the advisors to have a large network in all sectors and different fields to reach the aim of their projects.

The moving of papers

The advisors are especially busy and productive in producing text and documents during the process of completing the meeting-packs. As an observer, one would almost compare the writing process as compulsive or manic, similarly to that of Latour explaining the mania as getting a result of proliferation of documents (Latour & Woolgar, 1979) As the advisors are on time-pressure and need to deliver the meeting-packs to the committees, as a sum of results

² A meeting-pack is a large file including several documents such as meeting agenda, abstracts, notes, decisions, developments, conclusions, reports and written documents on further actions that should be taken. They are written twice a year by the advisors on specific topics within their field of work.

of the actual work during the last program period, my observation was that all the advisors I met were quite stressed. They felt the need to produce an adequate package of documents, both finding the right files to insert, and to summarize it in a way that fits the frames in the bureaucratic field. And while the advisors struggled with the writing, the office itself was a hive of writing activity (ibid.). The desks had different piles of paper, neatly or disorganized, on top of them. The computer formed the basis in creating the meeting-packs. Behind it stood the advisors, immersed in texts, with slightly wrinkled foreheads and questionable looks.

The type of institution that the Nordic Council of Ministers form, in combination with the Nordic Council, is important in both the bureaucratic and political fields. By being in the same building they can allocate and use their power for different objectives. By incorporating established knowledge from one field into working routines of another field, the institution as a whole can channel the total power for its own purposes (Latour & Woolgar, 1979). The power then lies in how the knowledge, for example in the form of policies or action plans, is marketed. If the policy or action plan is in the annual program or on the agenda, and is well marketed by an enthusiast, the knowledge could have a larger impact than if any of these parts were missing.

When the documents are incorporated as policies, action plans or projects, the actual writing procedures will fade and be quite invisible. The writing process is a tool in achieving the projects etc, where the office space and bureaucratic field is the environment where the action happens, but it is a paradox that without these tools and the environment the outcome would be non-existing. One presupposes the other. Therefore, timing and marketing are extra important for the actors when they want to show that their work has a purpose and a meaning. They need to convince that their work is important, legitimate and worth funding (Latour & Woolgar, 1979). By observing and interviewing my informants I understood that this was correlated to the initiative rights the institution so strongly stressed upon. If the timing was wrong, the ideas to weak, a lack of enthusiasts or simply not properly anchored within the institution, the advisors did not get many ideas. As Miriam would put it when describing what influence she has in her role as an advisor, *“So, I don’t get many ideas.”*

Hull (2012, p. 117) says “to understand what bureaucrats do with files and why, one needs to know some of the specificities of the procedures they involve”. Miriam explains that practically, she and her fellow advisors write meeting-packs. She mentions what meetings she has been to, what has been written (such as abstracts and reports), and give feedback to co-workers, departments, ministries or other groups and institutions.

In the abstracts the advisors need to write clear sentences starting with “that”, “to” or “in order to” and thereafter the task. These abstracts are written before the start of the meetings to be used during them with, for example, expert groups or ministers. The abstracts can be somewhat modified after the meetings concerning the language, but the content should remain the same. Miriam gives examples of what could be written in the documents from the meetings with the committee members of EK-M:

”That: EK-M looks at the yearly reports and approve them.”

“That: the following yearly report have been approved with following comments.”

“It is good that you have been more political in your alignment, we would very much like to see more international work.”

The advisor has a power that is partly concealed in the formal structure of the Nordic Council of Ministers. This power rests to a large extent on the fact that the advisor is the writer of the document and can thus set the agenda in the explicit way he or she think is the best for the task. It is up to Miriam to write clear abstracts that work in practice, but she believes it is difficult to write it on place and to get it approved immediately. Thus, the advisors usually say they will modify the language somewhat after the meetings and it is approved either on silence procedure or immediately on the meeting. Silence procedure is a way of formally adopting texts, if no proposed changes or amendments to the text is stated before the deadline of one week. It happens that not only the language changes, but also the content somewhat.

“The trick is to “hear” what is desirable, and if it possibly is confirmed with what the secretariat wants..., we have the initiatives, formulate it in decisions in order to follow up on it in a sensible manner later on.”

Miriam brings up the fact that there is a vulnerability in writing and getting the abstracts confirmed on the spot. This means that it could be difficult understanding what should be mentioned and not mentioned, and then narrow the decisions down to a text accepted by the rest of the group on that precise meeting. The abstracts should be very short and not include too much background information on the subject. Therefore, it is problematic on a later occasion to understand and work with the abstract as it might not seem very clear due to a lack of knowledge. Hull (2012, p. 128) says that “bureaucrats are often troubled by the question of who is really ‘behind’ a proposal”. The interpretation of texts can always change in the future. For example, in the case of writing abstracts that end up in meeting-packs, it seems the advisors need to find a balance in knowing how much background information to put in, as well as writing the abstracts in such a way that it is suggesting but not taking the advisors personal opinion into account. The advisors find this balance by tacit knowledge of the assembled groups of the institution. Miriam mentions that the advisors now have moved over to write thicker and more informative abstracts on the notion that they all need this process to work smoothly, as the short abstracts did not work well in practice.

When Torvald describes the production of documents he says he puts one third of his time on preparing meetings with committees and ministers. Before a meeting, on each topic, he writes one to one and a half page to introduce the topic, where he states what was discussed on the last meeting, the background and then proposes a future development. In the text, he writes what has changed since last time and responds to the comments from the last meeting. During the meeting, he writes an abstract for decision which should be discussed by the participants, approved as a decision at the meeting itself and thereafter be published.

“Sometimes they agree with me and sometimes not.”

Torvald sometimes writes notes which are for internal use in the secretariat.

“This is especially relevant when we are going to work on a case. I.e. the decision is that: ‘The secretariat is continuing on case xx based on the discussion at the meeting’.”

In most cases he puts in attachments and related documents to the background material introducing the topic, which could be action plans. The documents for the meetings could be between 50 to 100 pages. In cases where there are external experts at the meetings, Torvald

needs to present the main elements, what it means to him and the group and what actions he and the group believe needs to be taken. He also informs them about ongoing processes in the Nordic Council of Ministers so that the external experts get a greater understanding.

Gunnar spends about two thirds up to 100 percent of his time on tasks dealing with bioeconomy and related documents. A large part involves checking e-mails, prepare meetings, writing meeting-packs and participate in internal and external processes. Another part is the initiative right. Gunnar takes initiative in different ways and through different processes. He mentions an example of a process where he is obliged to look at tendencies in the Nordic countries in the different sectors of his unit, as well as tendencies in the EU. He also needs to see how the Nordic tendencies affect the European ones. He finds this out through his non-Nordic networks and international meetings.

“Nordic views, strategies, stories, through sight sharing. Also, through conferences in cooperation with international bodies such as the UN, OECD, and so on.”

Gunnar also write abstracts to the meetings of the ministers and the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials, which he says involves the initiative process at the Nordic Council of Minister. He makes notes from a Nordic perspective. Gunnar explains that he is not always in agreement with the experts at the meetings, but that is not needed since the experts’ advice stands for themselves. That is, the experts act from their own knowledge and area of expertise and they do not need to be coherent with other experts. They can discuss their perspectives at the meetings. All recommendations are not necessary to proceed with, but it is a process that Gunnar is part of. Another part of his work is giving support in different processes. He gives the experts written recommendations, and consequently to the ministers of the Nordic countries as well. He does not get too involved in the recommendations as he believes his work is to write corrections on tasks or agreements, and not try to steer the outcome of the process.

“There are demands for very short and precise recommendations, that we can put forward into the system. Thus, we do not take a stand to everything, and do not require a meaning to everything.”

In comparison to the advisors at the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers, the advisors of the Nordic Council are more often in contact with politicians from the Nordic countries as they write reports and supporting materials which they deliver to the committees within each respective area. The reports are based on questions and topics that the politicians want to investigate further, thus, informative facts that the politicians can use in their decision-making. The advisors at the Nordic Council deliver this type of support to the Nordic Section’s Council, where all 87 parliamentarians are gathered. The Secretariat of the Nordic Council, together with the host country’s delegation secretariat, usually prepares and organizes two annual meetings. The advisors also write the protocols during the meetings and are consulted when the host country’s secretariat prepares other meetings throughout the year. An example of the moving of paper is through Martins work at the Nordic Council. His main task is, according to him, to deliver “good support” to the committees so they can make well and informative decisions. Usually, written materials from meetings are later edited and

inserted into the correct template and format using a computer, at the desks of the advisors. As Latour mentions, the desk can be a hub where the writing activity is frequent and seen as the advisors' productive unit. Drafts and other documents can at this place be constructed and composed by sources of literature originating from the outside (such as scientific reports) as well as within the space (such as files and diagrams) (Latour & Woolgar, 1979).

Martin mentions that the Nordic Council works differently compared to the Nordic Council of Ministers; *"We do not have a budget or institutions, et cetera."* The role of the Nordic Council is to examine the ministers' budget, see if they need to make other priorities, and to bring suggestions or recommendations. Martin gives suggestions and recommendations based on proposals from the members. The proposals are processed and are eventually ending up as recommendations, as the decisions are taken at his section. Practically, Martin gives an example on recommendations given to the Nordic Council of Ministers that they should give support to a Sami film institute, also called ISFI. The process and arguments to supporting this idea derives when a member or party group submits a member proposal on a topic that the member or group think the Nordic Council should recommend to the Nordic Council of Ministers. Generally, it can touch any subject. The secretariat will assess whether the proposal contributes to Nordic benefits, if similar topics have been discussed before, if the Nordic Council of Ministers already deals with something similar, and so on. The Nordic Council of Ministers must answer all the recommendations in a written report. Martin gives an example of how it could be written:

"'This is a good idea', and earmark money. Or, 'This is already being done, we cannot prioritize this because we do not have enough money', or give some other reason."

The secretariat puts forward the proposal for, in Martin's case, the Committee on Knowledge and Culture with the supplementary information. Martin then needs to write an answer to the report.

"My job is to write a report on the suggestion that the committee has discussed, thus, how the committee reflects on the Nordic Councils of Ministers answer."

The committee discusses the matter and, if the situation is unclear, votes on whether to proceed. Based on the committee's discussion and decision, where hopefully, according to Martin, there is political agreement, Martin writes a report in which the decision formulation is: "that the Nordic Council recommends the Nordic Council of Ministers to support (in this case) the International Sami Film Institute". At the next meeting, the report and the decision formulation are discussed, and if the situation is unclear it will be voted on. Each case is thus treated at least twice in committee. Then the report goes on to the Nordic Council Session (conducted twice a year), where the entire plenary assembly (87 members) votes on the matter after a debate. Only then will it be a recommendation, that is, if a majority is behind the report. Thus, Martin provides with the supporting, written material.

Martin explains, as for ISFI, the argument was that it is only supported by the Norwegian state (during spring 2018), and the politicians said that the Sami in general, and in this case Sami film, concerns Finland and Sweden too and therefore should have an economic responsibility.

"It is the politicians who come up with the ideas and we who will follow them up [the ideas] and give the politicians a hopefully exhaustive decision-making basis."

Summary

Writing texts and different documents make up a large part of the advisor's daily work routine. They work with writing as preparatory work, but also during and after meetings, when further actions need to be taken in the implementation process. The documents per se are relevant in the different assemblages of groups, to put forward suggestions that in the end will end up at the table of the ministers. Therefore, the advisors put a lot of effort in analysing what they hear, read, and write to make the outcome, the information, clear and without implying their own thoughts or agenda. They also need to manage their written work within a time frame as other people depend on their documents of information. This is especially important in producing the meeting-packs, as it is a result of how the advisors have understood and implemented policies throughout the year.

The writing procedures structures the advisors' work. They have two occasions during the year when they prepare the meeting-packs. Throughout the year, they also need to be active in taking notes, write abstracts, answers and other written documents within a certain time-frame. They feel the need to produce an adequate package of documents, modify, translate and summarize it into the common templates of the institution. Basically, the advisors can follow a yearly scheme as a base for when to engage in writings of different forms.

The impact of writing is big. Most of their writings are documented, saved and then used in further processes. The meeting-packs include several texts such as abstracts, notes and recommendations et cetera. Bureaucrats are often troubled by the question of who is 'behind' a proposal (Hull, 2012). It is important to write clear and detailed documents that they can support. Thus, the writing has a direct impact on the ongoing work. That is why it is vital for the advisors to find a balance of how much advice they should give. They emphasize this as one of their main tasks and learn it by tacit knowledge of the bureaucratic field.

Implementation of policy documents

Writing and documents plays an important part in the process of implementing policies. Hull (2012) explains that to understand what bureaucrats do with files and why, one needs to know some of the specificities of the procedures they involve. For example, by creating projects such as producing annual work programs for working-groups, arrange seminars, conferences, work-shops, and by financing different projects through external working-groups. The advisors then follow up on projects through Nordic institutions and nations, as well as on internal processes.

I will demonstrate that documents and writing have a central role in in the implementation processes through the narratives of the informants. The narratives are based on discussing implementation as part of the daily work of advisors, as well as the implementation of international conventions as I first aimed to look at how the Nordic Council of Ministers work with international conventions such as the convention of biological diversity.

Ways to exercise bureaucracy

The advisors of the Nordic Council of Ministers

Miriam mentions that a large part of her daily work is about following up on decisions and implementing them in different ways. She states that the Nordic Council of Ministers task concerning international conventions is to assist the process of implementation. An example is the EU Habitats Directive from 1992, when all member countries of the EU would implement it nationally. Thus, this was a national implementation process, but as the Nordic Council of Minister applied projects within the Nordic countries, they could be of assistance to them. For example, Sweden and Finland learned from Danish experts on how Denmark carried out activities. They learned from each other, what went well and not so well, and evaluated the work. Thus, the Nordic cooperation was part of the process in implementing a directive and international agreement. When it comes to formal or informal implementation in Miriam's daily work, she implements decisions that has been taken by ministers, experts and EK-M. Her job is not to be an expert, but to lead processes, work with facilitation, plan meetings, cooperate, and make participants write constructively. That is, characteristics that you only learn by being in the bureaucratic field.

“When you enter this space, you leave your expertise behind.”

This example actually shows the opposite of what other advisors have said in the previous statements. Are the advisors really leaving their expertise or do they merely perceive it as so? They are employed because they have a certain knowledge and expertise, so why would advisors feel they need to leave it behind? As shown in this thesis, some advisors say they bring in their expertise to meetings and to different groups as part of their advisory role.

The yearly action plans within the working-groups function as their policy documents. The agenda of the action plan in the Terrestrial Ecosystem Group (TEG) thus differ from year to year, and so does the actual work.

“The working-groups, with the experts, bring forward what you [the working group] want to work with. Every country discusses land and cultural environments and what they want to invest in upcoming years, based on earlier results, signals from for example the Nordic Council.”

Parallel to setting the agenda of the TEG-group, the budget needs to be set. Information on the budget is delegated to the TEG-group. The Nordic Council have some influence on the work of the TEG-group.

“If there is a task that is too difficult and with no interest in working on it, the Nordic Council can stand its ground and put a budget on the task, and then it has to be adjusted, such as creating a workshop. Thus, many are involved in the work of the environmental sector.”

This suggests that if there are different views on whether or not to work with at specific task, the Nordic Council has the final say in the matter. Putting a budget on the task is really underlining that the specific work must be implemented by the working-groups under a specific department, even if it is too difficult of a task. It could be that there is lack of interest in the task, lack of resources such as experts, or it could be the lack of time. Either way, when the budget is set on paper the working-groups and advisors need to see it through. Hull (2012, p. 20) says “a file draws particular bureaucrats into a matter or excludes them as the file moves across their desk or is routed around them”. Consequently, there is a power in documents involving the advisors, or excluding them, in working with specific topics.

Torvald explains that the Nordic Council of Ministers hardly put any enforcement in their work on international conventions. The implementation process works through the national administrations whose main instruments used are the laws and regulations. He says these instruments are documents with enforcement powers, and that people in the societies or countries are obliged to follow them. In the Nordic Council of Ministers, they work with declarations, cooperation agreements, and resolutions, which have limited enforcement.

“The Nordic Council has a little bit more power than we have, but still they produce recommendations, and they can issue inquiries.”

Torvald mentions that the Nordic Council of Ministers are the mediator, there to discuss issues or inquiries but has no formal power. The same goes for the concerned EU-directives, the Nordic Council of Ministers has no formal power. They are not as powerful as legislative bodies but can instead rely on countries to give them assignments to fulfil. When handling international conventions there are directives on how to apply them. For example, concerning the Convention of Biological Diversity, Torvald says he does not work with it but mentions the Nagoya protocol³ as an example of an international convention they have been working with parallel to their own line of work. The Nagoya protocol (Nordic Environmental Protection Agency, 2018) concerns the ownership and rights to use genetic materials. The protocol, that was agreed upon by the Nordic Countries, prevented international companies to claim the right to the genetic materials. Parallel to the Nagoya protocol, the Nordic Council of Ministers worked together on the preservation of seeds as genetic resources through the Nordic institution NordGen, a gene bank with around 300 000 different seeds.

NordGen (NordGen, 2018), or the Nordic Genetic Resource Center, is a Nordic organization dedicated to the safeguarding and sustainable use of plants, farm animals and forests. The Nordic countries have been cooperating for more than 30 years on conservation of genetic

³ The Nagoya Protocol is an international agreement on genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge. The protocol regulates how the genetic resource is to be obtained, how it is to be used in research and product development, and how profit from its utilisation is to be allocated.

resources. NordGen was established in January 2008 as a result of a merger between the Nordic Gene Bank, the Nordic Gene Bank Farm Animals and the Nordic Council for Forest Reproductive Material. NordGen is mainly financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers. Torvald explains that the uniqueness about NordGen is that the Nordic countries (with the Kalmar Declaration) have decided to put their plant genetic resources under shared ownership and joint management. Thus, the Nordic countries decided to withdraw their rights to the material. He believes that these resources are of great importance in future food security and for the preservation of cultural heritage.

The Nagoya protocol influenced the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The institution read through the protocol, reviewed the EU-process which was based on the protocol, made a directive on genetic resources somewhat stating the same thing, then they adapted the work of NordGen in order to align it with the Nagoya protocol.

“A part of it was to amend a declaration called the Kalmar declaration, which is parallel to the Nagoya protocol, stating the plants et cetera are common property and in a public domain.”

NordGen needs to make bilateral agreements with the Nordic Countries if the countries want to use the gene bank. The result is that the Nordic countries have a Nordic institution that must follow an international convention as well as the countries who need to adapt to the agreements. Torvald believes that international policies or agreements sometimes are descriptive when basing their own strategies of work on them. The Nordic Council of Ministers can take an international convention and then pick out areas that they consider important to work with that goes in line with the work and aim of the institution. That is, conventions as an instrument does have an importance as some of the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers are based and translated to policies and further on to concrete action, like action-plans and workshops.

“We translate an international convention to strategy or action plan for the Nordic countries, which would be implemented mostly through our system and our institutions, but also partly in the home countries.”

When Iris describes her experiences of implementation processes at the Nordic Council of Minister, she says her unit that manages a budget of four million DKK per year, all of which goes to different programs where organisations can apply for funding. All Nordic countries, plus the Baltics, may apply but the projects need to have a connection to the Nordic values. The Nordic child and youth committee sets the overall priorities for the programs. Then a Nordic institution, called Culture contact North in Helsinki, administrates the programs and handles all projects. The project varies, but usually involves a social or cultural aspect that prioritises children and young people’s influence. The projects apply funding through the institution NORDBUK, which gets a report on which projects will get a funding that year. Iris writes an implementation plan, a so-called yearly strategy. NORDBUK in turn monitor and support other committees on how to work. When evaluating their work, the program administrator sends a yearly report which is up for discussion by the committee, who in turn ask for improvements or suggestions. Iris says,

“Up to now nothing much has happened to these evaluations. It has been a nice paper exercise.”

Occasionally a larger evaluation is requested, where Iris writes a tender procedure to an external consultant to evaluate what the program has led to the last five years. The evaluation should show if the program followed the priorities that the committee wanted, as well as the new priorities from the reformation process of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

“You want to see how the program live up to the priorities in the new strategy. What was good before and can be used in the future.”

The rest of the budget is used for prioritised projects that Iris and her co-workers decides on, for example projects on child poverty.

The committee has different themes and priorities changing year to year. When choosing a theme, the advisors must first give suggestions on the topic, then allocate what needs to be done and which actors are strong enough to take action. They keep themselves updated on the topic and investigate on where there is a need for action. The starting point is Iris who put written suggestions forward, due to the right of initiative. Many ministers do not have enough knowledge in questions concerning children and young people since they have different background, experience and work on other issues. Iris says it is noticeable in some committees where she has put forward a written strategy on how to work with these questions. For some people it was clear, such as the social sector who came with a lot of feedback and suggestions, but others do not understand how the questions concerns them. The criticism is put forward in an informative way, but she believes it is difficult to know how much people take in to account as it is not measurable.

Furthermore, Iris explains how the Nordic Council of Ministers generally start projects that will lead to policy suggestions internally or externally in the Nordic countries. Usually, the suggestions are implemented within the organisation since it is more difficult to get the countries to implement them. For example, policies concerning child poverty projects need to be based on an overall perspective where the child's role and thoughts are not neglected. Municipalities are able work with these types of projects and policies to prevent child poverty. Iris uses the international child convention, which the Nordic countries all ratified and stands behind, as a major tool in her work. She mentions that internal projects are often a result of her work. The difficult part is to get projects implemented in the Nordic countries.

“This working group does not have the greatest impact on the countries.”

Therefore, Iris usually work through her networks. Other ministries in institution work more with factual matters than overall questions, which are easier to relate to than abstract or unfamiliar subjects.

Iris believes the new modernisation process of the institution uses the child convention as a foundation and is an argument for her unit's work. Practically, it is an argument for her cross-sectoral work towards co-workers when giving written materials to support them in how they can involve the perspective of the child and youths. One example is how the co-workers could understand a child and youth perspective following a set of keys, but also practically in arranging certain workshops, conferences, and following a written manual created by her, on the influence of children and young people. When organizing meetings, she also uses a checklist as a tool.

“I am the annoying co-worker who puts something forward that they do not see in their own world. If we would not have had the child convention, we would not have had the arguments. It is hard to say no to.”

Gunnar explains working with international conventions or agreements in different ways. The overall tasks of his unit start with the Nordic Councils four visions and engagements, furthermore there are the cross-sectoral priorities, such as child and youth, equality, and sustainable development.

“Work on equality is ongoing, but on child and youth questions... it is so so. We are obliged to work with it.”

Basically, this quotation ascertains what Iris previously explained on the lack of interest or understanding to implementation of cross-sectoral issues.

Instead, Gunnar focuses on the four engagements which are integrated in the chairmanship program. It tries the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and his unit work to apply them in their sector. The SDG's that are directly important and relevant for the daily work of his sector can be integrated, but their relevance varies. He states that he and his unit do not get any directives on how the goals should be implemented, it is part of their work to understand it. Hull (2012, p. 125) says that it is the task of the officer to summarize the “relevant facts and precedents” and “suggest a course of action”. Some SDG's goes in to strategies and work, and they try to get a coherency all the way trough. Thus, this implies the necessity of speaking the same language, understanding the words used and the way of speaking in the bureaucratic field, to be able to take the right actions that “fit” into the frame or the space of the institution. Basically, part of the daily work of the advisor.

Gunnar work with major international conventions such as the Convention of Biological Diversity, for instance concerning fishery collaboration. He as well, mentions the Nordic institution NordGen as a cooperation on biodiversity.

“The Nordic cooperation has a closer contact with politics than the academy. We can affect the political part more.”

He adds that the secretariat take responsibility to avoid parallel structures and not to overlap in work. He also gives examples of projects, such as supporting workshops, where experts worldwide are invited, and where the Nordic Council of Ministers give their view on the Convention of Biological Diversity and the Aitchi target number 6⁴, and its similarity to the SDG's in biodiversity. The Aitchi target number 6 (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2018) concerns the impact of fishing on marine ecosystems. He says that international conventions are bilateral, and it is the UN and the national governments that have a responsibility to follow international agreements, not the Nordic Council of Ministers as an international cooperation body. Thus, the Nordic Council of Ministers assumes the duty of working with international conventions, but not to participate in the process on how to develop international conventions or agreements. Practically, Gunnar says the countries gather information on what is important for the Nordic countries by having meetings and

⁴ Aitch target nr 6 is about sustainable fishing and applying ecosystem-based approaches by 2020.

discussing with each other. They gather the information in notes. He says they help each other to prepare positions, actuating process (lobbying), to pay for expert consultations, and more.

“After some time we want the ministers to bring it up for a political discussion, come with suggestions or declarations, and to discuss it formally with the EU.”

Gunnar explains that the Nordic Council of Ministers is a forum where the countries want the advisors to look at the scientific basis of decisions to put it into processes of agreements. For example, the Nordic Council of Ministers has for several years worked on projects on how to move a conflict. That is, not to affect agreements but to support other processes with information and mediate between different actors.

“We are a platform. We support projects. We make demands where they are politically relevant.”

The advisors of the Nordic Council

When Martin describes what implementation processes means to him, he says it is to follow up on the work of the Secretariat of Nordic Council of Ministers, as well as on the use of their budget. For Martin, “following up” is a permanent task in his daily which he does through political initiatives by giving politicians a good basis for making decisions. It could involve reading reports, having meetings with stakeholders or the Nordic Council of Ministers.

“As far as the budget of the Nordic Council of Ministers is concerned, I will analyse the consequences for possible changes and present them to the committee.”

He constantly monitors different processes and has a control committee that especially considers how the Nordic institutes live up to their own goals or goals made by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The control committee consists of members of the parliaments appointed annually by a nomination committee. Martin argues that the Nordic institutes work with tasks that the Nordic nations are not able to manage since they are not national institutions. When following up on political initiatives, he and his colleagues try to write briefly and concisely, giving a background and description of the case, and furthermore, suggestions on how the committee can proceed with the initiatives.

“The terminology we use are the decision formulations, that should be formulated in a particular way.”

Since Martin is the rapporteur of the issues at the meetings, it is the committee’s coordinator who writes the briefs, while he takes supporting notes which they review together after the meetings. The briefs are sent to the chairman of the meeting who then approves them, after which they continue their journey to the other members as decided abstracts. The abstracts are published on the website of the institution.

Concerning international conventions, Martin explains that he and his co-workers do not use international conventions as a main tool in their daily work but knows that they exist and can refer to them. For example, knowing that his work is in line with the UN Convention on Children’s rights. Another example of using international conventions and writing of documents in his work is on the subject of match fixing. Gambling on games is a problem. The European Council has put forward a convention that the EU-member countries will work to prevent match fixing. Martin uses the convention in his writings and as a support to arguments which gives force to decisions made on a Nordic level. Practically, it can result in a

workshop in the Nordic countries on how to prevent match fixing. He says that other conventions, such as the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, are used in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers, for example when arranging a workshop about illegal trade with cultural heritage.

When it comes to implementing policies, Thomas starts with explaining the role of the Nordic Council as the parliament and the Nordic Council of Ministers as the government, compared to the political structure of a Nordic country. He says the institution is publicly anchored and part of legitimising and making decisions for Nordic collaboration, but also to inspire and come with suggestions for new ideas for the collaboration, and to make sure that everything complies with the political decisions.

Thomas and his co-workers organise two yearly sessions of meetings with the parliamentarians. They meet in working-groups and process proposals and reports. The secretariat makes sure that all meetings are in order when the parliamentarians meet, that the right documents are provided and that there is a follow-up after the meetings. He writes the attachments himself provided as notes or as received reports. He says that the detailed level of the notes varies depending on person and agenda. As an outsider, it could be difficult grasping the process and moving of papers. But as Hull (2012, p. 22) mentions “if you want to understand bureaucratic activities, follow the paper”. One of Thomas’s main tasks is to prepare meetings, that is, write the agenda and the associated documents. Another task is to invite experts in cases where a specific topic should be explained. His aim is to make meetings work by providing knowledge.

“Real knowledge, so the politicians can discuss knowledge on a reasonable level.”

“There is political exchange of thoughts, ideas... and draw conclusions.”

A large problem is silo-thinking within the Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers. When working in one sector it is difficult to think about the others. His experience tells him silo-thinking occurs on both national, Nordic and EU level, but believes the Nordic cooperation have less silo-thinking than nationally. The institution works cross-sectoral in working-groups and committees on all sectors, to make sure all processes are cross-checked.

Regarding the initiative rights in the organisation, Thomas gives an example working with an energy report where he had a mandate from a selected working group to develop a report on energy collaboration in the Nordic countries. By taking the initiative on a discussion where energy politics was on the agenda, he made a concrete action, as it is otherwise difficult to say where the initiatives come from. A part of his function is to control if they as an organisation has followed up on decisions. The Nordic Council is specialised, have certain competences among its staff, and can help with technical details when the parliamentarians do not have sufficient knowledge. Thomas mentions that the parliamentarians and the Nordic Council should be careful of getting into details, and instead write general guidelines and directions. Thus, he does not go into details concerning how to develop projects and cannot give such a task to members of the Nordic Council as it would mean to detail the actual work.

Thomas says the role of the Nordic Council in working with international conventions is limited but that he and his co-workers exchange knowledge and experience on how to

implement international conventions as well as EU directives. He gives an example of Norway and Island which are under EU directives. It is important to cross-check on how to work with different implementations to avoid working on parallel processes, and to make sure there are less obstacles between the countries. The political agenda of the Nordic Council of Ministers, in relation to the EU, includes harmonizing the implementation measures between all Nordic countries, but since they are five different countries with different traditions and administration it is a constant struggle. Furthermore, Thomas gives an example of the Mercury convention⁵ (United Nations Environment Programme, 2018). Emissions of mercury has been a global environmental problem and needs to be limited. To solve the problem all nations must participate, not just the Nordic countries. The Mercury convention was mainly developed through Nordic cooperation. Thomas explains the working order as first getting knowledge and understanding of the problem, create a political momentum, then bring the subject through the UN-system by firstly run it in the EU.

“Globally we have several examples of Nordic cooperation that contributes to create a global profile among the Nordic countries.”

He mentions that the Nordic Council does not implement conventions in the same way as nations do as by legislation, but through information and dialogue. The Nordic Council coordinates and creates dialogue with the Nordic countries at ministerial level, for example on agreements about genetic resources with NordGen. Thus, there is a high level of implementation on national level. Requirements and mapping are beneficial to succeed also on a Nordic level, largely at the Nordic Council of Ministers. As an example, the Terrestrial Ecosystem Group (TEG) could receive recommendations from the Nordic Council, such as working on certification on tourist destinations, to be implemented together with a Nordic institute or a Nordic nation.

When Jacob discusses implementations processes, he explains that his main task is writing the basis for decisions. He mentions two reasons on how and why; one is to spontaneously initiate processes, the other is to optimally manage incoming suggestions from politicians and to process and secure the quality. Jacob says that it is possible to work cross-sectoral if there is interest from other committees. For example, on questions related to transports, his concern is to manage the labour market and enterprise while the environmental aspect is managed by the committee of a Sustainable Nordic community.

Jacob argues that his working day can be divided in three parts. First, to produce materials for committee meetings, such as abstracts. There might be suggestions from politicians who want a report or a reflection that they can take a position on in upcoming meetings. It could also come from the Nordic Council of Ministers, where he writes an answer to a recommendation, that is, what to think about it and how to take it forward. He says that there is a lot of producing texts which is time consuming. The second part is related to e-mails and answering them, going to meetings within and outside the organisation, arranging conferences, contact people, coordinating, and manage upcoming issues. The third part is to keep a protocol and follow up on different processes. By keeping a protocol, Jacob can go through every item

⁵ The Minamata Convention on Mercury is a global treaty to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of mercury.

listed and what to do with them. This implies there is a to do-list, thus clear routines and recurring tasks. For example, it could be about establishing a process in the organisation, or to write an abstract.

A part of the daily routine is to hold formal and informal meetings. The working-groups are more informal, while the committee meetings are formal. Jacob says that all of them are to be given service by him, receive basis for decision-making such as reports, and to be able to receive visits or make visits at his office. Jacob is responsible for the political work and some external working-groups with politicians, while there is a coordinator for the detailed parts of the work. He believes the working-groups are more operational than the committees, as the working-groups usually get a task from one or several committees to act upon. They also receive a deadline to bring suggestions to the committee.

“They [the committee] are more reactive than proactive, and not so automatic. You need to remind them of their obligations, really curl them and suggest things. They do not get any extra bonus points for this, usually. It is not their stage of power.”

Jacob says this is a result due to the lack of focus on Nordic cooperation, since the parliamentarians participate in national parliaments and work with national and/or EU-related questions.

Regarding international conventions, Jacob explains that in his committee, he and his co-workers have not had any ownership of such. That is, being responsible for aligning work of the institution to an international convention. It could be so that other committees have had ownership and have sent them a referral to have it heard.

But, concerning certain types of international conventions such as the child and youth convention, he might receive it through a cross-sectoral process and need to implement it in his work. Although he believes parliamentarians are not very active or proactive on subjects issued from other channels than the usual ones, which implies that conventions mainly related to other sectors could be more difficult to work with in his network of politicians.

“One reason is that they [parliamentarians] might not be engaged in the topic, and also because they know they do not own the question and are only helping someone else with comments.”

If there is cross-sectoral work with international connection to a convention, there is usually another committee who receives it and carries the main responsibility. This implies a lack of cross-sectoral work and has been stated as an issue understanding the interviews, and furthermore a reason why the Nordic Council of Ministers apply initiative rights for its staff to make things happen. Jacob gives an example of how the committee writes abstracts with various comments and how it arranges a meeting with at least two other committees, having an open discussion about the abstract. In this case when Jacob’s committee is involved, he receives the abstract in writing before the meeting.

“On overall or cross-sectoral issues, such as sustainability or child and youth questions, it is harder to grasp. People have difficulty in understanding and grasping it. Sometimes there are enthusiasts, but overall it is relatively tangible and broad.”

Usually there are not any concrete suggestions on how to work with these questions, although everyone believes these are relevant topics, according to Jacob. If the secretariat writes a

suggestion the involved committees generally agree. He believes there are two ways to increase the interest. One is to make the question managed by the politicians from the start. In this case, an enthusiast is needed to steer the work and take responsibility. This person can run the question in the committee and hopefully get support.

“It is important that the question has been raised by a politician or an enthusiast, so there is someone feeling an extra responsibility and can take the question further. There must be a personal influence to improve the situation.”

The second approach is that the committee itself take the leadership role from the secretariat and write a concrete suggestion that is to the point. Although, this approach has a large chance only to lead to a consensus and no active engagement. It could end up in a silent paper exercise. Such a situation can be interpreted as not having enough power within the committee. Jacob believes there is a problem when the suggestions are too broad, since there is no one committed to the question, thus there is no proper follow-up. He explains that there is generally no talk about conventions since there is a desire from the Nordic Council to have concrete suggestions and sharp statements from the committees that others can act upon. According to Hull (2012, p. 133) “the irony is that the more you try to pin responsibility to individuals, the more responsibility is collectivized”. The Nordic Council desires concrete suggestions, but it could be so that the committee, due to lack of knowledge or engagement, protect themselves by deploying the documents widely, hence not stating they take responsibility of the suggestion.

Summary

Political cooperation and implementation are main activities that the advisors work with. Documents and writing have a central role in the implementation processes, for example when putting forward written suggestions to politicians on how to implement policies on a national level or when creating project and workshops. Although, the detailed level of the documents tends to vary depending on person and agenda. The advisors need to find a balance on how to express themselves in written texts without going into details. Thus, their mission is not to affect agreements but to support other processes with information and mediate them in their networks. There are different opinions between the advisors on how to use their expertise in their work. Some, such as Torvald, argue that the expertise is important to show, while others, like Miriam, suggest leaving it behind when entering the bureaucratic field.

There is a weakness in the work of the advisors when the suggestions from the committees are too broad. It creates a vagueness that affects their work as there is no concrete suggestions and sharp statements from the committees that the advisors can act upon. This makes it difficult to underline exactly what people do. As Hull (2012) explains, if you want to understand bureaucratic activities you need to follow the movement of the paper. This is true to some extent, but it is still difficult to grasp the process and moving of papers as an outsider due to its vague working structure.

In most cases, international conventions are not used in the daily activity of the advisors but can be referred to when creating policies that in turn will lead to implementation processes within the Nordic countries, such as the Convention of Biological Diversity. Implementation requires the advisor to learn how to mediate a process from one point to another. There is thus a practical logic of how to act, that is, learning by doing to become a bureaucrat.

When the advisors act within the bureaucratic field, they find it difficult to understand the questions and perspectives from an outsider. For example, when asking my interview questions, the advisors took some things for granted and answered, to them, in a familiar way. When I continued asking the same question in order to understand better, they did not always know how to answer my questions or why I insisted in asking them. They already perceived their answer as clear. This suggests there is a doxa of the field, where there are common social beliefs and actions which are self-evident and unquestioned (Bourdieu, 1992). Thus, what is true to a group of people may not always be so for others. So, as they are part of a bureaucratic field with a specific form of doxa, they learn a certain logic of practice about how to act within that field. When the common social beliefs and actions are questioned, and the networks are dissolved, the black box would open as they would be aware of the bureaucratic field. Only then all elements of their work and parts of the network would be visible to the actors and bureaucrats.

Discussion

The bureaucratic field

The Nordic Council of Ministers is embedded within a politicized bureaucratic field. Within this field there is a set of values, norms and a tacit collective understanding between the advisors. The advisors bring with them several resources in the form of social, cultural and organizational capital, gained by previous experience such as education, work experience and volunteer work. The advisers gradually learn bureaucratic procedures, words and discourses as well as practices, thus, they slowly develop a bureaucratic habitus. Their capital and bureaucratic habitus are important within the field as means of power and could be used to the actors' advantages.

It is interesting to see how questions or problems are worked upon. The questions that the advisors work with usually concerns their subject matters, like biology, agriculture or the environment. But it is the process of working with the questions that gives an understanding of what the advisors actually do. The advisors have an overall mission to mediate between people and their networks in the implementation processes they are part of. They do so in several ways, such as having meetings, writing documents and creating projects. A part of the process is to follow up on what has been said and done and transform this information to their networks such as the committees or working-groups.

From my research, I found out that writing is a large part of the work of the advisors. It is a tool to legitimise that work has been done, since the implementation processes are quite vague and extended. The time difference between act and decision means that the advisors generally will not be able to see the actual outcome of an implementation process. For the time being, when working as advisors at the Nordic Council of Ministers, they transform and translate information by using knowledge and a certain language gained in the field to make it fit the frame. That is, they use their mediating role to adjust information in such a way that it is manageable to work with. For example, the abstracts should be very short and not include too much background information on the subject. Otherwise it will be problematic to understand an abstract and work with it if the information is not precise. The detailed level of the notes varies depending on person and agenda. As an observer, I experienced that it was difficult to grasp the process and moving of papers. Hull (2012) argues that if you want to understand bureaucratic activities you need to follow the movement of the paper. This implies following the work, which is very tough for an ordinary citizen to get involved in.

As mentioned in this thesis, the bureaucratic and political field overlap somewhat. The political field needs the bureaucratic field in order to initiate and execute decisions taken within the political. The Nordic Council of Ministers, as a bureaucratic mediating support, creates a link between the two fields. It is the interstate body, responsible of the paper process, mediating to keep the political structure and related political decisions to function and staying alive. The two fields create their own rationalisations and values, which could be a problem as they are far from anchored by the public, that is, where the political decisions and policies are meant to help.

The logic of practice of bureaucracy

For the advisors of the Nordic Council of Ministers, the logic of practice is created by tacit knowledge. The advisors are learning by doing. By adjusting oneself to the language, physical

movements, perception, feelings and actions, the bureaucratic habitus is moulded. The bureaucratic habitus within the field in turn shapes the group and creates a common social action, that is, how the advisors go about in everyday work life. Tacit knowledge is difficult to transfer from one person to another as it could be a personal experience or a skill, but it can be transferred through the social network of the group and be practiced within the frame of the field.

When the actors adjust to their field, they start taking certain values, norms and practices for granted. Their way of understanding and interpreting is framed by the field. The bureaucratic gaze and logic of practice is gradually turned into a form of bureaucratic doxa, their shared social beliefs and actions, are for them self-evident and thus unquestioned. As an example, I had difficulties during the interviews in making them understand my questions. The advisors had problems in relating to the language, the questions and why I insisted on asking them. Therefore, they used a bureaucratic language when answering as to legitimise themselves and their work. It was difficult to exemplify what the advisors practically do for work and explain the processes.

The logic of practice lets the advisors adjust to the bureaucratic language and actions, which means that outside the bureaucratic field where the civic society is, a gap is created. The civic society can have difficulties in understanding and relating to the bureaucratic field. In contrary, the advisors rarely see actual effects taking place as they are far from the citizens. This means the links to the exterior becomes weaker since they do not see actual or fast enough results in society, which consequently strengthens the field itself. Therefore, the formality of the bureaucracy of the field support the advisors to take what they believe are tough decisions, as they are not able to see the effects that the decisions have in society.

The black box of democracy

The work itself on one hand requires a specific type of person with certain capital required to enter the bureaucratic field. The interviews show that there are quite a lot of bureaucratic activism in the institution, as many advisors are driven by engagement in their area of expertise. At the same time, people who work within the field slowly adapt to its specific norms, values and practices, thus forming a specific habitus. As mentioned, the advisors share a doxa, but simultaneously the individual in contrast to the group see the role of the advisor in a different light. The actions they take depend on the perception they have of their role. Thus, the space of manoeuvre is different depending on the person and how they have adapted to the norms, values and logic of practice of the field. I do not see it as a problem per se for the group of actors in their daily activities, but it shows that if the Nordic Council of Ministers want their advisors to take more initiatives, they would need to go outside the box. This is not the case. Even though the advisors mention they have initiative rights, they rarely take actions that would imply going outside the working orders and regular routines.

So, is it necessary? What would the consequences be? The tacit knowledge implies that the advisors as an assembled group understand when to act and when to stay within the frames. Apparently, this knowledge or truth, is appreciated in the Nordic Council of Ministers as it keeps the institution running, like the engine of a ship. But there must be more behind it. The institution itself would not suggest that advisors take more initiative if they did not see any problems to current processes. By examining the work of the advisors in this huge mediating institution, we come one step closer in unravelling the black box of the political bureaucracy of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Conclusion

To summarize, the bureaucratic processes within the bureaucratic and political fields are essential in order to make the bureaucratic system, that make up societies and nations, to function. Therefore, the advisors work are essential parts of the bureaucratic system, but at the same time it is very hard to pinpoint exactly what they do. In the process from idea to fulfilled projects the advisors work is a form of Latourian black box, which importance is invisible to the civil society at large.

I have made an attempt to show the role that the advisors fill within the bureaucracy of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The advisors' mediating role within the assemblages that form around projects and their space of manoeuvre are essential for the completion of the planned projects of the Nordic Council of Ministers. To understand the role these mediating institutions and the intermediaries fill it is necessary to study the details of the bureaucratic work processes, how ideas emerge and are elaborated on and how projects based on the ideas take form.

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