

Eirinn Larsen, eirinn.larsen@iakh.uio.no Modern and Contemporary History

I supervise students in Norwegian or English on issues related to modern and contemporary Norwegian and Nordic history with an emphasis on the ‘politics of Nordic exceptionalism’ (see below). I also supervise students wanting to explore how history is being used to build, brand or commemorate the Nordic region and/or nations, today or in the past (see below). As an historian of knowledge, I even supervise those interested in exploring the history of Norwegian and Nordic students abroad, or the history of specific educational and scholarly fields (e.g. business education, home economics, and history among others). Finally, I help students finding a suitable approach to the study of modern feminism, or gay activism.

- The politics of Nordic exceptionalism
- Reimagining Nordic pasts: History and memory
- The history of Norwegian students abroad
- The history of Nordic feminism

The Politics of Nordic Exceptionalism

Nordic exceptionalism is often treated – or tested – as a fact. In scholarship, there is no shortage of glowing descriptions of the region’s global performance. The Nordics are ‘moral superpowers’ (Dahl 2006), ‘agents of a world common good’ (Bergman 2007), ‘havens of gender equality’ (UN-CEDAW 2003), and the ‘referent’ for welfare states (Esping-Andersen 1990). However, correct or not, such statements can be themselves treated as research objects, something we could study. We can ask how, why and where these ideas and narratives of exceptionalism emerge? Who drove their development? And how are they used strategically – in politics and practice, and with what results? These questions formed the core of the Nordic Branding: Politics of Exceptionalism research project at UiO:Nordic (2017-2021). Its starting point was that these striking and consistent descriptions of the Nordics were suggestive of a “brand” – specific, simple, and stable. Moreover, they emerged especially in a global environment characterized by political and economic competition and rankings. Thus, we were curious as to whether Nordic exceptionalism might be better (and critically) understood with the help of marketing and branding theory.

I supervise students wanting to follow in the footsteps of the Nordic-Branding project by writing a thesis on how images and imaginings of *Norden*, the Nordic model (or models, as they do to span different policy fields from welfare to environment and gender equality), and individual Nordic countries are constructed and used in politics and practise within or outside the region. Using Nordic and/or non-Nordic sources, you can explore the representations of one or several Nordic countries in foreign parliamentary debates on specific policy issues (e.g. gender equality, female business quotas, prostitution,); analyse how Nordic countries in different periods are represented (and seek to represent themselves) in foreign or Nordic tourist magazines and travel books; or explore how and when the issue of gender equality became mainstream in the training of Nordic diplomats.

History and Memory: Building, Branding and Commemorating Nordics Pasts

History is an important resource in contemporary efforts to brand the Nordics, either this takes place inside or outside the region. But what kinds of pasts are being produced and used in these strategic imaginings of the Nordic? How does the past of the current *Norden* relate to those 'Nordic pasts' being (prod)used in earlier times? And what notions of the past do Nordic brands and models carried with them? Following up on research that I have been conducting myself recently, I do welcome students wanting to explore the uses of history in various ways and with different types of sources (e.g. historical monuments and the debates they drive in public, national commemoration events, or history (text)books etc.) You might also want to explore how imaginings of the Nordic past have changed as result of globalization, new Nordic interests and policy drives. Concepts like patriotic memory, national heritage, discourse, narrative, *lieux de mémoire* or others might be useful for you when exploring this both empirically and theoretically. You might use both Nordic and non-Nordic sources for this purpose.