
Editorial: happy entrepreneurial endeavouring in the Nordics

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This special issue of the *European Journal of International Management* pursues a comparative approach to entrepreneurial endeavouring in the Nordic region of the world. Is entrepreneurial endeavouring in the Nordics distinct? In which ways is it distinct? What makes it distinct? What are consequences of distinctiveness?

This guest-editorial introduction has two parts. The first part offers an account of the distinctiveness of the Nordics, specifically in entrepreneurship. The second part provides an overview of the articles in this special issue of *EJIM* as they comparatively examine particular aspects of distinctiveness of the Nordics.

The Nordic region comprises the five Nordic sovereign societies, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. In this introduction, we ascertain distinctiveness by comparing the Nordics with the region that is expectedly most similar to the Nordics. A most similar region would seem to be the other Western wealthy region comprising Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, UK, and the USA, on which we have data. Our introduction analyses the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor adult population survey from the Nordic region 2001–2018 and from the other wealthy Western region 2012–2018, a representative sample totalling 689,407 adults.

The Nordic model of political economy

The Nordics are societies with a distinct model of political economy, known as ‘the Nordic model’. The Nordic model is capitalism with considerable participation of labour and with extensive welfare. The culture is very modern or secular-rational in that the societies are rather secular and highly based on science and scientifically educated professionals, as also manifest in a high level of education. The Nordics have very high level of human development; indeed, all the Nordic societies are near the top of the Human Development Index and near the top in terms of the components of the index, i.e. longevity, education, and income. In popular discourse around the world, the Nordics are perhaps best known for their high level of happiness. Here, we address the question, is the happiness related to entrepreneurial endeavouring in the Nordics? More precisely, does work as autonomous entrepreneurs running their own businesses pulled by market opportunity bring them especially much satisfaction? Also, does work as entrepreneurially working employees bring them especially much satisfaction with job, with balance between work and family, and with life?

The population in the Nordics

Let us first look at the Nordic happiness. The Nordic adult population, compared to the population in other wealthy Western societies, has a higher level of well-being in terms of satisfaction with job, with balance between work and private life, and with life, Table 1.¹

This higher Nordic satisfaction might conceivably be explained by the higher wealth and higher education in the Nordics. However, we shall see, below, that part of this higher satisfaction in the Nordics is due to an especially high satisfaction among entrepreneurially working people.

Table 1 Adults' satisfaction

	<i>Nordics</i>	<i>Other wealthy West</i>
Life-satisfaction	3.77***	3.54
Job-satisfaction	3.69***	3.63
Work-life balance satisfaction	3.80**	3.75

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ in test of difference between the two regions.

The role of the entrepreneur is well institutionalised in the Nordics, in that the role is not only legitimate, but also given high status. Inequality of wealth and income is comparatively small in the Nordics, and the population in the Nordics, more than that in the other wealthy Western region, considers income inequality to be legitimate, Table 2. Nordic people also grant comparatively high prestige to the role as entrepreneur, Table 2. Furthermore, people tend to have a more elaborate entrepreneurial mindset in terms of higher entrepreneurial self-efficacy, assessment of entrepreneurial opportunities, willingness to take risks, and acquaintance with starting entrepreneurs, Table 2. Despite Nordic people's high level of capital – comprising general human capital, specific human capital, social capital, and financial capital – the intention of people to become autonomous entrepreneurs and start a business in the foreseeable future is lower among Nordic people than among people in the other wealthy Western region, Table 2.²

Table 2 Adults' views on entrepreneurial endeavouring

	<i>Nordics</i>	<i>Other wealthy West</i>
Egalitarianism regarding income	61%***	67%
Prestige of the role as entrepreneur	61%***	57%
Entrepreneurial mindset	50%***	41%
Intention to become autonomous entrepreneur	8.2%***	8.5%

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ in test of difference between the two regions.

Satisfaction differs across both occupations and regions, Table 3. Satisfaction is especially high among self-employed and employees in the Nordics compared to the other wealthy Western societies. Thus, the especially high satisfaction among self-employed and employees partly accounts for the especially high satisfaction with life, job and work-life balance in the Nordics. This provides some evidence that the high happiness in the Nordics is partly due to an exceptional high level of satisfaction – with job, work-life balance, and life – among self-employed and employees. We may interpret this further, as partly a product of the Nordic model of political economy.

Table 3 Satisfaction in occupations

	<i>Nordics</i>			<i>Other wealthy West</i>		
	<i>Life-satisfaction</i>	<i>Job-satisfaction</i>	<i>Work-life balance</i>	<i>Life-satisfaction</i>	<i>Job-satisfaction</i>	<i>Work-life balance</i>
Self-employed	3.82***	3.87***	3.72 [†]	3.60	3.75	3.64
Full-time employees	3.87***	3.67***	3.80***	3.64	3.59	3.73
Part-time employees	3.70***	3.55 n	3.94 n	3.58	3.59	3.95
Home-makers	3.49 [†]			3.41		
Retirees & disabled	3.85*			3.52		
Students	3.72 n			3.73		
Unemployed	3.21***			3.03		

Notes: n: not significant; [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ in test of difference between the two regions.

Autonomous entrepreneurs in the Nordics

We can understand the role of entrepreneurs better by distinguishing between different external motives, motives that pull and push people to become entrepreneurs.

Autonomous entrepreneurs may mainly be pulled to starting and running a business by seeing opportunities, or mainly be pushed by the dire necessity to earn a living, especially when jobs are difficult to get. These motives differ between the two regions, Table 4. Entrepreneurs in the Nordics, more than entrepreneurs in the other wealthy Western region, are pulled by opportunity.³

Table 4 Autonomous entrepreneurs' motives for running their businesses

	<i>Nordics</i>	<i>Other wealthy West</i>
Opportunity pull	75%***	62%
Necessity push	25%***	38%
Sum	100%	100%

Notes: [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ in test of difference between the two regions.

Entrepreneurs' motives are related to their satisfaction (Jensen et al., 2017). Opportunity-motivated entrepreneurs, compared to necessity-motivated entrepreneurs, tend to be more satisfied, especially in the Nordic region, Table 5. Accordingly, we refine our interpretation of Nordic happiness as follows. The high Nordic happiness can in part be attributed to the comparatively high proportion of entrepreneurs who are pulled by opportunity rather than pushed by necessity; opportunity-entrepreneurs who are especially satisfied.

Table 5 Autonomous entrepreneurs' satisfaction

	<i>Nordics</i>		<i>Other wealthy West</i>	
	<i>Opportunity motive</i>	<i>Necessity motive</i>	<i>Opportunity motive</i>	<i>Necessity motive</i>
Life-satisfaction	3.90***	3.59***	3.72	3.36
Job-satisfaction	3.94**	3.75 [†]	3.81	3.64
Work-life balance satisfaction	3.80 [†]	3.58 n	3.70	3.45

Notes: [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, n = not significant in test of difference between the two regions.

Entrepreneurially working employees in the Nordics

Like we distinguished between types of entrepreneurs, so we can distinguish between types of employee, to better understand Nordic model and the role of employee and the satisfaction in the role.

Some employees work entrepreneurially in that they are involved in developing new activities for their employer. Other employees work routinely in that they are not involved in such development. Entrepreneurial work by employees differs across regions, Table 6. Entrepreneurial work is more prevalent among employees in the Nordic region than among employees in the other wealthy West; actually, much more prevalent than in any other region in the world (Schött, 2012). We may interpret this high prevalence of entrepreneurial work in the Nordics, rather than routine work, as a feature of the Nordic model of political economy.

Table 6 Employees' type of work

	<i>Nordics</i>	<i>Other wealthy West</i>
Entrepreneurial work	20%***	16%
Routine work	80%***	84%
Sum	100%	100%

Notes: [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ in test of difference between the two regions.

Entrepreneurially working employees tend to be more satisfied than routinely working employees with their work-life balance and their life, especially in the Nordics, Table 7. We interpret this higher satisfaction as an outcome of the Nordic model with its high involvement of employees in the workplace. This provides further understanding on the high Nordic happiness. The high happiness can be partly attributed to the higher prevalence of employees who are working entrepreneurially and by their entrepreneurial work gain higher satisfaction.

In conclusion, the Nordic region is distinctive in its political economy by having a 'Nordic model' of capitalism with extensive involvement of employees and considerable welfare. These collectivistic institutions are combined with individualism and legitimacy of inequalities such as those arising from entrepreneurial endeavouring, conferring high prestige on entrepreneurs and enhancing their well-being. The welfare support implies that entrepreneurs typically are motivated by business opportunity, which is satisfying, rather than the dire need to earn a living, which would be less satisfying. The Nordic

model also implies that employees often work entrepreneurially rather than routinely, which enhances the well-being of employees. In short, the Nordic model has promoted satisfying entrepreneurial endeavours by both entrepreneurs and employees.

Table 7 Employees' satisfaction

	<i>Nordics</i>		<i>Other wealthy West</i>	
	<i>Entrepreneurial work</i>	<i>Routine work</i>	<i>Entrepreneurial work</i>	<i>Routine work</i>
Life-satisfaction	3.87***	3.80***	3.69	3.66
Job-satisfaction	3.74 n	3.68 n	3.74	3.72
Work-life balance satisfaction	3.87***	3.95**	3.66	3.85

Notes: n: not significant, † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ in test of difference between the two regions.

Overview of the articles in this special issue of EJIM

This distinctiveness of the Nordics in entrepreneurial endeavouring is highlighted in the articles assembled for this special issue of *EJIM*.

The article 'Entrepreneurial orientation confronting disruption: embedded in networks in Iran and Norway during the COVID-19 pandemic', by Mahsa Samsami, Øystein Tønnessen, and Bjørn-Tore Flåten, researches the early impact of the pandemic on employees' work in Norway and Iran. The article addresses the question of whether the pandemic disruption and resilience is affected by culture, modern culture in Norway as distinct from the traditional culture in Iran. This cultural distinctiveness implies, according to the authors' interpretation, a greater entrepreneurial orientation and more extensive networking in workplaces in Norway, consistent with the above account of entrepreneurial employees in the Nordics. In turn, this confers a capability on employees in Norway to cope with the pandemic disruption.

The article 'Internationalisation of family businesses in Sweden, China and Iran', by Ye Liu and Elham Kalhor, researches internationalisation in form of exports in family and nonfamily businesses in modern Sweden as distinct from the more traditional culture in China and Iran. They address the question of how family and non-family business exporting behaviour differs between a secular-rational society and a more traditional society. Their analysis supports the hypothesis that traditional culture with its support for family enhances exporting by family businesses, whereas secular-rational culture, as especially distinctive in Sweden, reinforces exporting by non-family businesses.

The article 'Business angels' ties with entrepreneurs in traditional and secular-rational societies: China, Egypt and Iran contrasted with Germany and Norway', by Mahsa Samsami, addresses the question, does the cultural environment around business angels influence whom they fund, whether they fund family members or strangers pitching a good idea? She finds that business angels fund family members especially in traditional cultures, whereas business angels fund strangers especially in secular-rational cultures, e.g. in Norway.

The article 'The effect of human capital in start or stop of businesses in Norway and China: the moderating role of gender and context', by Anna Trunina, Shayegheh Ashourizadeh and Huiyang Dai, contrasts modern Norway and traditional China. They address the question of how, in different societies, does education influence

entrepreneurial intention to start and influence exiting from business. They find that the effect of education on startups in Norway differs from the effect in China.

The article ‘Entrepreneurial pursuits of women and men in the diaspora from the MENA: dual embeddedness in home- and host-societies’, by Ye Liu and Zohreh Hassannezhad Chavoushi, contrasts modern Western society, notably the Nordics, with traditional society in the Middle East and North Africa. They focus on women migrating from traditional society to modern society. They address the question, what are the women’s occupational pursuits, especially to become entrepreneurs? Their research design analyses women and men in the diaspora compared with their home-society and their host-society. Analyses show that migrant men’s roles are to be breadwinners in the diaspora as well as in home- and host-societies. Migrant women, however, switch extensively from being homemakers in home-society to becoming breadwinners in host-society. Migrant women frequently show entrepreneurial intention, but are filtered out more than men, and in the diaspora more than women in Europe and North America, but less than women in the Middle East and North Africa. The findings contribute to understanding effects of dual embeddedness, especially when the contrast is with distinctive secular-rational culture such as in the Nordics.

In short, the articles are exemplars accounting for how the distinctiveness of the Nordics influences entrepreneurial endeavours.

References

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Notes

- 1 Life-satisfaction is an index of five indicators measuring, on a 1 to 5 Likert scale, extents to which life is ideal, conditions are excellent, life is satisfying, achievement of important goals, nothing should be changed. Job-satisfaction is an index of five indicators measuring job-autonomy, meaningfulness, absence of stress, satisfaction with work, and satisfaction with income. Work-life balance satisfaction is an index of three indicators measuring satisfaction with division of time between work and private life, with ability to balance needs of work and needs of family, and with opportunity to perform work and contribute to home (Gao et al., 2022).
- 2 Egalitarianism is measured by the preference for people having similar income. Prestige is measured by an index based on three indicators of people’s view that starting a business as a good career choice; status accorded those starting a new business; and media stories about successful entrepreneurs. Mindset is measured by an index based on four indicators of self-efficacy, opportunity-perception, risk-willingness, and acquaintance with a startup. Intention is measured by asking the respondent whether they are planning to soon start a new business.
- 3 Opportunity versus necessity is measured by asking entrepreneurs whether they are motivated by a business opportunity or by having no better choice for work.