



## Stories of Siblinghood: Three Nordic Neighbors at the 1994 Winter Olympics

By  
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### Abstract

This article analyzes newspaper representations of Norway, Sweden and Finland as Nordic neighboring countries at the 1994 Winter Olympics. Held in the Norwegian town of Lillehammer, the games constituted an enormous sporting success for the Norwegians while neighboring Finland and Sweden fared much worse, which led newspapers in all three countries to contemplate on the discrepancy. Focusing on the tension between national and macro-regional Nordic identities, this article argues that neighbor-images did in fact not compromise the seemingly collision-bound norms of “national rivalry” and “Nordic closeness”. Instead, the two norms informed and enforced each other through the key concept of humor, which created a safe media space for an Olympic dramaturgy of “siblinghood” to play out in. The analysis complements previous research on relationships between Nordic countries through highlighting the importance of emotion, popular cultural narratives, and intra-national relations for the construction of the Nordic neighbor as an imagined character.

**Keywords:** Sports media history, Norden, emotional history, popular culture, Winter Olympics

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### Introduction

During the 1994 Olympic Winter Games, the staggering difference in sporting success between the Norwegian host nation's athletes and their counterparts from neighboring Finland and Sweden sparked discussions in newspapers from all three countries. In Helsinki, *Hufvudstadsbladet* claimed that it was “frustrating” for “the Nordic brother nations”<sup>1</sup> to behold the Norwegian successes (26 February 1994: 13), while Stockholm-based *Dagens Nyheter* asked its readers to “stop comparing themselves with the brother people and start rejoicing over Norway's success instead [...] even if it's not always easy” (14 February 1994: 45). In Oslo, *Aftenposten* appeared to similarly balance appeals to both friendliness and rivalry by describing how Norwegian supporters first teased Swedish fans about Swedish failures but then offered the same Swedes a drink, “regretting kicks directed at someone who was already down”. Still, the newspaper claimed, “jokes about the Swedes were never far away” (20 February 1994: 18).

Newspapers covering the Lillehammer games thus had to deal simultaneously with two aspects of neighborhood. On the one hand, they asked their readers to view people from a neighboring Nordic country as friendly and good. On the other hand, as newspapers tend to do during Olympic games (see e.g. Billig 1995), they positioned their readers first and foremost as constituents of a nationally defined self, from whose vantage point it was supposedly difficult to feel good about another nation's good fortune, or bad about their sorrows.

Focusing on how the Olympic games, by way of popular and emotional culture, informed the idea of a Nordic neighbor, this article argues that the Lillehammer narratives did not compromise the seemingly collision-bound norms of “national rivalry” and “Nordic friendship”. Instead, the two notions enforced each other through the key concept of humor, constructing a relationship between the nations that was distinctly neighborly and sibling-like. By analyzing how this dynamic played out in newspaper representations of Norway, Sweden and Finland as Nordic neighbors at the 1994 Winter Olympics, the article provides new perspectives on the Nordic countries at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Nordism and neighboring nations

The imagining of the relationship between Nordic countries as a special kind of relationship is not particular to 20<sup>th</sup> century sports. Instead, it was evident already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when “Scandinavianists” dreamt of a politically unified Scandinavia (Hemstad 2018). During the 20<sup>th</sup> century strivings towards political unions died out, but the idea that Nordic neighboring countries (who were collectively understood through the concept of “Norden”, which also included non-Scandinavian Finland) should cultivate cooperation and friendship were

consolidated and politically promoted from the interwar-period onwards (Götz, 2003, pp. 326, 340; Kharkina, 2013, pp. 60, 66; Hellenes, 2020). This idea has been referred to as “Nordism”, and is defined by historian Peter Stadius as advocacy in favor of “a functioning Nordic cooperation and a feeling of togetherness often expressed in terms of familial closeness between the brother peoples” (Stadius 2019: 14).

While social scientists may be inclined to focus on political Nordic cooperation, this article widens the view on Nordism by focusing on the emotional aspect emphasized by Stadius. There is, namely, a notable distance between the practical, socioeconomic idea of a “functioning Nordic cooperation” and the much more elusive “feeling of togetherness”. The analysis will accordingly mainly approach Nordism by investigating whether Nordist *assumptions* were in play during the Lillehammer games. A journalist, when asked, could very well have denied being a Nordist, but still have written texts which carried, required, and promoted a Nordist reading. Nordism, thus, in this context becomes foremostly an analytical concept.

Such a focus immediately raises two kinds of questions. Firstly, it points towards the range the feeling of togetherness enjoyed in Norden. Was Nordism mainly an elite project, or something ingrained in popular culture? And were there limits to intra-Nordic closeness with regards to tensions and historical conflicts between the nations? For instance, historically, Finland and Norway had been subjects of Swedish political domination, and the relationship between contemporary Nordist sentiments and more cautious perceptions of neighbors derived from memories of inequality deserves attention.

Secondly, the emotional-historical focus raises the issue of what Nordist thought meant specifically within the context of the 1990s. For instance, political scientist Christopher Browning has described the period as one of decline for the ideas of Nordic collectivity during the rise of globalization and extended European integration (Browning 2007). However, we know little of whether these developments affected emotions about Nordic neighbors at a broader, popular level, or in what ways.

### **The Nordicness of Winter Olympics**

If one wants to answer such broadly defined questions, one might wonder what good an article on the winter Olympics, especially one that predominately focuses on only three of the five Nordic countries, will do. The answer lies in the cultural history of winter sports and its fruitful, albeit geographically somewhat illogical, relationship to cultivated notions of “Nordicness”.

For over a hundred years, winter sports have been popular spectator sports in Sweden, Norway and Finland, and sports such as skating, skiing and ski-jumping

have been conceived of as an integral part of each country's national identity (see Ehn, Frykman and Löfgren 1993; Goksøyr 2005; Wassholm 2018). From the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, winter sports were constructed as something essentially Nordic, which is most clearly epitomized by the introduction of the *Nordic Games* in Stockholm. These games were designed to promote both nationalist and Nordist sentiments, and winter sports were selected as fitting events since they would allegedly enable the hosts to properly celebrate Nordicness (Ljunggren, 1997, p. 356f). Due to the meteorologic realities of Nordic geography however, winter sports in Norden would mainly be practiced and developed as spectator sports in Sweden, Finland and Norway, and not in Denmark and Iceland. The exclusive Nordicness of winter sports thus constitutes a seeming anomaly, which only Finland, Norway and Sweden get to embody, and it is within this context that audiences from these three countries from the 1930s onwards began to consume the Winter Olympics as mediated events.

Especially, historian Helena Tolvhed has shown how Swedish media narratives during the post-war period represented some winter sports and athletes as essentially “Nordic”, and how a Nordic sporting “us” could be represented by both domestic and neighboring athletes (Tolvhed 2008: 110–114). Sweden, Norway and Finland, Tolvhed argues, came to embody Nordicness through their alleged relationship to winter sports, despite Denmark and Iceland being absent from the narratives. There is reason to believe this communal Nordic context to be of evident relevance to later periods as well, not least as cross-country and ski jumping disciplines are still labelled as “Nordic” disciplines in encyclopedias and official championships programs today (see for example Britannica 2018; *Tickets sale start for Nordic World Ski Championships Oberstdorf 2021* 2019).

Tolvhed also suggests rivalry as a core component within these narratives (2008: 111), touching briefly but precisely on the tension between nation and neighbor which forms the focal point of this article. Similarly, a short essay by ethnologist Fredrik Schoug on the much later 1992 Albertville Winter Games highlights the importance of the Swedish-Norwegian rivalry (Schoug 1992), and scholars such as Leif Yttergren and Matti Goksøyr have described the same rivalry as pivotal for power struggles within Nordic skiing (Goksøyr 2005; Yttergren 2006), not least with regards to the perceived inequality between Norway and Sweden as nations.

Drawing on such studies, this article departs from the understanding that 20<sup>th</sup> century media outlets in general have represented winter-sporting and the Nordic neighbors Norway, Sweden, and Finland both as constituents of a friendly relationship, and as antagonists to the national self within stories on rivalry. Given the discrepancy in results and the geographic setting, media representations of the Lillehammer games ought hence to provide an ideal site not only for an analysis of

neighbor-representations in general, but also of sports media logics' *demarcation* between national self and a Nordist collective identity. This focus will help rescue the Nordic concept from the confusion between regionality and nationality which has at times plagued the study of Nordic cultural construction. Crucially, this is not to deny that Norden *has* been confused and conflated with the national by historic agents (as pointed out by Klinge 1984 and Stråth & Sørensen 1997). Rather, the rescue will show how Norden was not *only* a part of a national identity, but also prevailed as a distinctly supra-national regional category.

Two other themes which my analysis will provide perspectives on should also be clarified at this point. First, the established institution that was Olympic sports media in 1994 (Puijk 1997; Daddario 1998; Billings and Wenner 2017) will showcase culture that concerned a *broader public*, which together with the demarcation-focus will shed light on the earlier raised issue of the "range" of Nordism. This public should not be equated with the "entire" public, not least when considering the gendered nature of sports media as a genre, which has predominately directed its representations towards masculine subjects (Whannel 2001). The "broader public" should therefore be understood as a readership large enough to impact normative imaginings of geography, rather than one exclusively embodying all norms.

Second, the article assumes (with inspiration from Mumford 2012) that sports media can tell us things about the central concept of *emotion*. Emotion is here understood along the lines of William Reddy's work *The Navigation of Feeling*, and defined as "overlearned cognitive habits", and as "goal-relevant activations of thought material" too large and complex to be "translated" by the attentive mind (Reddy 2001: 32, 128). From this position, I will heed Reddy's call for the investigation of "emotional regimes", by which he means "normative emotions" along with the speech acts, practices and rituals that "express and inculcate them" (Reddy 2001: 129). I am also inspired by Barbara Rosenwein's urge for investigations of "official' representations" of emotions due to them being "effective, if imprecise, shapers of individual representations" of emotions within an "emotional community" (Rosenwein 2002: 839). Accordingly, the article argues that 1994 sports media narratives acted as such "official" representations, echoing Jan Plamper's assumption that there is "hardly a feeling" in 20<sup>th</sup> century western society "that is not framed and pre-structured by the media" (Plamper 2015: 74). Put briefly, I will approach the media texts as narratives, and investigate how emotions figured in stories that Nordic media wanted to sell to their readers (Plamper 2015: 286).

By engaging with such discussions on how emotions informed the framing of tensions between nation and region in media, this article will moreover delve into the issue of humor, and the "joking relationship" between Nordic neighbors.

The article will primarily depart from anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown's notions of a joking relationship, where jokes between parties aim to diffuse tension of some kind (Radcliffe-Brown 1940), but the concept will also be applied and problematized more specifically in relation to the Nordic context.

### **Newspapers: Limitations and Capacities**

The main source material of the analysis consists of daily newspapers, during a period ranging from the day before the opening of the games to the day after the closing ceremony. These newspapers were not the only media to cover Lillehammer, and Nordic audiences would most likely already have experienced the events themselves through television when reading the newspapers in question. However, the newspapers' generic inclination to frame and reflect upon the meaning of events before and after they occur render them able to reflect and construct the viewing experience that preceded them. Preliminary findings have also shown that sports commentaries were less inclined to speak explicitly of emotion, compared to the abundance of emotional talk that the newspapers produced.

This understanding also stems from theories on newspapers as constituents of a dynamic flow of representations in relation to both readers and other media. On the one hand, newspapers may *reflect* perceptions of their readerships' imaginaries, since they would have had to write things that readers understood and related to if they wanted these texts to be bought (Romano 1987; Hall 1997). On the other hand, newspapers may also *construct* the readers and their views. As pointed out by media theorists Jan Ekecrantz and Tom Olsson, the relationship between media and its readers is not equal, since the reach of the newspapers' claims renders them able to powerfully shape the world view of readers in a way that is not reciprocated (Ekecrantz and Olsson 1994). This is not to say that the reader would have always accepted the implied worldview of the newspapers as true, but mediated worldviews would still have constituted challenges to any reader by setting an agenda. In the case of both reflection and construction, the text analysis will look for both explicit and implicit ways in which newspapers mediated worldviews, meaning that everything from explicit claims and imperatives to quiet assumptions on the readers' frame of reference will be of importance.

The newspapers studied in this article have been selected based on four criteria. The first is immediacy in relation to the represented event, meaning that daily newspapers have been chosen ahead of weekly or monthly magazines. The second is circulation, stemming from the assumption that major newspapers have a greater impact on, and are in more pressing dialogue with, broad public discourse. Third, morning and evening newspapers from the same owners have

been included for the sake of conformity. Last, newspapers with an ambition to be nationally relevant have been prioritized, to match the focus on national narratives and perspectives. Additionally, the *Retriever Archive* database has provided data from Swedish and Norwegian news agencies *NTB* and *T.T.*, both nationally prominent at the time, from which brief discussions of quantitatively-defined representations will depart.

The selection with regards to Norwegian and Swedish media consists of morning daily *Aftenposten*, evening newspaper *VG* (both Oslo-based and owned by the Schibsted group) and the Bonnier-owned *Dagens Nyheter* (henceforth abbreviated *DN*) and *Expressen* from Stockholm. All these four newspapers were by 1994 in pole positions circulation-wise in their country and genre respectively, thus providing ample possibilities for comparisons (*Nationalencyklopedin*, *Aftenposten*, *Verdens Gang*, *DN*, *Expressen* 2021; *Svenska dagstidningar 1900-2021* 2021; *Opplagstall norske aviser* 2021). In the case of Finland however, language barriers force the analysis to focus solely on Finland's largest Swedish-speaking morning daily *Hufvudstadsbladet* (henceforth abbreviated *HBL* in references, *Uppslagsverket Finland*, *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 2021), since no Finland-Swedish evening newspapers existed at the time which could have been meaningfully compared to *VG* or *Expressen*.

One should therefore be aware that Finland is not represented in this analysis on the same level as Norway and Sweden, since *Hufvudstadsbladet* constitutes but one outlet, whose readership would only have consisted of people who could read Swedish. Consequently, this article does not paint pictures of symmetric nations, but rather provides examples of how singular newspapers attempted to navigate the fields of representation that were active in 1994. In Norway's and Sweden's cases the newspapers have clear bearings on a wider national scale, while *Hufvudstadsbladet* can be understood as a powerful voice shaping the views on Nordicness and neighborhood within the Swedish-reading minority in Finland. This asymmetry could have been avoided by leaving out Finland altogether, but such a focus would have been impoverishing, as the Finnish inclusion elevates the perspective beyond mere dualist constructions of neighbors, and enables instead a wider discussion of Nordicness. This is especially true since *Hufvudstadsbladet* historically has had a special relationship to Nordism and Norden (Kurunmäki, 2000).

### Competing for Attention

An investigation such as this preferably begins with the question of attention. Newspapers tend to write about the things that its readers suppose are relevant (Nicholson, 2012), and if Nordism was something that mattered in 1994, closeness between Nordic countries ought to have been evident from the amount

of coverage that Nordic countries, relatively speaking, received. How much then, did the newspapers in question write about their neighbors?

Unsurprisingly, the Norwegian hosts dominate *Hufvudstadsbladet* and the Swedish newspapers, and feature more prominently there than any other country. On the front pages, Norway or Norwegians at the Olympics feature in Swedish newspaper *DN* almost every day, and on numerous occasions in Finnish *Hufvudstadsbladet*.<sup>2</sup> Various researchers have pointed out how modern sports media have fixated upon successful “stars” or “heroes”, an epithet easily applicable to many of the Norwegian Olympians at Lillehammer (Whannel 2001; Hellström 2014), and Sweden and Finland’s failure to match Norway in the medal table may thus explain this stark discrepancy.

A more detailed outlook reveals that attention to Nordic neighbors were not limited to attention to Norwegian hosts. For a start, entries in the “sports” category from Norway’s largest news agency *NTB* in the *Retriever* corpus, tells us that Sweden (in different forms) features 18 times in Norwegian headlines about the Olympics, even if one only counts articles consisting of a body of text, and not merely account for results.<sup>3</sup> This outshines the four medal-wise most successful non-Nordic countries Germany (3 headlines), Italy (6 headlines), USA (6 headlines) and Russia (4 headlines), despite these countries having vastly outperformed Sweden.

Furthermore, these successful countries are also beaten with regards to headlines about the medal-wise abysmal Finland, which features no less than nine times in *NTB* headlines despite winning no gold medals whatsoever. The *Retriever* metadata does not yet categorize Swedish texts by subject, but a manual reading of headlines from the *TT* news agency paints a somewhat corresponding picture with regards to Finland. Finland, according to this reading, features 7 times in corresponding headlines about the Olympics, thus matching or outperforming both the USA (3 mentions), Germany (0 mentions) and Italy (7 mentions). However, Russia beats Finland in the *T.T.* “league of attention” by being mentioned 11 times. Russia’s performance is noteworthy, but one should remember that the country won 11 gold medals, outperforming even the Norwegian hosts.

There are many possible explanations as to why Nordic neighboring countries feature more often than their sporting endeavors would merit. For instance, team sports are more likely to generate hits in the corpus (since it is “Finland” that wins the ice-hockey bronze while “Nancy Kerrigan”, and not the merely the “USA” won a figure skating silver), and outlier events unconnected to the nationality of the subject might cause similar skews. Regardless of their direct cause, however, headline frequencies would still have constituted a meta-level representation to Nordic neighbors as interest-worthy to the readership. Additionally, while both Sweden and Finland fared well in the men’s ice hockey event (a team sport, which

one should note at the time lacked an Olympic women's tournament), a brief look at silver medalist Canada (4 mentions in *NTB*) implies that ice hockey success alone does not explain the discrepancy, even if it most certainly played its part.

This data is too scarce to unquestionably answer the question of attention, but a qualitative reading paints a similar picture. For instance, Sweden makes the front page of *Aftenposten* when Swedish "star" Pernilla Wiberg wins the alpine combined event (22 February [all dates in article are 1994]: 1). Wiberg is in this case competing for space with several other athletes who have won medals, including some Norwegians, but still makes the cover. Furthermore, alpine skiing did not otherwise garner front page-attention in *Aftenposten* unless Norwegian skiers featured (10 February to 1 March).

Furthermore, Swedish and Finland-Swedish newspapers similarly feature each other's athletes, as when *Hufvudstadsbladet* puts Wiberg's triumph on their front page (22 February: 1), or when *DN* awards Finland's ice hockey bronze a front-page spot (27 February: 1). Similarly, *Hufvudstadsbladet* before the games, within a report on an American sports magazine's medal predictions, chose primarily to focus on how Sweden, Finland and Norway will fare according to the American publication (February 10: 15). Furthermore, *DN*'s mention of the Finnish hockey bronze on a front-page headline was the only such feature focused on a bronze medal during the games (*DN*, front pages, February 12 to 28).

Trivial as they may undoubtedly seem, these quantitative occurrences not only point towards interest in Nordic neighbors as a category, but also make for engaging conversations with previously published research on sports, whose focus has predominately been the construction of the national self. For instance, ethnologist Billy Ehn has claimed that representation of other nations is but a shallow aspect of the domestic national image, insinuating that the non-national "others" constitute a supporting cast of marginal importance (chapter in Ehn, Frykman and Löfgren 1993). But even though the quantity of 1994 Nordic neighbor-representations may not directly contradict Ehn's statement, they demonstrate the hazards that come with equating supporting roles with insignificant ones. For Norway, Finland and Sweden, in their roles as neighbors, seem all but negligible.

### Representations of Similarity

As mentioned previously, post-war Swedish newspapers during some Winter Games wrote explicitly of a collective Nordic "we" in relation to a non-Nordic "other" (Tolvhed 2008, 113–121). In this way, the Nordic identity mimicked the national ones through its mobilization of collective identity against outer others, and similar representations in 1994 would strengthen a case for continuity between the periods.

Compared to the postwar era however, such talk of Norden or the Nordic region in the 1994 Swedish sports pages appear sparse. There are exceptions, such as when the Nordic concept invokes a sense of periphery when *DN*'s Djakarta-correspondent talks of how the "Javanese" discovers an exotic new trait in "Nordic" melancholy (14 February: 8f). Similar representations also at times pondered on whether the Lillehammer "brand" could travel the world as a regional "Nordic" image, which makes sense in relation to previous research on how Norden was "branded" in the age of globalization (Browning 2007; Kharkina, 2013: 145), but such exceptions are scarce.

*Hufvudstadsbladet*, admittedly, uses Nordic concepts more frequently, and they repeatedly describe people and places as "Nordic" rather than "Swedish" or "Norwegian".<sup>4</sup> For instance, Pernilla Wiberg is said to have finished as "the best Nordic" (20 February: 19) in the downhill race. No such comparisons or invocations are made in Norwegian or Swedish newspapers, suggesting that *Hufvudstadsbladet* seem to care more about things being Nordic than its counterparts in Sweden and Norway.

However, if one turns from usage of Nordic epithets towards implicit or latent representations of pan-Nordic similarity, the theme becomes much less of an exclusively Finland-Swedish trait. Instead, such a reading shows the centrality of stories on comparison between Nordic neighbors in Swedish and Norwegian papers, and that such comparisons could be based on, and were constructive of, Nordist assumptions of similarity.

Unsurprisingly, *Hufvudstadsbladet* and the Swedish papers repeatedly rhetorically asked why Norway won so often. After it had become clear that Norway would beat Sweden in the medals race, a *DN* journalist claimed that "as a Swede" it was impossible not to "bitterly wonder why nothing like this [ever] happens to us" (15 February: 48). Tacitly, the question of why Norway won and not Sweden, was thus followed by an assumed "when we are a similar kind of place and people"-phrase. More potently, *Hufvudstadsbladet* dedicates an entire page to explanations of the Norwegian success (20 February: 11), giving the article the headline "Why Norway Wins". *Hufvudstadsbladet* and *Expressen* thus represents Nordic countries as similar enough to be compared, and for lessons to be learned between them. Before the scale of Finnish failure was a fact, *Hufvudstadsbladet* also showed that the comparisons need not solely concern Norway and the home nation, when it claimed that Swedish cross-country skiing has not "managed to transition from one generation to the other as well as Finland and Norway" (17 February: 14).

In the "Why Norway Wins"-feature, *Hufvudstadsbladet* also claims that "progressive thinking and creativity" lie behind the Norwegian success, suggesting that Norway excelled in the present after having learnt from the mistakes of its

past. Hence, *Hufvudstadsbladet* contrasts a progressive and innovative Norway to its neighbors, referring to concepts that at the time were central in discourses on Nordic identity (Andersson and Hilson 2009). Also, the newspaper speaks not only of innovation in general, but specifically about the Norwegians' ability to attract sponsorship and capital to sport, and to move away from "stiff rules". The article thus invokes ideals connected to individualism and commercialization, which some post-1989 forces wanted to replace traditional Nordic norms with (Browning 2007).

Overall, these comparisons show that the Nordic countries were still believed to be similar enough, in a specifically Nordic way, for comparison. What seems to be lacking however, compared with the postwar Swedish representations of Nordic Winter Olympic athletes, are explicit claims of Nordic superiority in relation to others.

### **A Closer Look: Emotions about Countries**

#### *Wishing neighbors well*

Turning towards a more qualitative scrutiny of representations of emotions, one sees for a start that newspapers continuously appealed to imaginings of Nordic solidarity. "We rejoice with Norway", an *Expressen* editorial read upon the closing of the games, "and cheer with Tre Kronor", referring to the Swedish hockey team (28 February: 2). The editorial here orders emotions hierarchically and geographically, seemingly confirming Nordicness as a "second tier" collective identity. Rejoicing, however, also occurred when no Swedes had won anything, as when *Expressen* explains how "we parasitize on your Norwegian happiness" and that "shared joy is double joy" (12 February: 12). In a representation that mixes emotional with geographic proximity, *Expressen* even in one instance describes how "Norwegian joy is spreading across the border (28 February: 2).

Such representations not only describe what the writer feels, but also claim to define what a national "we" feels. On the one hand, these representations are likely to reflect emotional norms shared among its intended audience. As Monique Scheer has claimed, it is "essential for successful emotional communication that messages are received in the manner intended", noting the importance for the sender to consider the context of receivers (cited in Plamper 2015: 267). However – as Ekecrantz and Olsson argue – media not only describes but also *impacts* the reader (Ekecrantz and Olsson, 1994). The representations thus work like Rosenwein's "official texts" or as constructors of Reddy's "emotional regimes". Specifically, as Reddy has pointed out, claims about a person's emotional state will affect that person by making them reflect on whether said claim is a correct way to describe their own state or not (Reddy 1997: 106). When *Expressen* claims that

“we” as Swedes rejoice over Norwegian successes, they hence do not necessarily tell the unmediated “truth”, but they do establish the logic of an influential emotional regime, by positioning all their Swedish readers as capable of brotherly love.

Other times, it is not the op-ed pieces but the headlines or preambles that do the framing. “Congratulations, Norway!”, *Expressen* announced after several Norwegian victories (15 February: 1), while *Aftenposten* wrote “Congratulations, Sweden!” after the men’s hockey final (28 February: 34). Moreover, awe and respect are sometimes articulated in cases where rejoicing is nowhere to be seen, e.g., when a writer in *Expressen* claims to be “impressed and overwhelmed” by the games, and “offers” his “hand” while “honestly” congratulating his neighbors (27 February: 24). Another writer “waves [his] woolen hat for Norway and Lillehammer” (*Expressen*, 28 February: 21), referring to the idea of hat-lifting as a sign of respect.

When one’s own country had won while one’s neighbors had failed, representation could also focus on pity and generous well-wishing. The Olympics have been a “real downturn for the brother people” *Aftenposten* claims after a Swedish failure, while assuring the imagined Swedes in question that better times lie ahead (15 February: 69). Five days later the same newspaper alludes to similar ideals by writing of a Norwegian fan who sympathetically comforts a Swede by assuring him that Sweden’s luck will eventually turn (*Aftenposten* 20 February: 18)

The newspapers also repeatedly wrote about emotions in a transnational sense, detailing what the neighbors were feeling. In a boggling feat of meta-narrative, a Swedish journalist is quoted by *Aftenposten* regarding what Norwegians think about Sweden. “Norwegian pity”, the journalist from Swedish conservative daily *Svenska Dagbladet* suggests, “is slowly turning into anxious concern”, since “one is treated like a terminally ill patient who hasn’t got much time left.” (22 February: 34). In a more straightforward narrative, Norwegian journalist Truls Dæhli in an *Expressen* interview claims that a Pernilla Wiberg victory would provoke “great cheer” in Norway. Tellingly, Wiberg herself responds that this “credits the Norwegians” as they “really stand behind all of Norden” (21 February 1994: 35). The Norwegian-Swedish border is thus metaphorically muddled by both countries’ newspapers engaging in conversation with one another. Similar stories do not, however, seem to include Finland, and *Hufvudstadsbladet* does not seem as interested in stories of neighborly comforting.

### *Friendship between neighbors*

Wiberg’s quote also leads us to the question of how friendship mattered to representations of Nordic athletes as individuals, not least on page 59 in *Expressen*’s pre-Olympic special issue. This page consists entirely of a colored picture of cross-country skiers Torgny Mogren (Sweden) and Bjørn Dæhlie (Norway),

where both skiers have had their faces entirely painted with the colors of their respective national flags. In the reportage itself, the reader then gets to see how “our favorites in the Olympic track” are themselves responsible for the face paint, having painted each other’s faces. The athletes thus get to constitute both their own nations (through the face paint), and the friendship between these nations; Mogren and Dæhlie are described as “two friends who laugh easily”. Furthermore, the specifically Nordic character of their relation is made clear when Dæhlie laughingly predicts Danish skier Ebbe Hartz to win the 30-kilometer event (9 February: 58, 59). Hartz infamously had a habit of finishing at the bottom of the result lists, and positioning the Dane at the receiving end of the joke appear to further cement the representation of the context as Nordic. In this way the joke also pin-points how winter sports managed to be a “Nordic” business despite Denmark’s absence from any serious competition or discussion; the reader is supposed to know that there are moments when Denmark is included in the concept, but also a more competitive situation where it was not.

In Norway, the same face-painting event was highlighted by VG. The joke about Hartz is included, as well as descriptions of Mogren and Dæhlie as “friends” (VG, 14 February: 43). The fact that VG finds space for the friendship narrative, despite the competition from nationally Norwegian interests, shows that intra-Nordic friendship was considered sellable in Norway too. Similar stories on Swedish-Norwegian friendship also occur when newspapers repeatedly refer to the royal families (ever-present guests at the Olympic events) as close or friendly (*Expressen*, 20 February 1994: 18; *Aftenposten*, 22 February 1994: 34; VG, 22 February 1994: 51 and 23 February 1994: 46).

Furthermore, the way that the newspapers allowed Nordic neighbors to speak for themselves conveyed a sense of a dialogue between peoples who know each other intimately, representing closeness and familiarity on a meta-level. Such positioning occurs frequently, not least through cases where newspapers (whose languages, one should remember, were mutually intelligible) quote colleagues from neighboring Nordic countries. For example, *Hufvudstadsbladet*’s editorial page repeatedly contains quotes and reflections from Swedish and Norwegian newspapers, and *Aftenposten* accounts for Swedish attitudes towards Olympic events through both op-eds and reports from its Stockholm correspondent (*HBL* 22 and 23 February 1994; *Aftenposten* 15 and 28 February 1994: 44 and 34 respectively).

### *Wishing your neighbors ill*

Well-wishing and friendliness thus paint a picture of Nordic countries held together by what seems to be a straightforward winter sports-Nordism, where countries feel positive things about each other’s successes. Competing representations, however,

seem to shatter this harmonious impression. In particular, representations of national rivalries raise questions about the nature of 1994 media Nordism. The invocations of emotion may vary, but they all stem from one central assumption: that their readers may experience the success of a neighbor as something negative, and vice versa.

This impression is reminiscent of Schoug's claims that Swedish media covering the Albertville 1992 games mainly portrayed Norway as an antagonist to Sweden (Schoug 1992). As opposed to Schoug, I will however not only argue that neighbors in Swedish, Finland-Swedish or Norwegian texts featured as antagonists, and nationally defined "others". Instead, I will also argue that the rivalry-representations, considered in their context, neither challenged nor compromised the notion of closeness, but rather cemented the special nature of the Nordic neighbor-relation, thanks to the interplay between Nordism, nationalism and the logics of the Olympics.

In Swedish newspapers, negative emotions at the prospect of neighborly success were present even before the opening ceremony: "My arms sweat and my feet sweat and I get dandruff and feel general displeasure at the mere thought" of Norwegian dominance, an *Expressen* journalist claimed. He continues to say that he has "not yet forgotten the immense Norwegian victory parade in Albertville two years ago" and wonders if it is "possible to write down continuing Norwegian successes as a travel expense? Mental suffering for two weeks, or something like that?" (9 February: 50). Clearly, the narrative evolves around an assumption that a triumphant neighbor brings discomfort.

As the games went on - and the *Expressen* columnist's nightmares would become true - representations of Norwegian successes bringing emotional discomfort were not limited to op-ed pieces or columns. When Norway wins both gold and silver in alpine skiing and ski jumping on the same day, the headlines do the emotional framing in *DN*. The article on the ski jumpers is entitled "Norway, Norway..." and the one on the alpine skiers, lower down on the same page, is entitled "Norway, Norway, Norway" (26 February: 71). Through this dotting, the reader is invited to share, tacitly but knowingly, in the emotional community that fatigue over Norwegian successes constituted.

As was the case with friendliness and well-wishing, negative feelings were further attributed to a national "we", as when *Expressen* exclaims that Norway brings discomfort since "Norway is toying with us, while we, at best, get to toy with Fiji and Denmark" (21 February: 32). The quote is hard to translate, since Swedish word for "toy" (*leka*), can mean both to toy and to play, meaning it is possible to understand the Norwegians as humiliatingly "toying" with the Swedes, while the Swedes are left to "play" with insignificant winter sports nations Fiji and Denmark. In any case, the Swedes are urged to mourn not only their own failures

and Norwegian successes, but also their relegation to a league of less appealing playmates.

Similarly, *Hufvudstadsbladet* claims that the Norwegian successes are “frustrating” to behold for “the Nordic brother nations” (26 February 1994:13). Evidently, *Hufvudstadsbladet* chooses to define not only what Finns are feeling, but what the collectively defined “brother nations” Sweden and Finland are feeling. Crucially, this framing epitomizes how newspapers departed from an idea of an emotional community where not just any neighbor’s victory is hard to take, but that of a Nordic neighbor specifically. Also, a similar three-way reference appears in Sweden when a *DN* columnist, half-way into the games, similarly expresses grief over Sweden’s lack of success “in these games where not only Norway but also Finland have had a good start” (16 February 1994: 1). Both Finns and Swedes, then, were supposed to feel something negative about Nordic neighbors due to an allegedly sibling-like relationship.

### *Specific ill-wishing: shame, envy and gloating*

Among specific concepts, shame is one which Swedish and Finland-Swedish texts at times return to in relation to Norwegian successes and domestic failures. “We are ashamed, of course”, *Expressen* writes during the games’ last days (27 February: 14), and a commentary in *Hufvudstadsbladet* writes that “the only ones we (i.e., Finns) can spend time with are the Swedes”, since Swedish athletes during the past week had performed poorly enough not to bring discomfort to Finns (20 February: 24). In Swedish media, and in Norwegian media portraying Swedes, shame also figures in stories where Swedes in Norway try to hide or disguise themselves. “I am a traitor to my country” a Swede in Lillehammer tells *Aftenposten*, seeing no other option but exile since “Sweden has disappeared from the map of winter sports” while indicating that “after the Olympic games I will seek asylum in Norway” (21 February: 31). Britta Svensson similarly wonders if she “can become a Norwegian citizen” and another *Expressen* columnist dresses himself up as a Norwegian to avoid recognition (15 February: 32; 16 February: 64).

Here, the underlying feeling of closeness behind the shame becomes clear through the ease with which all these Swedish voices turn to the possibility of “becoming” Norwegian in one way or the other. Moreover, media outlets once again represent neighbors by quoting them. The constant dialog between neighbors is represented as making the Norwegian victory-joy unbearable for Swedes. The exchange did however not seem to apply to Finland in the same way; *Hufvudstadsbladet* instead on one occasion illustrates how Norwegians are targeting Swedes with their gloating rather than Finns (17 February: 14). Any corresponding narratives on Finns have not been found in Swedish nor Norwegian media.

Furthermore, shame and frustration often seem to have a close relationship with envy, as is the case when *Expressen* claims that “we (now have) suffered enough” and that “(we) want to have the same fun as Norwegians” (27 February: 24). The idea of Nordic countries being similar enough for comparison is here cemented by implicitly giving voice to the question of why the national “we” cannot have what the neighboring “they” are having. As the games end, *Expressen* columnist Mats Olsson also shows that envy may not be caused only by animosity but also by admiration.. “Most of all”, he writes satirically about Sweden, “we want to sit in our playground thinking we’re the best... while the world rushes by and the tourist industry makes the Norwegian economy blossom” (26 February 1994: 29). Olsson’s interest in economy and a global “brand” is perhaps typical of a prolific writer who was based in New York City, but might also be a wider indicator of a Nordism which has stepped into the market-oriented globalized age by way of envious comparison. Olsson’s Swedish readers were in this context encouraged to join him in feeling left behind a Nordic neighbor that “could have been us”.

Notions of rivalry did not only allow for “sore” losers, but they also allowed for representations of “bad” winners. After a competition where the Swedes have been particularly outclassed by the Norwegians, *Aftenposten* tellingly writes that “there has never been so many well-camouflaged Swedes in Lillehammer” (20 February: 18), explaining their hiding as a result of the contrast between Swedish failure and Norwegian success. In a similar tongue-in-cheek tone, the same newspaper’s Stockholm correspondent writes that it is “all right to be a ‘*norrman*’ [using the Swedish word for Norwegian] in Sweden” when the Olympic victories also coincide with the Norwegian currency being stronger than the Swedish (15 February: 44). In a less overt but still revealing fashion, *Hufvudstadsbladet* gloats about one of the few Norwegian failures - the elimination of their ice hockey team - by speaking of how “Norway persists in silence about the ice hockey tournament” (18 February 1994: 12).

Quotes from Norwegians in Swedish newspapers also allowed representations of gloating or *schadenfreude*, as when the above mentioned Truls Dæhli claimed that the Norwegians “don’t think (the discrepancy of results) funny anymore” (21 February 1994: 35). Rivalry and pity seem to walk hand in hand, as the article conveys an impression of Norwegians who misses their Nordic playmate. Similarly, *DN* claims that “skate-loving Norwegians miss a real Swedish skater, one like Tomas Gustafson (1984 and 1988 Olympic Champion). It is one thing to defeat Holland. It’s another thing entirely to surpass Swedes” (14 February 1994: 47). The texts thus position Norway as a character whose emotional ambivalence construct an image of a rivalry between the character and the reader that at the end of the day is based on closeness.

### Humor

To understand the discrepancy between negative and positive emotions about neighbours, one must eventually dissect the subject of humor. For humor, playfulness and irony were actually keys to understanding what the Nordic neighbor as a category constituted at the Lillehammer games.

From the depictions of “sweat” and “dandruff” at the thought of Norwegian success to the expressed wishes of a changed nationality, it is quite evident that some of the above-mentioned texts were not meant to be read literally, or even seriously. When *DN* for instance alleges that a Norwegian child at the competitions has shouted “Go Sweden, I’m sure you’ll get your gold”, only to immediately add, part-inaudibly “if you dig in the mines” (15 February 1994: 47), the emotional regime, through humor, allows for both positive and negative emotions. The arguably most vivid example of this humorous blend of friendship and rivalry consists of *DN*’s standing op-ed columns “Norsken” (i.e., a knowingly clumsy and slightly derogative translation of “the [male] Norwegian”) and “Svensken” (“the Swede”). Throughout the games, “Norsken” and “Svensken” account for Olympic events while exchanging chauvinist, over-the-top banter, and the humorous genre and ironic tone is illustrated by the columnists’ right eyes being covered by a national flag, making them “one-eyed” (*DN* sports pages, 6-28 February).

Through intermingling ironic nationalist chauvinism and regionalist positioning, this banter epitomizes how media would order and conflate conflicting emotions through humorous framings. Before the games, “Norsken” prophesizes that “Sweden will get to sing a song, when Pernilla (Wiberg) wins, it’s on the house” (14 February 1994: 48). And later, when Wiberg actually wins her gold, “Norsken” bids Sweden “Welcome to the gold-club” and says that he “for the sake of pan-Nordic thought” will “tolerate your over-the-top celebrations” (22 February 1994: 52). “Svensken” similarly “let” his neighbor “have” a gold, as long as they “don’t think too much about themselves”, in another playful sign that neighborly solidarity was something that could be emotionally “afforded”. Crucially, also, the text positions the “pan-Nordic thought” as a high ideal to strive for. Nordism thus appear almost as a code one “should” adhere to, at least when in dialogue with one’s Nordic neighbor.

This can be understood in light of Reddy’s discussions on how societies that uphold certain emotional norms simultaneously might cultivate a knowledge that failure to comply with such norms is understandable and perhaps even tacitly acceptable. Reddy talks about such regimes in terms of honor (Reddy 2001), and Nordism might perhaps be analyzed in similar terms, if Swedish journalists who “offers their hand” or “waves their hats” to the Norwegians demonstrate that an honor-code tabooing anti-Nordist sentiment is at play. In this case, the fact that a newspaper also allows itself to write about “ugly” feelings implies that the taboos

in question are not particularly strong ones. Rather, media texts treat Nordic rivalry-emotions as extremely open secrets.

This “joking relationship”, finally, allows media outlets to blunt the edges of national and regional emotional communities in three different ways. Firstly, it seemingly disarms national rivalries through assurances that negative emotions should not be taken seriously. Secondly, humor allows for the expression of feelings considered inappropriate, but that the implied reader might still want to relate to. Thirdly, both these regimes come together to convey a specific form of Nordic closeness, which can be seen in analogy with Peter Gundelach’s description of a Scandinavian joking relationship, where jokes are used to enhance familiarity and maybe even friendship between the neighbours (Gundelach 2000). In order to make jokes about the neighbor, you must first know them, and the continuous jokes in 1994 thus become a sort of meta-representation of the Nordic countries, perhaps especially Sweden and Norway, as a close and even friendly community. Jokes could of course be signs of mean-spirited relationships too, but representations of dialogues between equals who exchange the jokes at least partly compromises such an argument. Commonplace as it may seem, the simile of sibling relationships perhaps best describes how both positive and negative feelings would form a coherent framing of a close and special relationship between Nordic neighbors under the umbrella of humor.

### **Conclusion: Nation, Region and “Safe Spaces”**

Within the nationally ordered space that was newspaper representations of the 1994 Winter Olympics, assumptions of a special relationship between Nordic neighbors filled a narrative function without which the texts would not have made sense to the readers. Norden as a region functioned in ways that the nation could not have done, since the neighbor-representations allowed media audiences to cultivate relational emotions, both positive and negative. Newspapers would represent the neighbor as being close and similar, but almost always as clearly demarcated from the home nation.

Crucially, the newspapers used humor to diffuse the tension between nation and region, which in turn strengthened the image of the Nordic neighbor as something close and friendly. The constant references to this joking relationship constructed the Nordic region as a “safe space” for national rivalry, permitting bigotry and chauvinism as long as one stayed within the realm of “humor among friends”. The notion that representations of sports rivalry and antagonism always and automatically constitute a form of “othering” is thus challenged, as the Nordic neighbor through the discourse on rivalry enters a form of community. At the same time, this undeniably prompts the question of who was included

and excluded from the community in question. The excluded ones could have consisted of nations and people outside Norden, but also of people within the nations themselves, who for various reasons did not have access to the emotional community that the joking relationship constituted. Not least, the overall social influence of such a heavily gendered genre as sports media should provoke contemplation.

Summing up differences in interactions between the three countries, the joking relationship appear to be the strongest between Sweden and Norway. Considering this relationship against the historical background of Swedish domination, some representations may speak not only of a generic neighbor-relationship, but also of one where an “older” sibling (Sweden) is surpassed by a “younger” one (Norway), resulting thus in the shame of the elder and the gloating of the younger. However, Norwegian texts rarely gloat unabashedly, and seem unwilling or uninterested in disregarding the feeling of “empathy” towards Sweden altogether. Seemingly, the ideal of restraining negative feelings about neighbors was not unique to “big brother” Sweden. Additionally, the fact that *Hufvudstadsbladet* willingly mocked Norwegian ice hockey failures implies that gloating was not an exclusive privilege for politically or historically defined “smaller brothers”. In conclusion, future research would do well to examine whether gloat and shame might appear differently during games when the roles were reversed, since this article points towards both possible similarities and differences.

Sweden’s and Norway’s overrepresentation could, moreover, encourage future researchers to discuss whether this relationship takes on characteristics of a friendship of its own, independent of an overreaching “Norden”. The repeated references to the three neighbors as a collective, the historical context regarding “Nordic” skiing, the humorous use of the “pan-Nordic” concept and not least the otherwise inexplicable jokes about Denmark and other such examples, however, suggests that such a relationship cannot be satisfyingly understood without “Norden” being present as a context.

In the wider historical perspective, it is noteworthy that while the 1990’s have been characterized as a time of confidence crisis for the Nordic model and for Nordic cooperation as a political endeavor, this investigation points towards a collective Nordic identity that persisted emotionally and mentally despite the political developments. The sources seldom talk of Norden, but there can be little doubt that banal Nordist imaginings of Nordic neighbours prevailed beyond the end of the Cold War. If contemporary politics had any influence on an imagined Norden, it seems instead rather to have been through conceptions of a globalized world where the notion of nations and regions as “brands” on an international market was emerging.

Lastly, one may note that while the successful Norwegian hosts attracted more

attention from its neighbors than vice versa, not even the Norwegian newspapers “forget” about their neighbours. Hence, Lillehammer is not only an atypical event *enabling* Nordism; it also shows that Nordism can prevail *despite* the national frenzy that was Norway’s hosting endeavors in 1994. The Lillehammer games, singular and exceptional as they might have seemed to those who were there, thereby also further becomes a testament to the quiet but prevailing power of the conventional.

### Author

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<sup>1</sup> All translations from Scandinavian languages are my own.

<sup>2</sup> In *DN*, news about Norway on the first page featured on 17 of the 19 days that the Olympics were held, between the 10th and 28th. In *Hufvudstadsbladet*’s front pages Norway feature on at least 4 dates during the same period, more than any other nation.

<sup>3</sup> The search words for Sweden, and all other nations in Norwegian newspapers are *svenske\** and *Sveriges\** whose returns translates to “swede”, “swedes” “Swedish”, “Sweden” and possessive forms. All other countries are represented by results from the corresponding search terms. Source: NTBtekst.

<sup>4</sup> The concepts “Norden” and variations of the term appear in *Hufvudstadsbladet*’s Olympic coverage at least 12 times.

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