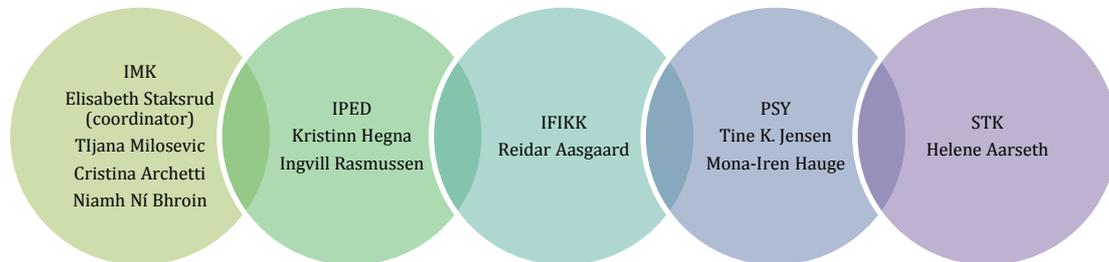


## LIVING THE NORDIC MODEL

### Digital technologies, institutions and Nordic childhoods into the 21<sup>st</sup> century



### Summary

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*What has often been looked upon as “The Nordic Model” of childhood, gender, and family politics is in the paradoxical situation of being severely challenged on the one hand, and being acclaimed and seen as highly attractive on the other. But do the values or ideals that the model is widely thought to embody still exist in the lived experience of its current and future citizens? Beyond its abstract theorizations, the “Nordic model” is the sum of all the micro interactions, decisions, i.e. lived everyday practice, of all the citizens of the Nordic countries. This study aims to problematize the very foundations of the “Nordic model” by examining historical and current ideals, practice and institutions related to the formative stages of its citizens’ lives—their childhoods, parenting values, the institution of family, kindergarten, school and media. Through which processes are Nordic citizens created and how do they come to perform the actions, embody the values, and take the choices that will lead to the continued existence of the Nordic model? We specifically focus on how the familiar challenges (i.e. globalization, migration, economic inequalities and digital technology) influence the values that are traditionally considered as inherent to Nordic upbringing and social institutions. How do these influences challenge the key values related to the institution of childhood in Nordic countries, taking into account inter-country similarities and differences? The project therefore aims to contribute to the understanding of how the Nordic model relates to the lived experience of its current and future citizens.*

### Introduction

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Several current social processes challenge the ideals, the institutions and the continuation of what is coined “the Nordic Model.” A greater heterogeneity in the upbringing of children and in our understanding of what Nordic childhoods are, result from globalisation, migration and mobility, heightened economic inequality and marginalisation, as well as new technological developments. Although the traditional “Nordic parent” is hard to portray, today’s parents are increasingly described as multicultural, or multi-religious and secularised. The equity, independence and autonomy often characterised as the core values that Nordic child rearing practices try to instil in youth, are also said to be emblematic of Nordic model citizens. As families adopt digital technologies, which can alter the patterns of parenting, but also children’s learning, socialisation, play and civic engagement later in life, these ideals may be under threat. A multitude of global influences, along with intensified parenting, where parents try to exert greater influence with respect to their children’s leisure activities and schooling, can also put the traditional Nordic child rearing practices into question and thus influence the

Nordic model citizen. Economic inequalities are increasing and change the context of the Nordic childhoods, as well as families' opportunities to choose, for example, which institutionalised socialisation they want for their children – e.g. public or private kindergartens and schools. Are the acclaimed values and ideals of “the Nordic model” still at play in Nordic families and institutions such as kindergartens, schools and child welfare? Is the model becoming a social construct that has little to do with the lived reality of the everyday lives of its citizens? And what may the new values and ideals that arise from the ashes look like? Are the challenges so acute and all-encompassing that “the Nordic model” is at risk of smouldering up?

### Three central perspectives

The University of Oslo's strategic programme UiO: Norden has, through the funding of five high quality projects, covered several important aspects of the Nordic model. Among these are perspectives on the labour market, historical evolution and change, challenges to the welfare state from migration and the branding of the Nordic model.

We propose three, thus far unexamined and yet central perspectives, which are necessary for understanding the changing nature of the Nordic model. 1. One is the *family and childhood orientation*, often mentioned as one of the cornerstones of the “Nordic model.” 2. The second is a perspective on how ideals and workings of the Nordic model's institutions are reflected in the *everyday lives* of Nordic citizens, including their children and youth. 3. The third is a

focus on the apparent challenges and changes that *global digital technologies*, internet and social media have brought to the individual lives, values and truths of the Nordic people – as citizens of a globalised world. These three perspectives are combined in the present project.

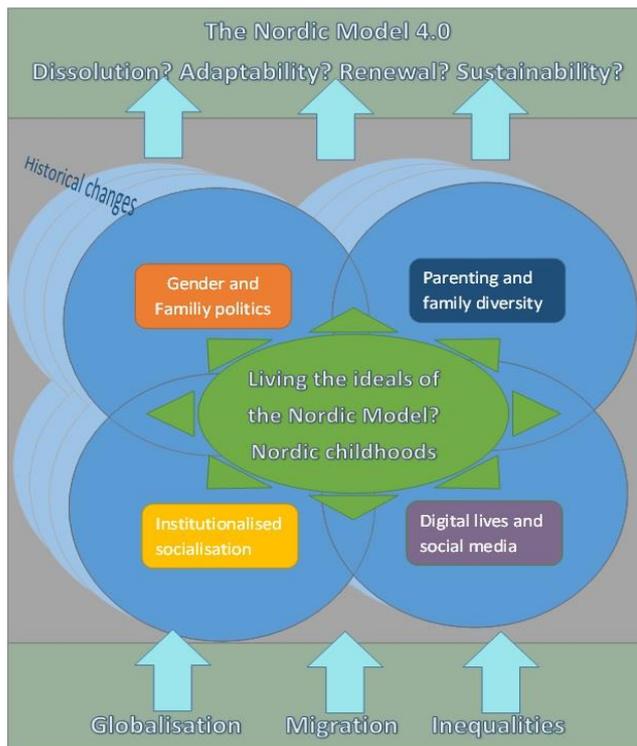


Figure 1: The ideals, values and norms related to the social construction of the Nordic model child, are at the nexus of fundamental aspects of the Nordic welfare state model. Policy, institutions, families and cultural industries have undergone profound historical changes, producing new contexts, new realities and paradoxes – representing emerging challenges for the sustainability and adaptability of the Nordic model in the future.

### Object of study

In this project, we wish to bring together scholars with a common interest **in the study of the lived and, in the broad sense, institutionalised childhoods of the Nordic countries**, seeing this as *the nexus* of the Nordic model. Through the lens of the “Nordic childhoods” and its institutions, our aim is to understand the history, present challenges and future sustainability of the *lived* Nordic model by contrastive and comparative research on the “Nordic institutionalised

childhoods.” By “**Nordic institutionalised childhoods**” we mean both the values (ideals) of the Nordic model as related to upbringing and formation of future citizens, but also the perception and the lived implementation of these values by families and formal institutions (i.e. kindergartens, schools, other state institutions and media—increasingly digital technologies). Understanding the ideals and describing the processes of socialisation of the Nordic model citizen require a critical focus on the individual practices that take place within significant welfare institutions of the Nordic countries, within the family, and in the relations between them.

### **Why departure from the child in a study of The Nordic Model?**

To sustain and extend the common values and institutional practices in any society, such as the Nordic countries, the transfer and internalisation of these values to the coming generations is required. In the socialisation and upbringing of the children of any particular society lies the key to understanding the basic beliefs, values and normative aims of that society. Thus, to understand the actual workings of what theoretically is commonly referred to as The Nordic Model, the evident challenges it faces as well as its sustainability, we must study *the organisation of and strategies for the upbringing of the Nordic child*. Esping Andersen’s (1990) analyses of European welfare regimes conceptualized ‘the Nordic Model’ as one ideal type, with reference to the Nordic countries’ form of universal welfare state policies and the regulation of state-market relationships. Later contributions have focused on Nordic family politics, children’s living conditions and wellbeing, as well as on related institutional arrangements (Christiansen & Markkola, 2006; Hernes, 1987). Previous research has identified several characteristic aspects of ‘The Nordic Model’ that are of importance for the welfare state and family politics; *universalism* in education, child care, and social welfare benefits (e.g. kindergartens, child benefits); social *equality* and *equity* (e.g. women’s labour market participation); and a high level of *trust* in the state and in public welfare programs (Bond & Lun, 2014; Christensen, 2003; Ellingsæter, Noack, & Rønsen, 1997; Melby, Ravn, & Wetterberg, 2009; World Values Survey, 2005-2009).

Our motivation to create an interdisciplinary research group and collaborative research projects lies in the shared conceptual idea that if normative ideals and practices that can be defined as a “Nordic model” exist, then these can best be identified and studied by inquiring into the practices of forming new citizens – children (defined as under 18) in the institutions of the family, kindergartens (‘barnehage’), schools and child protection services, relevant governmental and non-governmental organisations, while taking into account the role of media and technology in this process. We see UiO:Norden as an excellent opportunity to initiate and sustain new collaborative efforts among key researchers from different disciplines working on child-related issues at UiO, in Scandinavia and internationally. These scholars from distinct fields do not normally collaborate on these topics and we believe that by bringing them together we can design innovative interdisciplinary research and build robust comparative studies.

### **Description of the project**

Our proposed project is divided into four pillars that facilitate interdisciplinary research collaboration through a series of workshops (four pillar-specific workshops, an opening and introductory workshop and a concluding one). These workshops are envisaged as venues where participating researchers will engage in designing creative approaches to research

questions, or specify the details of methodology for their studies, execution and timelines, planned publications etc. The workshops will involve participation from the project members, relevant Advisory Board members, PhDs, Post-docs and relevant Master's students.

## **What do we see as the challenges to and inherent paradoxes of “The Nordic Model”?**

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### ***Pillar I: The parenting paradox – children's autonomy under pressure***

Raising the Nordic child has been described as disciplining through socialisation to trust, independence and self-reflexivity (Gullestad, 1996; Skard, 1956) rather than through physical punishment and authority. Historically, these ideals have manifested themselves in socialisation processes in the family and in pedagogy, in welfare policies institutionalised through kindergartens, schools, child social welfare and family politics, to name a few. In the classrooms of the present, pupil participation is reduced while teacher control is in focus (Imsen & Ramberg, 2014). The value of the autonomous child is still reflected in parenting practices (Hegna & Smette, 2015), but is clearly challenged by stronger supervision and technological surveillance (Aarseth, 2008; Lareau, 2003). Globalised internet and social media use among children impact on their wellbeing, socialisation and identity formation (boyd 2014), while parents lack the experience to grapple (Staksrud, 2013). Growing inequalities and the ideals of “The schooled society” (Baker, 2014) on the rise, exert pressure on parents to enable their child to master their schooling and future success. While autonomy and self-reliance are evident assets in children's encounter with technology and education, the emerging parenting strategies (“concerted cultivation”, “curling parents”, “helicopter parenting”, “tiger mom” etc. see also Lareau, 2003) may be a threat to these central ideals/self-concepts of the Nordic model. Historical perspectives will feed knowledge into other disciplines by exploring common historical features, differences and preconditions that have shaped contemporary attitudes to child rearing in the Nordic countries. We will also examine modern conceptions of children and childhood with a view to what values they reflect: what perceptions of children as human beings emerge. From this pillar, the following research questions emerge, contrasting the lived experience of the Nordic citizens of today as compared to the past.

**RQs:** Have the ideals and values inherent in the Nordic model changed historically, and if so, in what ways? Which ideals have become dominant, and which have been marginalized along the pathways of forming the “Nordic childhood” – and why? What are the ideals of parenting and normative childhoods held by today's parents, and what are the consequences of the actual parenting practices that Nordic parents engage in? This pillar will be led by Reidar Aasgaard (philosophy and history of ideas) assisted by Helene Aarseth (parenting, gender studies), and it will rely on the expertise of the History of Ideas and Childhoods and the Welfare State branch of our Advisory board, as well as Parenting and Diversity branch (please see Table 1 with the National and International Advisory Board members on pp. 9-10) and will be addressed in our second workshop. The details on the methodology will be fine-tuned in the workshop but this Pillar will broadly rely on analysis of historical documents, discourse analysis and existing quantitative and qualitative empirical research on this topic. We will also hire a PhD student to work on this topic (please consult the budget in connection to subsequent hiring references).

*Pillar II: Normative values under pressure of globalisation – rights and participation*

In April 2016, pictures from fierce demonstrations in 20 countries targeting the Norwegian Barnevernet (the child welfare system) were widely spread in traditional and social media alike (VG, 2016). An immigrant family in Norway received international public support as Barnevernet took their children away on the grounds of repeated slapping and beating by their parents. The incident illustrates how central values of the Nordic model – children’s rights and autonomy, protection from physical discipline in the family etc, may be at odds with key cultural and religious beliefs in other countries. In the Nordic countries, institutions like the child welfare system, public health nurses, kindergartens and schools are relied upon to steward and

manage these central values, and to contribute to the socialisation of families and children. The overall individual trust and consequent social capital, depend on trustworthiness in our experience with institutions (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008). Institutions on their end, depend on a high degree of public confidence to be able to accomplish their mission. Professionals in kindergartens, schools and welfare institutions meet challenges from a diversified student body as migration to Norway changed the diversity of the population (Sommerfeldt, Hauge, & Øverlien, 2014), while they themselves may have increasingly multicultural backgrounds. Thus, while these professionals are presupposed to further the normative ideals of the imagined Nordic model, they may themselves be living other ideals, transforming the institutions from within. The contours of the current and future Nordic model are continuously reshaped through this complex interplay between individual and institutional practice, enactment of values, norms and ideals, in the forming of the new generations of and for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Nordic institutionalised systems for prenatal care, childcare/kindergarten, child protection services, health care, schools and education systems and ultimately working-life are assumed to strongly emphasize self-formation, autonomy and democratic citizenship in children. Nordic children spend increasing time in institutions like day-care, school and organised leisure activities. Research projects will for instance study how the increasing value of child and teen independence, autonomy and agency can be developing, while institutional control, day care enrolment and modern parenting ideals simultaneously break with these ideals (Farstad & Stefansen, 2007; Imsen & Ramberg, 2014; Smette, 2015; Stefansen & Aarseth, 2011). The following research questions will be addressed:

**RQs:** What are the actual ideals and values of the parents, teachers, kindergarten and social welfare workers of today? Are their practices at odds with the continuation of the values traditionally thought of as the Nordic model? These questions will be addressed in the third workshop. The pillar itself will be led by Mona-Iren Hauge (psychology) and Kristinn Hegna (education) and it will involve the expertise of Socialisation, Youth and Gender Studies

branch of the Advisory Board, as well as History of Ideas of Childhoods and the Welfare State branch of the Advisory Board. While the goal of the workshop is to bring together scholars from different fields in order to brainstorm an innovative methodological approach to answer these questions, the proposed departing point for this thinking process involves a survey with parents, kindergarten and school teachers in Nordic countries, which will be supplemented with focus groups and in-depth interviews (see the budget allocation for fieldwork). We will hire a PhD student and a postdoc to work on this topic.

### ***Pillar III New technology, old norms? Autonomy, self-reflexivity and discipline***

Research activities will also address the modern Nordic childhood as increasingly digital and multimodal, with general access to digital technology and freedom to explore social media (Helsper, Kalmus, Hasebrink, Sagvari, & de Haan, 2013; Staksrud, 2011), and how this challenges parents' socialisation efforts and the teacher's role as mediator of knowledge (Lund & Rasmussen, 2008; Rasmussen & Ludvigsen, 2010). Internet, computer games and social media are venues for not only leisure and entertainment, but also for informal learning, counsel and civic participation (Livingstone, Carr, & Byrne, 2015; Staksrud, 2013). While children have the right to be protected from possible harm in digital environments, they also have the *right to participate* in these environments. International comparative studies suggest that the Nordic countries stand out from the rest with respect to children's internet use and the autonomy that children are entrusted with by their families and institutions when it comes to their online exploration. Children's participation appears to be encouraged by family rearing practices but is also enabled through institutional and policy-level support that is stronger than in many other European countries (Staksrud, 2011; Helsper et al., 2013; O'Neill, 2014). This autonomy, however, often considered as an inherent feature of the Nordic model, is directly challenged by not only the emerging parenting practices discussed above, but also by international laws that apply to Scandinavian countries and which put emphasis on parental authority in deciding about children's access to digital media platforms (e.g. European General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR). From this pillar, the following research questions emerge:

**RQs:** How are digital technologies reshaping parenting values in connection to the Nordic model? How are they affecting children's rights as a central pillar of the Nordic model? How are international laws related to the internet affecting the values of the Nordic model? This pillar will be led by Elisabeth Staksrud (media and communication), Ingvill Rasmussen (education), Tijana Milosevic (media and communication) and Niamh Ni Bhroin (media and communication). The questions will be addressed in the fourth workshop by Learning, Socialisation and Digital Tools branch of the Advisory Board and Media and Childhoods Online branch as well as by Vulnerable Children and Children's Rights branch of the Advisory Board. The provisional methodology for this pillar involves an analysis of existing survey data that is currently being collected and is designed to be nationally representative in a number of European countries (EU Kids Online Project<sup>1</sup>) and is funded in Norway by the Ministry of Justice; as well as existing qualitative research. We will hire a PhD student to work on this topic.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/Home.aspx>

### ***Pillar IV: Blind spots – the flip side of the normative child***

The Nordic welfare states are in an exceptional position internationally, when it comes to children's quality of life, their individual rights and protection, with the Children's Ombudsman and the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child being the institutionalisations of these acclaimed values. Still, family violence and the sexual abuse of children for instance, is not lower in the Nordic countries (Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2013), and child abuse and neglect is a major challenge (Mossige & Stefansen, 2007; Myhre, Thoresen, & Hjemdal, 2015; Schou, Dyb, & Graff-Iversen 2007; Sætre, Jebsen, & Holter, 1986; Thoresen & Hjemdal, 2014). The difficulties of disclosing abuse and neglect and the dire consequences of failure to disclose such abuse have been well documented (Backe-Hansen 2017; Jensen, 2005; NOU:2017). The radicalisation of youth is often explained as the result of failed integration and social inclusion by the welfare state, and the "Swedish example" is construed by the media as the politicians' and welfare system's lack of acknowledgement of the problems. Similarly, the inner workings of the Nordic model are exposed from the perspective of the *childless couple*. When gender and family policy is oriented at children's welfare, is there room for the people who do not wish to have children or are unable to have them? A focus on the Nordic model's blind spots, taboos and cultures of silence may challenge the idealized images of the Nordic child-centred welfare state, in professional practice as well as private contexts. How do Nordic welfare and mental health institutions handle increasing diversity and non-normative childhoods, and which are the challenges that are acknowledged and met while others are not – are same-sex parents, childless families, immigrant families, maltreated or abused children *seen*? What are the cultural taboos of the Nordic model? From this pillar, the following research questions emerge:

**RQs:** How do the changes in the structures of Nordic societies brought about by globalisation, migration and economic diversity impact the family values (ideals) inherent in the Nordic model? How do the ideals of the Nordic model affect those who do not meet the normative standards or do not play by the book? To what extent are the ideals represented in the current population? What are the differences with respect to these changes among the Nordic countries? These questions will be addressed in workshop five and rely on the expertise of Socialisation, Youth and Gender studies branch of the Advisory Board, as well as Vulnerable Children and Children's Rights branch. This pillar will be led by Cristina Archetti (media and communication), Tine K. Jensen (psychology) and it will rely on a discourse analytic approach as well as in-depth interviews with non-normative families in Nordic countries (to be funded via the fieldwork component of the budget). We will hire a postdoc to work on this topic.

## **Project plan**

### **Added value of interdisciplinary approach, ambitiousness of the project**

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The proposed project is ambitious, innovative and goes beyond the state of art in this particular field because it examines the unstated, taken for granted, assumptions behind what is normally considered to be the Nordic model; it also identifies and examines the less discussed paradoxes and the blind spots of such a Nordic model that the well-known challenges (e.g. migration, globalization, economic competitiveness, digital technology) bring to the fore, thus undercutting the model itself. The added value of such interdisciplinary

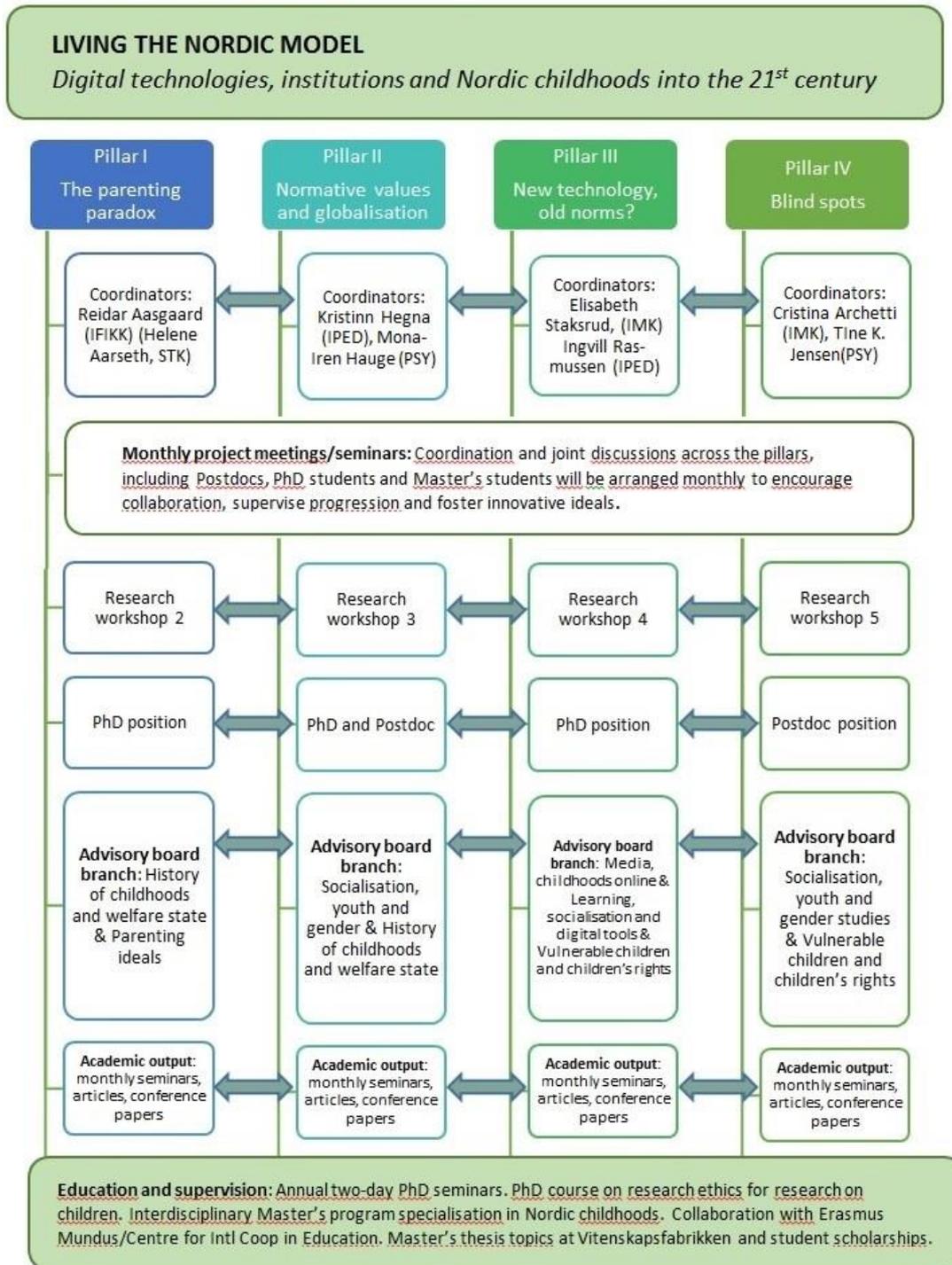


Figure 2: Project plan of Living the Nordic Model: Digital technologies, institutions and Nordic childhoods into the 21<sup>st</sup> century

research cooperation is that it allows scholars who normally work separately in their own fields and disciplines (i.e. research on youth, family, parenting, gender studies, education, digital media and technology) to communicate and produce innovative answers to proposed research questions in relation to connection to historical conditions, global challenges and paradoxes inherent in the Nordic model. This will be achieved through the cross-disciplinary pillars, described above, and the organisation of six workshops with the members of our

Advisory Board. During the three years' time, one introductory, one closing and four pillar-specific workshops will be arranged. The three PhD students and the two Postdocs will be included in pillar-specific projects. Each workshop will address the research questions specified under its pillar and the participants will then engage in collaborative research efforts, generating ideas for innovative methodological approaches to answer the research questions. In addition, we will hold monthly seminars at UiO as well as annual seminars for the PhD students and we propose the creation of an inter-disciplinary MA program specialisation in connection to the project topic. See figure 2.

### **Education (teaching) and supervision**

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In addition to the workshops and extended collaborations, the project will employ **PhD** candidates and **Post-docs (please consult the budget)**. These will play an integral part in the project, and their work will have a vital role in our monthly project seminars. The project will also aim to develop a specialized course for Nordic and International Ph.D. candidates in order to develop and enhance collaborative constellations and provide useful knowledge about childhoods, family lives and institutions in the Nordic countries. **A two-day PhD seminar** will be offered each year, specifically targeting aspects of the main research perspectives, and will include invited international speakers. In addition, the project will develop and offer a PhD course on **research ethics** when doing research with children. These courses will be open to all Nordic PhD candidates from all fields. The project will commit to develop and strengthen interfaculty educational collaboration at the **master's level**, both within UiO and in the Nordic countries. The project seeks to develop interdisciplinary master's degree courses and potentially an MA programme specialisation for Nordic childhoods in cooperation with our participating departments, as well as with other Nordic universities. We will seek to collaborate closely with existing educational resources, such as the Nordic Media Master at the Dept. of Media and Communication. The project will also allocate resources to support and supervise MA students who would like to work on project-related topics. We will pitch potential master topics for prospective master students on various arenas and forums, including UiO's Science Shop (Vitenskapsbutikken). The project will work with the Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU) to utilize student mobility, Erasmus+/Erasmus Mundus. All master students connected with the project will be invited to our monthly seminars and to present their work, as well as to other project activities.

### **Academic output**

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To ensure the long-term significance of the results, the project will publish the findings and conclusions in a variety of academic outlets (reports, journal articles, book chapters, etc.). We also plan to produce one open-source edited volume based on the output from the four pillars.

### **Future funding and participation in networks and at conferences**

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The researchers involved in Living the Nordic Model will use support from UiO:Norden as a stepping stone to develop a sustainable interdisciplinary research group that will break new ground in the study of childhoods, families, and Nordic social institutions, and thus promote cultural and social innovation. We will further prioritize applications for additional short- and long-term external funding. Our funding strategy includes national and Nordic sources for funding such as The Norwegian Research Council, Extrastiftelsen and Nordforsk. We will seek to develop applications for Horizon 2020, especially under the "Societal challenges" calls, as well as a Centre of Excellence application by 2025. Funding from UiO:Norden will

provide infrastructure to enhance collaboration through the co-location of researchers, PhD students and post-docs. The project participants have a successful record in securing external funding (see CVs). The project will facilitate participation at international conferences and in international networks for all project members, as reflected in the budget.

### **Dissemination**

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In addition to academic output and publications, the project will build on the wide array of stakeholder contacts (industry, policy, educational, government, charity, child welfare, parenting groups and others) identified and contacted by the partners' previous work. The purpose is to maximise dissemination of project results and also to build constructive relations with stakeholders best positioned to benefit from the results. Specific activities are planned throughout the duration of the project (and doubtless thereafter) as follows:

**Website.** The project website will be thoroughly revised in time for the project launch and regularly updated thereafter. It will include a facility for interested contacts to register to receive reports, press releases etc. (all to be posted on the site), with reports, links, press releases and contact information.

**Media coverage.** The project deliverables include a series of reports, each of which will be accompanied by a press release. The timing of these can be adjusted to coincide with relevant public events as these arise.

**Distribution of reports.** Short reports and published articles produced during the course of the project will be made freely available in PDF format online and promoted through media, academic and stakeholder contacts. The final project report (end of year 3) will be produced as a printed document, with the executive summary translated into main European languages.

**Conferences.** Throughout the project, project members will take advantage of the array of national and international, academic and policy conferences and events to promote project findings where possible through presentations, posters and panel submissions.

**Social Media.** The project will include the use of new social projecting sites and services for dissemination purposes when relevant. This would include setting up interest groups on sites such as Facebook or services such as Twitter where information can be posted for interested individuals, allowing for a direct dissemination also to interested parties outside the realm of established projects. This will also allow for direct contact with users, as well as the ability to facilitate democratic discussions and instant feedback on issues and dilemmas that will arise in the course of the project.

### **Project cohabitation**

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The Department of media and communication will facilitate shared office space for the project participants.