

The endeavour to achieve a gender balance in access to societal power is a cornerstone of the Nordic concept of democracy and gender equality policy. A key tool in gender equality work is knowledge of the distribution of women and men within various sectors of society, employment, and social positions of power.

In the research project “Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries”, an interdisciplinary Nordic research team mapped out and analyzed the representation of women and men in politics and business in the Nordic countries during the last 15 years.

In this report, Kirsti Niskanen compiles comparative figures on the representation of women and men in decision-making positions in politics and business, and analyzes and interprets the data that was collected in the project from a Nordic and comparative perspective. In the two articles that follow, Drude Dahlerup and Mari Teigen discuss explanations for the existing gender distribution, as well as the measures taken in the various Nordic countries to distribute social power and influence more evenly between the genders. The report also includes a summary of the results from all the studies in the project.

The report is a source of information for political decision makers, researchers, students, and others who have an interest in Nordic equality policy.

The project “Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries” (2008-2009) was carried out on behalf of the Nordic Ministers for Gender Equality and co-financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Gender Institute (NIKK).

Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries
– with focus on politics and business

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Kirsti Niskanen (ed.)



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Kirsti Niskanen (ed.)

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Preface

Gender and power was a thematic cornerstone in the Nordic Council of Ministers' 2006-2010 co-operation on gender equality. Commissioned by the Nordic Ministers for Gender Equality NIKK – the Nordic Gender Institute – carried out a one-year research project on gender and power in the Nordic countries. The initiative was taken by Finland during their Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2007. The project was co-financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers and NIKK and was completed in the autumn of 2009.

The overall purpose of the project was to produce knowledge to support the political decision-making process and highlight the gender equality measures that affect the mechanisms behind the structural power. The project focused on politics and business in the Nordic region. While gender equality development has come relatively far within the political realm, quite the opposite is true for the realm of business. Hence, a comparison of opportunities and obstacles within these two areas is crucial.

The project resulted in two publications in Scandinavian languages. The first report was based on statistical material and research results on the distribution and representation of women and men within politics and business in all of the Nordic countries as well as on the Faroe Islands, in Greenland and on the Aland Islands. The second report consists of articles analysing and comparing the presence of structural gendered power within politics and business in the Nordic countries. Moreover, it discusses the measures taken to distribute social power and influence more evenly between the genders. Three of the articles in the second report have been translated into English for the present volume which also contains a summary of the project results.

The project was managed by Kirsti Niskanen, NIKK's Head of Research at the time. NIKK adviser Rikke Randorff Hegnhøj functioned as

its project coordinator. A total of 20 senior and junior researchers from all over the Nordic region contributed to the project.

Notes on the contributors

Drude Dahlerup (DK/SE) is Professor in Political Science at Stockholm University since 1998. She has published extensively on women and politics and on the history of the women's movement. Her current research deals with the new tendency of introducing quotas in order to increase the representation of women in politics in different parts of the world. The book *Women, Quotas and Politics*, ed. by Drude Dahlerup, Routledge 2006, is the first global scale study of gender quotas in politics. In cooperation with the international IDEA, she and her research team stand for the global website on quotas, www.quotaproject.org, see also www.statsvet.su.se/wip.

Kirsti Niskanen (SE) is Associate Professor in Gender Studies, research director at NIKK during 2008-2010 and, from 2010, Professor in History at Stockholm university. Her research interests are social and gender history, the history of economic ideas, and biographical gender research. Her latest publications include *Karriär i männens värld* (A Career in a Man's world), SNS Förlag 2007, which is a biographical study about Sweden's first and only female economist before the 1970s, Karin Kock, and *Föregångarna. Kvinnliga professorer om liv, makt och vetenskap* (Predecessors. Female Professors on Life, Power and Scholarship), SNS Förlag 2010 (with Christina Florin).

Mari Teigen (NO) holds a PhD in sociology and is research director at the Institute for social research (ISF) in Oslo. Central research interests lies in studies of policy-making, welfare state and working life, with particular reference to issues of gender. Present research projects concerns quota policies and anti-discrimination law and policies. Latest publications include: *Gender Quotas for Corporate Boards in Norway – Innovative*

Gender Equality Policy, forthcoming in a book edited by Gonzalez and Fagen on Palgrave, 2011; *Political intersectionality: Tackling inequalities in public policies in Scandinavia*, in *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* 2010, with Anette Borchorst; *Tracing Gender Equality Cultures: Elite Perceptions of Gender Equality in Norway and Sweden*, in *Gender & Politics*, 2009, with Lena Wängnerud and *The “Crisis” of Gender Equality: The Norwegian Newspaper Debate on Female Genital Cutting*, in *NORA* 2009, with Trude Langvasbråten.

Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries: A Comparative Perspective

Kirsti Niskanen

1 Introduction

In international comparisons, the five Nordic countries are regularly ranked among the world leaders in gender equality.¹ However, power studies and statistics point to an unequal distribution of women and men in top-level positions of society even in the Nordic countries (Ruostetsaari 2008: 147; Borchorst 2002; Göransson 2007a; Skjeie and Teigen 2003). The endeavour to achieve a gender balance in access to societal power is a cornerstone of the Nordic concept of democracy and gender equality policy (Nordic Council of Ministers 2006). A key tool in gender equality work is knowledge of the distribution of women and men within various sectors of society, employment, and social positions of power. In this context, it is highly relevant that Finland, during its year as President of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2007, took the initiative to realize a one-year research project entitled *Kön och makt i Norden* (Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries).

¹ The comparisons refer to differences between women and men using social, political, and resource-based indicators, such as standard of living, life expectancy and education (GDI) as well as political and economic participation and decision making, and power over economic resources (GEM). For GDI (Gender Development Index), see http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_20072008_gdi.pdf; for GEM (Gender Empowerment Measurement), see http://origin-hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_20072008_GEM.pdf. For a discussion of UN indicators, see also Kabeela and Stark (2008: 2–5) and Bergqvist, Adman, and Jungar (2008: 10–11).

The project includes two sectors of society, politics and business, in the five Nordic countries and the autonomous territories. The project had four main aims: (i) to compile comparative figures on the representation of women and men in decision-making positions in politics and business, (ii) to analyze and interpret this data from a Nordic and comparative perspective, and (iii) to discuss explanations for the existing gender distribution.² In addition, the project was to discuss (iv) the measures taken in the various Nordic countries to distribute social power and influence more evenly between the genders, and evaluated gender equality policy methods and means of influence.²

This article presents some of the project's most important findings from a comparative Nordic perspective. The survey illustrates a known pattern, namely that the representation of women in parliamentary politics in the Nordic countries is relatively high (from just under 40 to almost 50 per cent), while there is continued male dominance of the business sector. There are also significant differences between the Nordic countries and other nuances that are worth noting.

The text is organized as follows: after this introduction, sections 2–4 present a comparison of parliamentary and municipal politics in the five Nordic countries. Section 5 discusses explanations and gender equality measures in the political sphere. Sections 6–7 contain a corresponding survey and discussion of the business sector. Section 8 provides a comparative account based on the reports on politics and business in the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland. Section 9 discusses in brief a number of proposals for incorporating the project's findings in research and gender equality statistics.³

1.1 Realization of the project, reference points, and definitions

The project maps and analyzes the distribution of structural gender power in business and politics in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Swe-

² 'Kön och makt i Norden – projektplan', ÄK-JÄM, DINA no. 07-02082.

² The project contracted eleven senior researchers (experts on research on politics and economics) and eight junior researchers from the five Nordic countries and an additional four researchers who compiled basic data on the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland. See the presentation of authors.

³ I would like to thank Solveig Bergman, Anne Maria Holli, and Anita Nyberg for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this text.

den, as well as the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland. The comparisons in this article are primarily based on the country reports produced in the project.⁴ The data in the country reports was, in turn, gleaned from official statistics and from the publications and homepages of public authorities, political parties, companies, and financial organizations.

The understanding of the concept of gender power used in the Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries project is based on the power studies that were carried out in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden during the 1990s and at the beginning of the 2000s. These were so-called 'elite studies', involving different emphases and strengths in the analyses of gender power (Skjeie and Borchorst 2003). The studies' theoretical understanding of power was based on the so-called 'position method' (Ruostetsaari 2008: 144). As such, power is defined as the possession of formal positions (such as in the Norwegian power study carried out in 1998–2003 and in the Swedish power studies of 2001–2006 and 2007) or as the possession of formal and informal power (as in the Danish power study of 1999). In the Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries project, power is defined as the possession of formal, institutional positions (Göransson 2007: 54). These are formal positions that entail access to institutional resources and decision making with consequences for many people (SOU 2007: 108, Annex 1). This means that the various sectors chosen consist of a top layer of positions above a certain level and the individuals holding these positions. It should be noted that as regards Iceland and the autonomous territories, this is the first time that structural gender power is studied systematically, and that the Finnish elite studies carried out in the 1990s contained little information on gender power.⁵ As for Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, the project represents an updating of existing knowledge.

From a gender perspective, the most comprehensive of the earlier power studies is the Swedish elite study *Maktens kön* (The Gender of Power) that was carried out between 2001 and 2006, and the follow-up

⁴ See Niskanen and Nyberg (eds) 2009. In some instances, the researchers involved and I have supplemented the information from the country reports in this article with data taken from official statistics and the homepages of public authorities and organizations.

⁵ The Academy of Finland has recently financed a research programme, 'Power in Finland' (2007-2010). The project investigated, among other things, gender power in politics, the judicial system, public administration, science, and organizations (<http://tietystitemp.aka.fi/fi/A/Tiedeyhteiskunnassa/Tutkimusohjelmat/kaynnissa/VALTA>).

government report *Kön, makt och statistik* (Gender, Power, and Statistics), both under the supervision of Anita Göransson. *Maktens kön* is a comprehensive, Bourdieu-inspired study that, with the help of an extensive questionnaire survey (involving 2,890 people, corresponding to 3,343 positions), maps and analyzes the distribution of gender power within seven sectors in Sweden in 2001: business, politics, public administration, organizations, media, culture, and science. An important general conclusion of the study is that women and men exercise different types of public power: women are better represented in areas and positions where recruitment is done through political channels, whereas men occupy greater numbers of top positions where recruitment is done through appointment. The findings of *Maktens kön* were developed, updated, and expanded upon in the said report, SOU 2007:108, which offers nuanced patterns of gender power, including the fact that women are often found at the level of highly visible top positions in certain fields, whereas top positions at lower levels, for example at the municipal and regional levels, are often male dominated (Göransson, ed. 2007; SOU 2007:108).

In line with the Swedish power studies and the Nordic Council of Ministers' project description, the statistical surveys in the Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries project take a broad understanding of their two areas studied, politics and business, as their starting point. The research team has mapped gender equality in national politics (the national parliaments) and in the EU elections in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, as well as in the presidential elections in Finland and Iceland. We also studied parliamentary and political party leadership positions, as well as governments, committees, local/municipal politics, the foreign service, and top-level positions in government offices and ministries. Similarly, a broad definition of business was also used. We have studied the gender balance of corporate boards and among the top positions in listed and state-owned companies in the five countries, and also studied the management level of a number of financial authorities and interest organizations to the extent possible given the project's financial and time constraints. Insofar as possible, we aimed to investigate the gender balance in the top positions in corresponding spheres in the autonomous territories.

1.2 Comparison: opportunities and limits

An important aim of the project has been to compile comparative information on the gender balance in high-level decision-making posts in the Nordic countries and the autonomous territories. The aim is for the knowledge generated to function as a source of information for political decision makers, researchers, students, and others interested in issues of equality, or in politics and business in general, and for the knowledge to serve as inspiration and a springboard for further research.

One problem that arises in generating comparative information of the type presented here is that it is difficult to formulate *exact definitions* that are adapted to the national circumstances in a simple and consistent manner.⁶ In order for the comparisons between countries to be meaningful, it is necessary to have access to statistics that are *clear, accessible, and comparative*, as shown in the Swedish study *Kön, makt och statistik* (SOU 2007:108: 28). For historical reasons, the political cultures in the Nordic countries are similar, and political, economic, and cultural cooperation between the countries has been well established since the Nordic Council of Ministers was founded in 1952 (Ruostetsaari 2008: 143). At the same time, the political, administrative, and economic structures and administrative and corporate cultures, etc., as well as traditions for the compilation and publication of official statistics display features distinctive to each country; hence, making exact comparisons difficult to make. This means that the inclusion of which positions in each country and sector is open to interpretation and that the lowest common denominator – variables that can be compared – captures similarities and differences between countries only at a general level. As with comparisons that are done at a European or international level between countries and over time, the Nordic comparisons should, therefore, be seen as indicative, rather than absolute, even if the overall picture can be considered reliable.

1.3 Access to statistics, methodological problems, and delimitations

As indicated, the surveys in the Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries project take a broad definition of politics and business as their starting point, as defined in the project plan, which also stipulates that the

⁶ The same applies, to a greater degree, to the statistical comparisons that are done, for example, at the EU level. See *Women and Men in Decision Making* (2007:16).

project should be based on existing statistics and knowledge. This provision, along with the tight time frame, has presented the research team with conflicting demands. As a consequence of the broad aim of the project, a great deal of time and resources have been allocated to generate and compile the necessary statistical data. At the same time, the official statistics in the five countries and autonomous territories have often been inadequate, or completely non-existent, and it has, therefore, not been possible to answer the questions that the researchers wanted to pose. In several cases, statistics have had to be collected and compiled manually. In general, the information on the most visible top positions (for example chairpersons and regular members of boards, committees, etc.) has been relatively easy to access, while it has been considerably more difficult and more time-consuming to map lower, but important, positions of power (such as vice-chairpersons, deputy members, etc.). In general, there is also better access to information on positions of power in the political sphere than in the business sector. But there are exceptions in both cases. As Christina Fiig points out in her study of Danish politics and central administration, it is apparent, for example, that access to official statistics related to politics and administration is not as good in Denmark as in the other Nordic countries, as soon as one deviates from the most visible, representative, political level (Fiig 2009). On the other hand, it has been relatively easy to access information about listed companies and the composition of their boards and management in Sweden, and, to a certain extent, in Denmark as well, through actors from the private sector personally contributing with ongoing data collection.⁷ As regards the other countries, a great deal of the material on the business sector and its organizations has been compiled by the researchers themselves and their colleagues.

The lack of accessible, clear, and comparative statistics has resulted in delimitations that limit the possibilities for inter-country comparisons in certain important respects. Firstly, one of the project's aims was to not only examine politically appointed officials, but also top positions attained on the basis of competence and qualifications, primarily civil servants in government offices, ministries, and other public administration.

⁷ It is, however, important to note that the valuable knowledge of important societal phenomena generated in this way depends on the responsible organization's interest and willingness to allocate resources to data collection and that there are no guarantees that this sort of private compilation of statistics will continue to receive support and be made a permanent feature.

Due to differences in administrative structures and cultures in the five countries and autonomous territories, as well as variable access to statistics, this information is not uniformly presented in the country reports, and it is, therefore, not possible to make direct comparisons between the countries in this field.

Secondly, an objective of the project was to – insofar as possible – compile information for the last fifteen years in order to facilitate comparisons over time and with earlier research. For the same reasons as above, it has often not been possible – for example as regards the decision-making bodies of political parties, corporations, and various organizations – to collect information that is more than a few years old from homepages and other published material.

The third limitation relates to the above-mentioned difference between the most visible and less visible positions of power. Archival research, questionnaire surveys, and more detailed manual data collection would have been necessary in order to study less visible positions of power. However, this has not been possible to carry out within the framework of the project.

2 There is gender balance among highly visible positions in parliamentary politics in the Nordic countries – but just barely

The following section summarizes some of the project's most important findings regarding two aspects – *vertical* and *horizontal* segregation (gender division of labour). Vertical segregation refers to women and men occupying different hierarchical positions in an organization or context. Where there is horizontal segregation, women and men occupy different positions at the same level, and certain tasks and positions are considered more important than others.⁸ In many respects, the project's findings follow a known pattern: the representation of women in parliamentary politics is relatively good (38–47 per cent of each sex),

⁸ The concepts vertical and horizontal segregation were originally used to analyze the gender division of labour and positions of power in the labour market. For a discussion, see, for example, Peterson and Lewis, *Elgar Companion to Feminist Economics* (1999: 578–584) and Walby (1997: 100–119).

while business is still heavily male dominated. This is demonstrated by the tables below, which, using a number of key variables, present a gender equality profile for the five countries and autonomous territories. The tables illustrate tendencies in each area with respect to similarities and differences that are broadly comparative. More comprehensive surveys and analyses are found in each of the country reports.

2.1 Parliamentary politics

As regards the representation of women and men in the national parliaments in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden from the mid-1990s to the present (Table 1), the following summary conclusions can be drawn:

- Based on the assumption that a proportion of 40–60 per cent of each sex constitutes an equal or balanced representation, the goal of gender balance has been met in Finland, Iceland, and Sweden. In Denmark and Norway (in August 2009), the parliamentary representation of women is just under 40 per cent. We can also observe that the representation of women in national parliaments has increased since the mid-1990s in all countries except Norway, which has stayed at the same level.⁹ In Denmark, there has been a moderate increase in the proportion of women, while, in Finland and Sweden, the increase has been somewhat more substantial, and, in Iceland, there has been a considerable increase, from 25 to 43 per cent.
- There have been changes in the parliamentary leadership (speakers and equivalent) in Denmark, Finland, and Iceland. It is important to note that these posts concern a small number of people, and, consequently, a small change in absolute numbers has a large effect percentage-wise.¹⁰ Notwithstanding this reservation, we can establish

⁹ After the information in the Norwegian country report was collected in June–August 2009, female representation increased to 39 per cent in the general election in September of that same year.

¹⁰ The Danish Presidium of the Folketing consists of a president and four vice-presidents (Fiig 2009: 23–24). The Parliament of Finland has a speaker and two deputy speakers (www.eduskunta.fi/thwfakta/hetekau/hex/hxent.htm). The leadership of the Althing in Iceland consists of one speaker and six deputy speakers (Syrkarsdóttir 2009: 149). The leadership of the Norwegian Storting consists of presidents and vice presidents in the Storting, Lagting, and Odelsting, in total six posts (Langvasbråten 2009: 192–193). In Sweden, the leadership of the Riksdag comprises one speaker and three deputy speakers (Alnevall 2009: 272–273).

that a 40 per cent representation of women in the Presidium of the Danish Parliament in 1994 decreased to 0 per cent in 2007 and that speaker posts in Finland went from being held by two-thirds women (two women and one man) in 1995 to no women at all in 2009. In Iceland, the development has been the reverse – from total male dominance in 1995 to all seven of the speaker posts being held by women in 2009. In Norway, 17 per cent of speakers were women in both 1993 and 2005 (the years measured). In Sweden, there has been gender balance in the parliamentary leadership since the mid-1990s.

- The gender representation in parliamentary committees (regular members) is relatively balanced, with over 40 per cent women in Iceland and Sweden. In Denmark, Finland, and Norway, the proportion of women is between 30 and 35 per cent. In Finland and Iceland, the proportion of female committee members has increased since the mid-1990s, while in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, it has been stable.
- There is gender balance among the parliamentary committee chairpersons in Finland, Iceland, and Sweden. In Denmark, just under 40 per cent of committee chairpersons are women, while the proportion is lower in Norway, with just under 30 per cent (August 2009). Change has been the most drastic in Iceland, from 25 to 50 per cent between 1995 and 2009.
- The current (August 2009) governments of the Nordic countries are gender balanced, with 41–60 per cent of ministers being women. Only in Finland, however, do women constitute a majority, with 60 per cent. As a rule, the proportion of female ministers has increased since the mid-1990s, with the exception of Sweden, where 50 per cent of ministers were women in 1994, in comparison to 41 per cent today.¹¹

In summary, it can be established that, in quantitative terms, there is relative gender equality in parliamentary politics in the Nordic countries today. A systematic pattern can, however, be discerned: women are almost always closer to the 40 per cent mark and men closer to the 60 per cent mark, rather than the other way around.

¹¹ After the general election in Norway in September 2009, a new government with 50 per cent women was formed (<http://www.regjeringen.no>).

2.2 *Municipal politics*

The next area that is illustrated in Table 1 is municipal politics, which differs from national politics in some important respects. As regards the representation of women and men in municipal politics, the following can be established:

- Only in Sweden is the representation of municipal councillors gender balanced, where the gender representation has been stable since the mid-1990s.
- Finland, Iceland, and Norway are close to the 40 per cent mark.
- Change has been most drastic in Iceland, from a female representation of 25 to 35 per cent; the proportion of women has also increased in Finland and Norway.
- Denmark has remained at a level of 27 per cent female representation in municipal assemblies since the mid-1990s.¹² In the Danish country report, Christina Fiig gives a number of conceivable reasons for the stagnation: regional differences (more women are elected in the capital than in the rest of the country), the organization of the municipal political work as well as recruitment and ranking of candidates (Fiig 2009: 44). It can be noted that while the proportion of female candidates for municipal elections has been around 30 per cent for the past four elections (1993–2005) in Denmark, in Norway, it has been around 40 per cent during the same period, and has increased from around 30 to 40 per cent, or just under 40 per cent, in Finland and Iceland, respectively (Langvasbråten 2009; Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009; Styrkársdóttir 2009). As regards municipal executive boards, which exercise executive power in the municipalities, the data is incomplete.
- The picture of vertical segregation in municipal politics is reinforced when we look at the gender distribution of leadership positions in the municipalities. Information on these posts is not directly comparable between countries due to differences in administrative structure and the ways in which municipal leaders are chosen. However, some

¹² After the information in the Danish country report was collected, female representation increased to 32 per cent in the municipal elections held in Denmark on 17 November 2009 (www.kvinfo.dk/side/1174/, 14 December 2009).

patterns can be discerned. In Denmark, this political level has traditionally been male dominated. In 2005, following the municipal reform, 7 per cent of mayors were female (Fiig 2009: Table 28).¹³ In Finland, the proportion of women holding the post of chairperson of the municipal council has increased by ten per cent, from 16 per cent in 1993 to 26 per cent in 2005, and Norway has seen an increase from 16 per cent in the mid-1990s to 23 per cent in 2005 (Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009: Table 35; Langvasbråten 2009: Table 37). In Sweden, 30 per cent of municipal council chairpersons have been women since the end of the 1990s (Statistics Sweden: Demokratidatabas). As regards municipal executive boards, which exercise executive power in the municipalities, information is not available in all reports. In Finland, the provisions of the Equality Act have been tightened since 1995 such that each sex shall have at least 40 per cent representation on the municipal executive boards (Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009: 94). The allocation of quotas has affected the gender composition; the proportion of women on municipal executive boards increased from 24 per cent in 1994 to 45 per cent in 1997, and to 46 per cent in 2005 (Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009: Table 33). Although the quotas do not apply to chairpersons, the proportion of female chairpersons of municipal executive boards has, nonetheless, increased since the passing of the reform, from 11 per cent in 1993 to 15 per cent in 1997 and 22 per cent in 2005 (Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009: Table 35). In Norway, female representation on the municipal executive boards has increased since the end of the 1990s and is today somewhat higher in the municipal assemblies. In 2007, women constituted 42 per cent of the members of municipal executive boards, compared to 38 per cent in 1999 (Langvasbråten 2009: Table 36). No information has been reported on the chairpersons of municipal executive boards in Norway. In the Swedish municipalities, women held 39 per cent of municipal executive board positions in 2007, compared to 32 per cent in 2003. The under-representation of female chairpersons is even more apparent and the development is static: in 2007, 31 per cent of the

¹³ After the most recent statutory proceedings, it looks like this proportion increased to 14 per cent with the municipal elections in November 2009 (www.kvinfo.dk/side/1174/, 14 December 2009).

chairpersons were women, compared to 30 per cent in 2003 (Statistics Sweden 2008: 63–64). From Iceland, information is reported on municipal directors (equivalent to chairpersons of municipal executive boards). The proportion of women in these posts has increased from 11 per cent in 1994 to 20 per cent in 2006 (Styrkarsdóttir 2009: Table 25).

2.3 The diplomatic service

In order to illustrate the trends of change within an area of public administration that is seldom included in gender equality discussions, the diplomatic service, I have included information on the proportion of female ambassadors in Table 1. Foreign affairs and the diplomatic service have traditionally been characterized by strong male dominance in all of the Nordic countries and this continues to be the case even today. The proportion of female ambassadors (excluding ambassadors to international bodies) in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Norway has increased from very low levels (between 3 and 10 per cent) in the mid-1990s to 15 and 14 per cent in Denmark and Iceland, respectively, and to just under 30 per cent in Finland and Norway. This may mean that the situation within the diplomatic service is changing. The Finnish and Norwegian country reports present information on Foreign Ministry trainee courses. In Finland, women have been over-represented among those accepted (between 52 and 74 per cent) and in Norway, as well, the gender distribution among the trainees in 2006–2008 has been relatively balanced (between 40 and 57 per cent) (Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009: 101, Table 44; Langvasbråten 2009: 201). The Swedish data is not directly comparable with that from the other countries, since there is no information on ambassadors within the diplomatic service only. But even here, the figures indicate a clear trend: the proportion of women who are heads of missions and ambassadors to international bodies has increased from 10 to just over 30 per cent since the mid-1990s.

Table 1: Vertical political segregation: proportion of women in a number of key political positions in the Nordic countries in the mid-1990s and 2005–2009

Positions	Denmark		Finland		Iceland		Norway		Sweden	
	1994	2007	1995	2009	1995	2009	1993	2005	1994	2006
Parliament and government/year										
MPs	34	38	34	42	25	43	39	38	40	47
Speakers (or equivalent)	40	0	67	0	0	100	17	17	50	50
Committees	38	38	31	39	29	34	-	36	44	47
Committee chairpersons	31	38	20	41	25	50	33	31	47	44
Ministers	35	42	41	60	10	42	42	47	50	41
Municipalities/year	1997	2005	1996	2008	1994	2006	1995	2007	1994	2006
Municipal assemblies	27	27	31	37	25	36	33	38	41	42
Diplomatic service/year	1995	2009	1997	2008	1995	2008	1995	2008	1995	2007
Ambassadors	3	15	7	27	5	14	9	28	10*	32*

Sources: Fiig 2009; www.eduskunta.fi/thwfakta/hetekau/hex/hxent.htm; Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009; Styrkårsdóttir 2009; Langvasbráten 2009; Anevall 2009; Demokratidatabas, Statistics Sweden.

Note: - no information available; * refers to both heads of missions and ambassadors to international bodies.

3 Women and men are often found in different political areas

A considerable amount of parliamentary work is done in committees. Committees are a central arena for initiative and control of political decisions and debates in parliamentary politics (Wägnerud 1999: 57–58; Holli and Saari 2009: 27–30). The representation of women and men in committees has, therefore, been examined in terms of vertical segregation, as presented above, as well as horizontal segregation. The so-called BEIS typology is used in European and other international comparisons of the distribution of women and men in different political areas and functions. Political areas are categorized in the BEIS typology according to different functions as follows: B = basic functions (foreign and domestic policy, defence, justice, etc.), E = economy (finance, trade, industry, agriculture, etc.), I = infrastructure (transportation, communications, environment, etc.), and S = socio-cultural functions (social affairs, health, family, youth, elderly people, education, science, culture, labour, sports, etc.)

(Macfarlane 2007: 27).¹⁴

Table 2 presents a selection of committees that have been grouped to show the parliamentary areas in which women and men are most often active.¹⁵ The structure and number of committees differ between the countries, and in the table below the names used by the Swedish Riksdag and the committee structure have been used as reference. As such, the table does not provide exact information on all parliamentary committees in the other countries; instead, capturing the gender distribution of the committees in the most important political areas, according to the BEIS typology.

¹⁴ The Swedish social scientist Lena Wägnerud's categorization of female- and male-coded political areas on a continuum between reproduction and production has certain similarities with the BEIS typology. The difference is that the BEIS typology includes culture and social affairs in the same group, issues related to justice, law, and the constitution are grouped under basic functions, and infrastructural affairs (transport and communications, environment, etc.) are not included in economy/technology, instead forming a separate group (Wägnerud 1999: 62–68). I have chosen to use the BEIS typology since it was used in the follow-up indicators to the recommendations of the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 ('Beijing + 15 follow-up indicators'). The BEIS typology makes the Nordic comparisons comparable with corresponding international indicators (Macfarlane 2007: 26–28).

¹⁵ Two classification systems are combined in the table. Firstly, committees are grouped into male-dominated and gender-balanced committees and committees with high numbers of women, according to the same classification used by Christina Fiig and Trude Langvasbråten in their articles in *Kön och makt i Norden. Del I* (Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries: Part I) (Fiig 2009; Langvasbråten 2009). The categorization is based on the study of the gender distribution in Norwegian parliamentary committees carried out by the Norwegian social scientist Nina Hallberg (Hallberg 2003). In accordance with Fiig's modification of Hallberg's model, the following designations are used: committees with ≤ 30 per cent women are termed male dominated, committees with 31–40 per cent women are gender balanced, and committees with ≥ 41 per cent women are termed committees with high numbers of women. For information used as the basis of the classification, see Table 1 in the Annex.

Table 2: Horizontal segregation in a selection of national parliamentary committees in the Nordic countries: male-dominated (≤ 30 per cent women) and gender-balanced (31–40 per cent women) political areas as well as areas with high numbers of women (≥ 41 per cent women), grouped according to the BEIS typology

	Denmark 2003–2004	Finland 2008	Iceland 2009	Norway 2005	Sweden 2006
Male dominated					
Basic functions	Defence	Defence	–	Defence The Constitution and Scrutiny	–
Economy	Finance Agriculture and Fisheries Taxation	Finance Agriculture and Forestry	Finance Agriculture and Fisheries	Finance Industry and Trade	–
Infrastructure	Transport and Communications	Transport and Communications	Transport and Communications	Transport and Communications	–
Social	Labour Market	–	–	–	–
Gender balanced					
Basic functions	Foreign Affairs	Foreign Affairs	–	–	–
Economy	Industry and Trade	–	Industry and Trade	–	–
Infrastructure	–	–	–	Environment and Energy	–
Social	–	–	–	–	Social Insurance
High numbers of women					
Basic functions	Justice EU Affairs	Justice The Constitution	The Constitution Foreign Affairs	Justice Foreign Affairs	Civil Affairs Defence Justice The Constitution Foreign Affairs EU Affairs
Economy	–	Industry and Trade	–	–	Finance Industry and Trade Taxation
Infrastructure	–	Environment and Energy	Environment and Agriculture	–	Environment and Agriculture Transport and Communications
Social	Cultural Affairs Social Affairs Education	Labour Market Social Affairs Education and Cultural Affairs	Social Affairs Education and Cultural Affairs	Labour Market Cultural Affairs Church Affairs, Education and Research	Labour Market Cultural Affairs Social Affairs Education

Source: Annex: Table 1

When interpreting the table, it is important to bear in mind that the data comes from somewhat different points in time. The most recent available

Danish data is from 2003–04, the Norwegian data refers to the situation after the 2005 election, the Swedish data is from after the 2006 election, and the Finnish and Icelandic data is from 2008 and 2009, respectively. The data does, however, illustrate a pattern. The table shows that, according to these criteria, the Swedish Riksdag differs from the parliaments of the other Nordic countries: after the most recent election, there are no distinctly male-dominated committees, and all committees, with the exception of the Committee on Social Insurance, have high numbers of women. In the other countries, the committees with some of the basic, economy, and infrastructure functions (defence, finance, and transport and communications) are distinctly male dominated. Women are mainly over-represented in committees with social-cultural functions (social issues, health, children, family, education, and culture). The picture is otherwise variable. It is interesting to note that committees involved in an important economic policy area, industry and trade, are gender balanced, or have high numbers of women in all countries except Norway. Moreover, agriculture and fisheries (or just agriculture) are male-dominated committees in Denmark, Finland, and Iceland, and foreign affairs committees are gender balanced or have high numbers of women in all countries.

The classifications in Table 2 are based on a generous definition, whereby the span of between 31 and 40 per cent is characterized as gender balanced. In gender equality work in the Nordic countries, a distribution of 40–60 per cent of each sex is often used as equal gender representation. It is, however, possible to question the plausibility of even this distribution. If women are *systematically* represented at around 30 or 40 per cent and men at around 60 or 70 per cent in various contexts, it is justified to wonder whether the aim should be for a 50–50 representation of both genders in order to be able to speak of a balanced representation (see, for example, *Kön, makt och statistik* [SOU 2007:108: 206–207]). In Table 3, the data on the gender distribution in the committees has once again been rearranged, using as a reference point committees where women constitute 50 per cent or more of the committee members. This reinforces the picture of horizontal gender segregation evident in Table 2. Social functions, such as culture and education, are practically always areas in which women are over-represented, and men under-represented. In addition, women are the majority in committees involved in areas, such

as the labour market (Denmark and Sweden), the environment (Finland and Iceland), justice (Norway and Sweden), and foreign policy (Iceland and Norway).

Table 3: Selection of the Nordic parliamentary committees with ≥ 50 per cent women, grouped/categorized according to the BEIS typology

	Denmark 2003/2004	Finland 2008	Iceland 2009	Norway 2005	Sweden 2006
Basic functions	–	–	Foreign Affairs	Justice Foreign Affairs	Justice
Economy	–	–	–	–	–
Infrastructure	–	Environment	Environment	–	–
Social	Social Affairs Education	Labour Market and Equality Social Affairs Education	Social Affairs Education	Family and Cultural Affairs	Labour Market Cultural Affairs Social Affairs Education

Source: Annex: Table 1

4 The governments in the Nordic countries

Even if the composition of Nordic ministries is today gender balanced, the work of government is often characterized by the vertical and horizontal gender segregation. The Nordic countries have thus far only had three female Prime Ministers. The first was Gro Harlem Brundtland who led three Norwegian Social Democratic Governments during the 1980s and 1990s. The second was Anneli Jäätteenmäki who briefly served as Prime Minister of a coalition government (the Centre Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the Swedish People’s Party) in Finland in 2003, and the third is Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir who was elected Prime Minister of Iceland in 2009 (Langvasbráten 2009; Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009; Styrkársdóttir 2009).

As regards other ministerial posts, portfolios tend to be distributed differently among female and male ministers. The horizontal gender segregation at the government level has not been examined in detail in all of the country reports due to lack of time. However, the sparse information that has been reported makes it possible for some conclusions to be drawn. In the Danish report, defence policy (basic function), economy functions like finance policy and agriculture and fisheries policy (including ‘food policy’) as well as infrastructure functions, such as energy and

communications/transport policy are characterized as male-dominated political areas. Portfolios within basic functions, such as foreign and defence policy, have never been held by women and only a few women have held ministerial posts in the remaining areas. It can also be observed that during the 1990s and 2000s (1993–2009), fifty-three women held a total of fifty-six ministerial posts in the Danish Governments. Of these, eleven posts (20 per cent) can be classed as basic functions, ten (18 per cent) as economy functions, nine (5 per cent) as infrastructure, and thirty posts (54 per cent) as social functions.¹⁶ In Iceland, during a similar period (1991–2009), eighteen women (including the female Prime Minister) held ministerial posts in the different governments. Of these, four (22 per cent) can be grouped under basic functions, three (17 per cent) under economy functions, four (22 per cent) under infrastructure, and seven (41 per cent) under social functions. The portfolios of agriculture, fisheries, finance, trade, as well as transport minister, i.e. posts involving important economy and infrastructure functions, have always been held by men in Iceland.¹⁷

In the Finnish country report, a similar pattern is evident. Even the current government, where women are the majority in terms of numbers, is characterized by vertical and horizontal gender segregation. In addition to the Prime Minister being a man, important economy functions (finance and trade) and basic functions (foreign policy) are held by men. Women indeed hold ministerial posts within important basic functions, such as justice and domestic policy, but the majority hold posts involving social functions (social issues and health, social insurance and education, and the labour market) (Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009: 24–25). The Norwegian Government of 2005–2009 can, according to the BEIS typology, be characterized as a government that, in several respects, broke the mould of traditional horizontal segregation. The government consisted of one Prime Minister (a man) and nineteen departmental ministers, nine of which were women and ten were men. Two ministers, one woman and one man, each held two ministerial portfolios. Three of the basic-function posts (defence, local government and regional development, as well as reform and government administration) and three of the economy functions (finance, trade and industry, as well as fisheries and coastal affairs)

¹⁶ The calculations are based on information in Fiig (2009: 32, Table 13).

¹⁷ The calculations are based on information in Styrkárásdóttir (2009: 145, Table 13).

were held by women. On the other hand, men dominated posts within social and infrastructure functions (<http://www.regeringen.no>). According to the BEIS typology, the current government in Sweden is pretty gender balanced. In addition to the Prime Minister, it consists of twenty-one ministers. The post of Prime Minister is held by a man and a woman serves as Deputy Prime Minister. Women and men hold the same number of posts within basic functions (three each), economy (two each), and infrastructure (one post for each sex). The social functions are distributed among four women and five men (<http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/1440>).

On the whole, this survey provides an interesting picture of the interplay between vertical and horizontal gender segregation, and between party politics and national politics. Women are still less likely to hold leadership posts in the largest parliamentary parties. It should be noted, however, that the Social Democratic Alliance in Iceland has had female party leaders since 2005 (Styrkársdóttir 2009: 135), with the result that a woman now holds the post of Prime Minister. It is also of interest that the opposition Social Democrats in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden elected female party leaders. As long as women do not head the largest parliamentary parties in government, they cannot be considered as candidates for Prime Minister either. In all of the countries, several smaller government parties have, or have had, female party leaders who hold, or have held, ministerial posts within important economy functions, for example in the Norwegian and Swedish Governments (the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Trade and Industry).¹⁸

5 Explanations and gender equality measures: parliamentary and municipal politics

5.1 Explanations for the development of female representation

While the development within parliamentary politics in the Nordic countries can be considered a gender equality success story in many respects, other political levels, such as municipal politics, are lagging behind, or even characterized by stagnation. How can this be explained? Drude Dah-

¹⁸ The Swedish ministerial counterparts are the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Enterprise and Energy.

lerup, in her article in this volume, discusses how gender theoretical, political science research has explained women's under-representation and men's over-representation in political assemblies and bodies since the 1980s (Dahlerup 2009). She highlights four explanatory approaches:

- 1) Structural explanations – for example that there has been a ‘glass ceiling’ for women in politics, which has prevented them from reaching the top positions in politics – and ‘the gender power perspective’ where male dominance and female subordination tend to be reproduced through various mechanisms. Different variations of the gender power perspective have been formulated in various disciplines, from the early theories of patriarchy that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s to more nuanced and actor-focused perspectives during the 1990s and 2000s.
- 2) The time-lag theory is another structural explanatory approach that postulates that there is a gradual increase in gender equality, and that political organization and activity at lower levels (e.g. in municipal politics) lead to corresponding activation at higher levels (e.g. in parliamentary politics) later on. The time-lag hypothesis is based on social science developmental theories, and has a certain empirical validity with respect to parliamentary politics in the Nordic countries: there has been a gradual increase in female representation and parliamentary politics has become more gender balanced in all Nordic countries since the 1970s. However, the time-lag hypothesis has difficulty explaining the stagnation that we are, for instance, currently seeing in Danish politics, and also surges, for example why there was a breakthrough in terms of female representation in the Nordic countries in the 1970s.¹⁹
- 3) A third explanatory approach Dahlerup calls ‘the saturation theory’, which is based on the Danish social scientist Ulrik Kjær’s studies of Danish municipal politics. The theory holds that a female representation of around 30 per cent in various munic-

¹⁹ For a discussion of the different phases in the development of female representation in the Nordic countries – the build-up phase from the 1920s to the 1970s, the breakthrough phase from about 1970 to 1990, and the consolidation phase during the 1990s and 2000s – see Bergqvist, Adman & Jungar (2008: 48–71).

pal contexts is considered sufficient; women are present and can make their voices heard; hence, both women and men are *satisfied* with the situation. The saturation theory is essentially a hypothesis based on a generalization of empirical data in Denmark. As Dahlerup points out, it should be empirically tested and developed theoretically. Why does it appear as if ‘saturation’ occurs in Danish municipal politics, but not in other Nordic countries and in other areas? How does the notion of ‘saturation’ take shape in a certain historical situation and at a given point in time?

- 4) The fourth explanatory approach consists of actor-focused explanations, i.e. the significance of socio-political debate and collective movements for social development. The findings of the Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries project largely support the actor-focused explanatory approaches. The findings of our research show that the socio-political debate, coverage of gender equality issues, and pressure from the women’s movement (both within and outside of the political parties) have been decisive for the development of gender equality in the Nordic countries. This explanatory approach is touched upon below when I discuss the gender equality achievements that the project evaluated.

5.2 Equality measures and women’s political representation

The project discusses three types of gender equality measures taken in connection with the political sphere. The first concerns the provisions in the gender equality legislation (or, in the case of Sweden, government decisions) which have prescribed gender-balanced representation on public committees, commissions, and boards appointed by governments and various government departments in all Nordic countries since the mid-1980s. When introduced, the aim of the provisions was to counteract the tendency of male dominance in the election of members to these bodies, given that the increased parliamentary representation of women was not matched by a similar development at this political level. The provisions were tightened, stipulating 40 per cent representation of each sex in Norway (1988), Finland (1995), and Sweden (1995; equal representation since 1998). Already in 1999, Anette Borchorst, in *Likestilte demokrati-er?* (Equal Democracies?), observed that increasing female representation

in all countries had been the effect (Borchorst 1999). The findings of the Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries project also indicate that the measures have been effective. This is evident from the relatively good gender balance in these bodies (and also in the boardrooms of state-owned companies, discussed in Section 7 below), provided that the observance of the laws is monitored by gender equality agencies and responsible ministers. Access to data and reporting methods vary in the country reports, making direct comparisons between the countries difficult. However, on the basis of the information reported, the following can be noted:

- The Danish report (Fiig 2009) presents information on newly created ministerial councils, commissions, and committees from 1998, 2002, and 2006. Information is not available for certain ministries and years. Nor has it been possible to access information on previous years. Despite these reservations, it can be observed that the proportion of women on newly created councils, commissions, and committees in 1998 was 38 per cent, in 2002, 53 per cent and, in 2006, 40 per cent, with great variation between the ministerial spheres (Fiig 2009: Table 23). In 2009, the proportion of women on government councils, commissions, and committees varied from 0 per cent (the Prime Minister's Office) to 43 per cent (Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs). The most male dominated, apart from the Prime Minister's Office, were committees and commissions in the areas of transport and agriculture (81 per cent men) and in the committees under the Ministry of the Environment (78 per cent men) (Fiig 2009: Table 24).
- From Finland, information on government committees, preparatory bodies, government investigators, and specialist groups is reported. Female representation in these contexts was 43 per cent in 2000 and 46 per cent in 2008 (regular members) (Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009: Table 40). By way of comparison, it can be noted – even if the information is not completely comparable since it relates only to committees and preparatory bodies – that the proportion of women in Finnish government committees in 1980 was 7.5 per cent and in preparatory bodies 11 per cent and that corresponding figures in 1996 were 42 and 36 per cent, and, in 1999, 42 and 50 per cent (Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009: Table 39). In other words, the quota regulations

were effective, even if the proportion of women was higher among deputy members than regular members (Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009: Table 40).

- In Iceland, the proportion of women on ministerial councils, boards, and commissions has increased from 11 per cent in 1987 to 36 per cent in 2007, with considerable variation between the ministries. The most male dominated were the committees and councils of the Ministry of Communications, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Finance comprised of 70–80 per cent men. The proportion of women was highest (40–45 per cent) in bodies under the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security (Styrkarsdóttir 2009: Table 16). The Icelandic Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men was tightened in 2008, stipulating a minimum representation of 40 per cent of each sex.
- In Norway, the proportion of women in ministerial committees was 39 per cent in 1993, 41 per cent in 2000, and 46 per cent in 2008 (Langvasbråten 2009: Table 28). Differences between the ministries were great. Five ministries (Trade and Industry, Petroleum and Energy, Defence, Transport and Communications, and Agriculture and Food) had not met the requirement of 40 per cent representation of each sex in 2008. At the chairperson and vice-chairperson level, gender differences have been considerable. In 1993, 21 per cent of chairpersons and 53 per cent of vice-chairpersons were women, whereas the same figures for 2008 were 31 and 56 per cent women.
- In Sweden, the gender ratio on the boards of government agencies and advisory councils is reported in conjunction with the annual budget proposals in order for the Riksdag to be able to follow the development of gender equality in this area. Since the end of the 1980s, the proportion of women on the boards has grown – from 28 per cent female board members in 1988 to 44 per cent ten years later. In 2008, both the boards and advisory councils were reviewed, at which time the representation of women was 48 per cent. The Swedish Government is actively working to reach the ultimate goal of 50 per cent women by, among other things, arranging board member training for women. Chairperson posts remain, however, male dominated, with

61 per cent men and 39 per cent women in 2007–08. The greatest over-representation of men was found in the areas for which the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (ten agencies) and the Ministry of Agriculture are responsible: 90 and 88 per cent, respectively, of the chairperson posts were held by men ([www.regeringen.se/ prop.2009/10:1/utgiftsområde](http://www.regeringen.se/prop.2009/10:1/utgiftsområde) 13: Annex 1).

The other gender equality measure touched upon in the country reports concerns the definition in the equality legislation in Finland (the Act on Equality between Women and Men) in 1995, and the amendment of the Norwegian Local Government Act in 1992, stipulating that 40 per cent of each sex shall be represented on municipal committees and boards (Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009: 94–96; Langvasbråten 2009: 210–211). Information about this political level is not presented in the other country reports. Thus, it is not possible to make comparisons between countries that do and do not have quota legislation in place at the municipal level. As regards Finland and Norway, it can be noted that

- in Finland, the proportion of women on municipal committees was already on the increase before quotas were introduced, with 35 per cent in 1989, compared to 19 per cent in 1978. After the quota regulation came into force, the proportion of women increased to 47 per cent in 1997 and to 48 per cent in 2005 (Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009: Table 33). Committee chairpersons are not subject to the law and male domination of these posts remains strong. The proportion of women who chaired committees and boards was 22 per cent in 1993, increasing to 24 per cent after the first elections held after the law was introduced in 1997, and then to 27 per cent in 2005. On the other hand, there are more women holding the first and second vice-chairperson posts (33 and 44 per cent in 2005) (Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009: Table 36).
- in Norway, the quota regulation first came into use following the 1995 municipal elections. The proportion of women on municipal committees has increased from 39 per cent in 1996 to 45 per cent in 2008. Among committee chairpersons, women are under-represented, holding 30 per cent of posts in 2008. As in Finland, there is a tendency of gender disparity in the distribution of chairperson posts: according to a study of twenty-two municipalities in 2009, only 23 per cent of

chairpersons were women, while women hold 46 per cent of vice-chairperson posts in these municipalities (Langvasbråten 2009: 211).

On the whole, it can be concluded that the information from Finland and Norway supports Anita Göransson's observation in *Kön, makt och statistik* regarding Sweden: one tendency is that less visible and less-observed political levels remain male dominated (SOU 2007:108: 189).

The third measure touched upon in the country reports is that of voluntary gender quotas in political parties. The parties play a key role in the development of political representation, since they nominate the candidates that voters can vote for and place them in elective or non-elective positions on their lists (Dahlerup 2009). The pressure from women's organizations and feminist debaters since the 1970s and 1980s has more or less forced the political parties to review their internal party democracy and nomination practices.

It is important to point out that party quotas in the Nordic countries have been voluntary and were introduced in a political situation in which the parliamentary representation of women was already on the increase, between 20 and 30 per cent. The Nordic party quotas can, therefore, be seen as 'high-echelon quotas' where an already-strong female minority in the parties took advantage of their position of power to achieve a better gender balance in party politics through quotas (Freidenvall, Dahlerup, and Skjeie 2006: 56).

Two types of quotas have been used in Nordic party politics: quotas on parties' internal bodies (party quotas) and quotas on parties' candidate lists (candidate quotas). Party and candidate quotas were first introduced by the centre and left-wing parties in Denmark and Norway, later during the 1980s in Sweden and in Iceland in the 1990s. In Denmark, party quotas were used by two parties for a couple of years at the end of the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s, as well as candidate quotas by the same parties for a short period during the 1980s and 1990s, but were abolished on the grounds that special measures for women were no longer considered necessary (Freidenvall, Dahlerup, and Skjeie 2006: 64). In Finland, parties currently do not use candidate quotas due to the Finnish electoral system in which preference voting plays a prominent role. On the other hand, five of the current eight parliamentary parties (the Green League, the Left Alliance, the Social Democratic Party, the Swedish People's

Party, and the Christian Democrats) use quotas for their internal bodies and the three other parties (the Centre Party, the National Coalition Party, and the True Finns Party) advocate balanced gender representation (Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009: 69).

Lenita Freidenvall, Drude Dahlerup, and Hege Skjeie have studied the impact of gender quotas on the Nordic parliamentary parties since the mid-1970s – when the first quota rules were introduced in the Nordic countries by the Socialist Left Party and the Liberal Party in Norway in 1975 – until 2006. They have compared the proportion of female MPs party by party, before and after each party used candidate quotas, in the four countries where such quotas were used. The most common quota rate is a 40 per cent minimum representation of each sex, except in Sweden, where the Green Party and the Left Party in 1987 and 1990, respectively, first introduced the 40–60 per cent rule as the rule for placing women and men on candidate lists, but during the 1990s the rule was revised to 50 per cent of each sex, and, in 1993, the Social Democratic Party introduced the zipper system.²⁰ Based on this study and the information in the country reports, the following can be noted:

- In Denmark, the Social Democratic Party, which, for a short period of time, used candidate quotas for EU elections and municipal elections, never used quotas for parliamentary elections (Freidenvall, Dahlerup, and Skjeie 2006: 70). The proportion of women in the party's parliamentary group has decreased from 39 per cent in 1994 to 35 per cent in 2001 and to 33 per cent at the time of the 2007 election. The Socialist People's Party, which introduced candidate quotas in the mid-1980s and then abolished them in the mid-1990s, has witnessed a reverse development: the proportion of women in the party's parliamentary group was 23 per cent in 1994, which increased by 10 per cent to 33 per cent in 2001 and to 48 per cent in 2007 (Fiig 2009: Table 3).
- In Iceland, the Progressive Party is the only parliamentary party that uses both party quotas (since 1984) and candidate quotas (since 2005). The Social Democratic Alliance and the Left-Green Movement introduced party quotas in 1999. The proportion of women in the

²⁰ Under the zipper system, the male and female candidates are placed alternately on party lists.

Progressive Party's parliamentary group decreased from 33 per cent in 2003 to 29 per cent in 2007, but climbed back to 33 per cent in 2009. Consequently, the party has not reached 40 per cent female representation during the 2000s. The highest proportion of women, 50 per cent, at the time of the last election in 2009, was achieved by the Social Democratic Alliance, the Left-Green Movement, and a category designated 'other parties'. Within the Left-Green Movement, the proportion of women in the party's parliamentary group has continually increased, from 33 per cent in 1999 (when the party entered parliament) to 40 per cent in 2003, 44 per cent in 2007, and 50 per cent in 2009. In the Social Democratic Alliance, the proportion of women was 40 per cent in 2003, but dropped to 33 per cent in 2007, before, once again, increasing (Styrkárdsdóttir 2009: Table 4).

- In Norway, the Labour Party, which introduced both party and candidate quotas in 1983, had over 40 per cent women in the parliamentary group throughout the 1990s and 2000s. In 2005, the proportion of women was 53 per cent. The Socialist Left Party introduced party and candidate quotas as early as 1975 and had just over 30 per cent women in its parliamentary group during the 1990s. At the time of the elections in 2001 and 2005, the party's female representation was the second highest in the Storting (after the Labour Party), with 48 and 47 per cent, respectively. The Christian Democratic Party introduced party and candidate quotas in 1993, whereby the proportion of women in its parliamentary group increased from 39 per cent in 1993 to 44 per cent in 1997. Thereafter, it decreased to 36 per cent in the 2001 election before, once again, increasing to 46 per cent of MPs in 2005. The Centre Party introduced party and candidate quotas in 1989. The proportion of women in its parliamentary group has varied from 44 per cent in 1993 to 36 per cent in 1997, and a female majority of 60 per cent in the parliamentary group in 2001. The year 2005 witnessed a second drastic change, when female representation decreased to 46 per cent. Finally, the Liberal Party is the second Norwegian parliamentary party that introduced party quotas as early as 1975. During the 1990s, the party's parliamentary group consisted of one member, a man, and, after the 2001 election, two members, both men. In the 2005 general election,

the party won ten seats, of which four (40 per cent) were held by women (Langvasbråten 2009: 191; Table 15).

- In Sweden, the largest political party, the Social Democratic Party, had a female representation of 41 per cent in its parliamentary group after the 1991 general election when the total proportion of female MPs decreased for the first time since 1928, from 38 per cent at the previous election to 34 per cent. The decrease sparked a lively debate and led to the founding of the feminist network *Stödstrumporna* (The Support Stockings). The debate and the Support Stockings' threat to form a separate women's party forced the established parties to take an active stance on women's political under-representation, and attempt to rectify it. After the Social Democratic Party introduced the zipper system in 1993, the proportion of women in the party's parliamentary group increased to 47 per cent in 1994 and to 50 per cent in 1998. After a drop of a few percentage points in 2002, the representation of women once again increased to 50 per cent in 2006. Both the Green Party and the Left Party tightened the quota rules for their party lists during the 1990s: the Green Party from 40 to 50 per cent of each sex in 1997, and the Left Party to a 'minimum 50 per cent women' in 1993. The proportion of women in the Green Party's parliamentary group has varied between 44 per cent in 1994 and a female majority of 59 per cent in 2002, and 53 per cent in 2006. The Left Party made a huge leap from 33 per cent women in 1991 to 46 per cent in 1994. The proportion of women has somewhat varied in the following two elections, but has remained above 40 per cent. After the last election in 2006, the party's parliamentary group had a 64 per cent female majority (Alnevall 2009: Table 7-8; Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2008: 59–60).

One significant finding of this survey is that it is not possible to draw clear conclusions about the link between gender quotas in the parties and women's representation in the parliaments. In Denmark, parties that have either abolished or never used quotas today have the highest female representation in their parliamentary groups (Fiig 2009: Table 3). In Finland, candidate quotas have never been used in democratic elections, whilst the proportion of women in parliament is among the ten highest in the world, 42 per cent (Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009: 69). Freiden-

vall, Dahlerup, and Skjeie note the introduction of quotas in the other countries has contributed, above all, to a continual increase in the already-high female representation in the parties' parliamentary groups. The most important effect of the quotas can, instead, be observed at the discursive level: the competition between the parties and the gender equality debates generated by the measures have forced the whole political spectrum to react and take an active stance on issues of representation (Freidenvall, Dahlerup, and Skjeie 2006: 78–79).

6 Business

6.1 Vertical segregation

In most countries, there is limited access to clear, accessible, and comparative statistics on the top positions in the business sector. None of the countries have official statistics which make it possible to follow the development of gender equality in leading positions in the private sector over a longer period of time. The information presented in the country reports is based on sparse statistics that have been compiled for different purposes and that have been collected from various sources. The information is not systematically dated and changes all the time. These reservations notwithstanding, Table 4 presents information on a number of key management positions in listed companies and state-owned companies and in two fiscal authorities. The comparison illustrates a clear pattern: the executive management of listed companies is a male bastion and, with the exception of the Norwegian listed companies, women are mainly on the boards and part of the management teams of state-owned companies. The situation in Norway has changed dramatically between the two measurement points as a result of the quota regulation introduced in 2006. From 7 per cent in 1996, women's representation has increased to 36 per cent in the listed companies in 2008. The latter figure refers to all companies (both Norwegian-owned and foreign) that are listed on the Oslo Stock Exchange/Oslo Axess (Heidenreich 2009: Figure 3). If we include only Norwegian-owned companies that are subject to the quota regulation, the ratio of women is 40 per cent (Heidenreich 2009: Table 5).

Table 4: Vertical segregation in the business sector I: proportion of women in some key positions in listed companies in the Nordic countries (selected years between 1997 and 2008)

Positions in listed companies	Denmark		Finland		Iceland		Norway		Sweden	
	1997	2005	2004	2008	2000	2007	1997	2008	2000	2008
Board members	9	10	9	13	4	7	7	36	4	19
Board chairpersons	1	1	-	-	2	5	1	3	1	1
Chief executives	2	1	-	-	2	0	2	1	1	2
Members of management team	9	11	13	17	-	-	-	14	-	9

Sources: Verner 2009; Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009; Rafnsdóttir and Styrkársdóttir 2009; Heidenreich 2009; Kierulf 1997; Nilson 2009; Annex 1.

Note: - = no information available.

Table 5: Vertical segregation in the business sector II: proportion of women in some key positions in state-owned companies, central banks, and the Financial Supervisory Authority (or equivalent) in the Nordic countries (selected years between 1998 and 2009)

Positions	Denmark		Finland		Iceland		Norway		Sweden	
State-owned companies										
Year	1998	2009	2008	2008	2000	2008	2002	2008	2000	2008
Board members	23	26	-	35*	23	49	33	47	-	46
Board chairpersons	18	7	-	-	14	4	40	29	-	31
Chief executives	0	27	-	-	-	-	0	7	-	-
Members of management team	9	10	-	18*	-	-	-	27	-	-
Fiscal authorities										
Year	2000	2009	-	2009	1999	2009	1997	2008	2000	2009
Central bank executive board/ management committee	27	22	-	25	20	29	33	33	33	33
Gender of chairperson	f.	m.	-	-	-	f.	m.	m.	m.	m.
Financial supervisory authority executive board/management committee	-	-	-	-	0	33	40	57	33	33
Gender of chairperson	-	-	-	-	m.	m.	m.	m.	m.	m.

Sources: Verner 2009; Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009; Rafnsdóttir and Styrkársdóttir 2009; Heidenreich 2009; Kierulf 1997; Nilson 2009.

Note: - = no information available; * refers to all state-owned companies (wholly state-owned or with the state as a shareholder).

6.2 *Horizontal segregation in business*

Unlike the political sphere, there have been no uniform proposals for the evaluation of horizontal segregation in the business sector. In the country reports from Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, an attempt is made, however, to examine the top-level management positions held by women and men in different industries. The reports show that

- the highest proportion of women in the boardroom (9–12 per cent) in the Danish listed companies is found in the financial and corporate service, transport and postal, and manufacturing sectors.
- the few women in top management positions (board chairperson and chief executive) in Danish listed companies (169 companies) are found in the manufacturing, building, and construction sectors.
- the largest proportions of women (23–26 per cent) on the boards of Swedish listed companies (294 companies) are found in sectors, such as perishables and consumer discretionary, closely followed (20–21 per cent women) by companies in the finance, real estate, industrial goods and services, and health care sectors.
- the largest proportions of women, 32 per cent, on the boards of Finnish listed companies are found in the energy, power, and telecommunications group. This group comprises several companies that are, or have been, state owned. The companies have been affected by the provision of the Equality Act stipulating that state-owned companies shall strive for an equitable representation of women and men in the boardroom, which explains this high percentage. In other companies, the highest proportions of women (17–21 per cent) are found in the industrial production (‘materials’), financial services, and consumer discretionary sectors.
- The highest proportions of women (22–27 per cent) in other management positions in Finnish listed companies are found in sectors, such as health care, consumer discretionary, and consumer goods, followed by the manufacturing industry; financial services; and energy, power, and telecommunications.

The findings of these limited studies should be interpreted with care. However, a few observations can be made:

- It is possible to discern a pattern in which women are in top positions in financial and corporate service companies, the manufacturing industry, consumer goods industries, consumer discretionary companies, and the health care industry.
- In Swedish listed companies, measured according to market value, there is a clear pattern regarding the link between the company's size and the proportion of women in the boardroom: the larger the company, the more women in boardroom positions.

To sum up, the important conclusion to be drawn from this survey is that the criteria and methods for examining and evaluating horizontal segregation in the business sector should be developed. For example, the Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries project's time frame has not made it possible to examine middle management positions, i.e. positions from where chief executives and management teams are recruited (Göransson 2009; SOU 2007:108: 51–52; Holgersson 2003). In general, it is of critical importance to acquire knowledge of how norms and practices related to corporate management and board recruitment work with respect to sex, ethnic background, age, region of origin, etc. From a comparative perspective, one should also bear in mind that norms and rules for corporate management, board recruitment, and the role of nominating committees and their relationship to the corporate boards vary among the countries, depending on, among other things, country-specific conditions, such as ownership structure and the view on strong owners (Björkmo 2009: 11–23).

7 Explanations and gender equality measures: business

7.1 Proposals for explanatory approaches

There are, at present, no clear-cut or thoroughly developed explanations for the unequal representation of women and men at the top of industry. In her article in this volume and based on her earlier research, Göransson points to a few areas that research has failed to sufficiently elucidate. To

take a few examples, these include the significance of informal networks and ownership interests for board and chief executive recruitment in the private sector. The networks and reproduction strategies of economic capital apparently play a significant role in this context: it is uncommon for people to apply for top jobs and boardroom positions based on their qualifications; they are asked. The need of different ownership interests to reproduce economic power influences which people are asked. The horizontal gender segregation, whereby men more often than women have middle management positions (line managers and controllers) as qualifications for chief executive posts, should also be more closely examined (Göransson 2007*b*, 2009).

Øystein Gullvåg Holter and Elisabet Rogg discuss several of these elements (Holter and Rogg 2010). They state, among other things, that the prerequisites for appointment to top positions in politics and business differ: while the main rule in politics is that of democratic representation, appointment to the top of industry is governed by particularist, rather than universal, principles. They also outline an explanation based on another aspect: top business positions are symbolically understood as male positions. This helps to create a sort of 'organizational masculinity' which plays a big role for corporate self-image and presentation. Holter and Rogg also refer to the actor-oriented explanations emphasizing the role of the women's movement and political debate as champions of increased representation of women in politics. There has not been similar pressure from the women's movement regarding the appointment of top positions within the private sector. Consideration for the autonomy of industry and respect for private self-regulation have placed limits on the gender equality discussion, as Mari Teigen points out in her article in this volume (Teigen 2009).

7.2 Gender equality measures

The project has looked at three types of gender equality measures. The first is the Norwegian ASA quotas (ASA = *allmänna aktiebolag*, 'listed company'), the requirements and implementation of which are discussed in Teigen's article. She shows that quotas for boards of listed companies were imposed by the then-centre-right government under special circumstances when the government's legitimacy in gender issues was somewhat

eroded and when structural changes in the business sector played an important role. When the problem of gender equality issues in business was under discussion and there were few good solutions, it was easy to fall back on the Norwegian quota tradition. And the quotas have had an impact: in five years, the proportion of women on the boards of listed companies has increased to 36 per cent, from 9 per cent in 2004. The spillover effect within the companies has thus far been negligible: 95 per cent of board chairpersons in the same companies continue to be men, and, among chief executives, male dominance is essentially complete. In management teams, the proportion of women is marginally higher, around 10 per cent (Teigen 2009). The long-term effects of the ASA quotas, and its spillover effects outside of Norway, are interesting issues for the future.

The second gender equality measure that the project has examined is the code of conduct, the so-called 'Code of Corporate Governance', introduced in Sweden in 2004. The code applies to all large companies listed on the Stockholm Stock Exchange and stipulates, among other rules of conduct, a balanced gender distribution on their boards. There is no provision for sanctions against those who breach the code. According to Tomas Nilson's study, the code, coupled with the threat of quotas made by the Social Democratic Government in 2002, has had an impact: the proportion of women on the boards of listed companies has increased from 6 per cent in 2002 to 19 per cent in 2008. Even the proportion of companies with no female board members has decreased considerably, from 69 per cent in 2002 to 24 per cent in 2008. However, as in Norway, male dominance of chief executive posts and other management posts remains strong (Nilson 2009). Finally, it can be noted that, in Denmark, a voluntary code of conduct, 'Charter for More Women in Management', was introduced in 2007. All companies (public and private), municipalities, privately owned institutions, etc., can sign up to the code and decide in which positions a changed gender distribution is desirable. Companies and institutions commit, in this respect, to work towards goals, e.g. through the compilation and publication of statistics broken down by gender, action plans, etc. Since the code was introduced in 2007, its effects have still not been evaluated (Verner 2009).²¹

²¹ In Finland as well, a code of conduct, with recommendations that corporate boards should consist of both men and women, was introduced in 2009 (Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009: 111).

The third gender equality measure related to business that is discussed in the Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries project is action-oriented gender research, as described by Susanne Andersson (2010). Specifically, it concerns a research and development project, ‘The Gender Network’, where researchers, together with middle management from a group of innovation companies (‘Fiber Optic Valley’), carry out research-based change management at the organization level.²² The development project ties in with comprehensive organization theory research that discusses how gender is constructed within organizations, and which also demonstrates that bridging the difference in numbers of women and men does not necessarily lead to gender equality. According to various organization theory approaches, it is important to also change qualitative aspects in an organization, e.g. to highlight and analyze micro-level power relations in order to study how the spontaneous creation of gender and hierarchies occurs in the daily life of an organization. Andersson’s research shows a new way of thinking about equality work and change management within organizations and how gender research and practical equality work can be combined to enrich each other.

8 The Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland

Structural gender power in the three autonomous territories in the Nordic region has not previously been studied systematically. The previous large Nordic comparative study *Likestilte demokratier?* (1999) focused on women’s representation in politics and the institutionalization of gender equality policy (Jungerstam-Mulder 1999). Here, it was noted that even though the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland have very different societies for geographic, historical, economic, and political reasons, they share certain similarities in terms of their gender politics: the late establishment of political parties compared to the rest of the Nordic countries (in particular, Greenland and Åland), the late entry of women into politics, their low proportion of popularly elected politicians in home rule parliaments, and the late institutionalization of gender equality policy. One notable characteristic was, moreover, that women’s entry into politics first oc-

²² The project for change is financed by the government agency VINNOVA (The Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems) (Andersson 2009).

curred at the municipal level and not at the central level as in the rest of the Nordic countries, which is explained by the focus of politics on the individual in these small island societies. How did things look during the 2000s? Tables 6–9 summarize some of the findings of the reports on the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland. It should be borne in mind that fully comparable official data is absent from the reports (parliamentary committees, home rule governments, and boards of public companies over the years). However, a few interesting observations can be made, and we can establish that

- women’s representation in the parliaments of the Faroe Islands and Greenland increased during the 2000s.
- in the Faroe Islands, the great advance, from around 10 to just over 20 per cent female representation (seven women out of a total of thirty-two members), was made in conjunction with the 2008 election, following a reform of the Faroese electoral system the year before. The work of the so-called *Demokratia* committee is considered to also have contributed to this development.²³
- in Greenland, women’s representation increased sharply in the 2002 election, from 19 to 36 per cent (twelve out of thirty-one members), when a women’s party for the first – and until now only – time participated in the elections. The party did not gain representation in parliament but did work to bring women into parliamentary and local politics. Only one party, Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA), prescribes in its constitution the fair distribution of women and men in leading positions in the party. In the 2009 election, the IA was the only party that had more women than men on their candidate lists, which resulted in a female majority in the party’s parliamentary group.
- in the Åland Parliament, the proportion of women has remained at around 30 per cent, or around ten female members out of a total of thirty, since the end of the 1990s. The first great advance was made with the 1995 election, whereby women’s representation increased

²³ The committee, which was established on the recommendation of the West Nordic Council, is charged with working for the increased political participation of women. The committee consists of representatives from the political parties, the Gender Equality Commission, key women’s organizations, and the national associations of the municipalities (Knudsen 2009: 324–325).

from 13 to 23 per cent, and again in the 1999 election, which witnessed an increase from 23 to 33 per cent. The change in women's representation thus happened somewhat earlier in Åland than in the Faroe Islands and in Greenland. The political parties in Åland are influenced by the quota discussion and strive for a minimum representation of 40 per cent of each sex when listing candidates for both parliamentary and municipal elections.

- the gender distribution among ministerial posts is today balanced, with over 40 per cent female ministers in Greenland and Åland, and just under 40 per cent in the Faroe Islands.
- the work of the committees in the Faroese Parliament is heavily male dominated (16 per cent female members and 13 per cent female committee chairpersons) and somewhat less male dominated in Åland, where women occupy one-third of equivalent posts. In Greenland, women constitute 43 per cent of committee members after the last election.
- horizontal segregation characterizes the work of the committees in the Faroese Parliament. Just under one-third (two out of seven) of economy functions (the Finance Committee and the Committee on Fisheries and Industry) are held by women, and, in the social functions (the Welfare Committee), there is just one woman out of a total of seven members. Only the parliament's smallest committee, the Committee on Governmental Affairs, with three members, has, according to the BEIS definition, gender-balanced representation – in this case, one woman and two men.
- the gender balance in the committees of the Parliament of Greenland is varied. Economy functions, such as taxation, fisheries and agriculture, as well as the Trade and Industry Committee, are male dominated. However, important economy (finance) and infrastructure functions are gender balanced. High numbers of women are found in one important basic function, foreign and security policy, and in social functions.
- the composition of the Åland Parliament resembles the horizontal segregation found in the other Nordic countries. Basic and economy functions (Legal Affairs, the Grand Committee, Finance, and Trade and Industry) are male dominated, and, in the social functions (the

Cultural Committee), there is a high number of women. The small Review Committee, with three members, has one female and two male members.

- in Åland, the representation of women continues to be somewhat higher at the municipal level than at the central level. The reverse is true in the Faroe Islands and in Greenland.

Table 6: Vertical segregation: proportion of women in a number of key political positions in the parliaments and governments of the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland (1998–1999, 2002–2003, and 2007–2009)

Positions	The Faroe Islands			Greenland			Åland		
	1998	2002	2008	1999	2002	2009	1999	2003	2007
MPs	12	9	22	19	36	39	33	37	33
Committee members	–	–	16	–	–	43	–	–	29
Committee chairpersons	–	–	13	–	–	–	–	–	29
Ministers	11	0	38	–	–	44	–	–	43

Note: – = information not reported in the respective report.

Sources: Knudsen 2009; Poppel and Chemnitz Kleist 2009; Westlund 2009.

Table 7: Horizontal segregation in the parliamentary committees of the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland: male-dominated (≤ 30 per cent women) and gender-balanced (31–40 per cent women) political areas and areas with a high number of women (≥ 41 per cent women), grouped according to the BEIS typology

	The Faroe Islands	Greenland	Åland
Male dominated			
Basic functions	Judicial Affairs Foreign Affairs	–	Legal Affairs The Grand Committee
Economy	Finance Industry	Taxation Committee Fishery, Hunting, and Agriculture Trade and Industry	Finance Trade and Industry
Infrastructure	–	Preservation (species protection and hunting) and Environment	–
Social	Cultural Affairs Social Affairs	–	–
Gender balanced			
Basic functions	Governmental Affairs	–	Review Committee
Economy	–	Finance Auditing	–
Infrastructure	–	Infrastructure and Housing	–
Social	–	Culture, Education, Research, and the Church	Social Affairs and the Environment
High number of women			

Basic functions		Foreign and Security Policy Legislation Election Scrutiny Committee	
Economy	–	–	–
Infrastructure	–	–	–
Social	–	Family Health	Culture

Sources: Knudsen 2009; Poppel and Chernitz Kleist 2009; Westlund 2009.

Note: Committees with ≤ 30 per cent women = male-dominated committees, committees with 31–40 per cent women are gender balanced, and committees with ≥ 41 per cent women are committees with a high number of women.²³

Table 8: Proportion of women as municipal assembly members and chairpersons in the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland (1998–1999, 2002–2003, and 2007–2009)

Position	The Faroe Islands			Greenland			Åland		
	2000	2004	2008	1997	2001	2005	1999	2003	2007
Members	22	22	30	19	18	29	37	32	38
Chairpersons	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	25

Sources: Knudsen 2009; Poppel and Chernitz Kleist 2009; Westlund 2009.

Note: – = information not reported in the respective report.

As regards the business sector, there is only comparative data for publicly owned companies. In principle, these companies are subject to gender equality legislation stipulating an even, or equal, distribution of women and men in public commissions, committees, and boards. The reports show the following:

- The wording of Faroese gender equality legislation (the Act of Equality between Men and Women) is, in accordance with the Danish prototype, comparatively weak and has no provisions for sanctions for authorities or companies that fail to comply. The scope of the law is debated. For example, it is unclear whether publicly owned companies are subject to the law (Knudsen 2009: 323–324). The management teams of the fourteen publicly owned companies that have been examined are male dominated. On average, a little over one-third of board members and just over 10 per cent of board chairpersons are women. Only men are directors.

²³ It is not completely clear how the committees should be classified according to the BEIS typology. The Faroe Islands and Åland have no real infrastructure committee. It is debatable whether the Social and Environmental Committee in Åland should be included under social functions or infrastructure functions.

- In Greenland, the Gender Equality Act stipulates that insofar as possible, publicly appointed boards shall consist of one-half women, one-half men. Only three of the examined seventeen companies comply with the purpose of the Act (Poppel and Chemnitz Kleist 2009: 356–357). On average, a little over one-fifth of corporate board members are women.
- In Åland, the Act on Equality between Women and Men, in accordance with the corresponding law in Finland, prescribes an equal representation of women and men on the boards of publicly owned companies, without specifying numerical quotas (Westlund 2009: 375–376). Just over one-third of board members and directors in the nine companies that were examined are women. The proportion of board chairpersons is somewhat lower, a little over 20 per cent.

Table 9: Proportion of women in a number of key positions from a selection of publicly owned companies in the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland (2008–09), and the number of companies examined

Positions	The Faroe Islands	Greenland	Åland
Board members	33	22	34
Board chairpersons	13	–	22
Directors	0	–	33
Number of companies	14	17	9

Sources: Knudsen 2009; Poppel and Chemnitz Kleist 2009; Westlund 2009.

9 Gender and power in the Nordic Countries: recommendations for future research

An important initial finding of the project is that there are gaps in official statistics in all countries, with the result that it is not possible to follow the development of gender equality in politics and business in a structured manner. This applies, for example, to certain aspects of parliamentary politics in Denmark, municipal politics and public administration in all countries, as well as the private sector.

Another fundamentally important finding of the project is that numerical equality, or the equal representation of women and men at the same

level, can entail stratification and differences in status through women and men being in different functions and carrying out tasks in different areas. Indicators for the measurement and evaluation of horizontal segregation present a challenge for gender equality research.

A third finding, and task for future research, concerns the measurement and evaluation of the impact of quota measures on gender equality. On the one hand, quotas (voluntary and statutory) have shown to be an effective door opener for a more equitable distribution of power. On the other hand, widespread equality has been reached in the absence of quota rules, for example in parliamentary politics in Denmark and Finland. A more nuanced discussion and research-based knowledge of different equality measures and their impacts, including different forms of quotas, are, therefore, important matters.

Based on these findings, the project would like to make a number of recommendations for future research:

- Research-based comparative gender equality statistics on politics and business should be developed in all of the Nordic countries. The statistics should be clear, accessible, and comparative.
- The work with Nordic equality statistics should, insofar as possible, focus on making the statistics comparable with European and other international statistics.
- Measures and indicators for the measurement and evaluation of horizontal segregation should be developed.
- The production of statistics and research should focus on mapping and analyzing access to power at positions lower than at the very top level. Within politics, it is necessary to create statistics that facilitate the mapping and following up of the development of gender equality and its measures at the regional and municipal levels. Within business, both statistics and research on middle management, i.e. the level from where chief executive and management team recruitment takes place, are needed.
- It is critical that rules and practices for corporate management and corporate board recruitment as well as the work and function of nominating committees become the subject of comparative Nordic research.

- An important undertaking would be to create comparative Nordic statistics on gender and structural power also in other areas of society, for example science, media, and culture.

Annex

Table 1: Women and men in the national parliamentary committees (selected committees): per cent (%) and total number of members/committees in the selected years

Committee	Danmark			Finland			Island			Norge			Sverige		
	F. (%)	M. (%)	Tot. no.	F. (%)	M. (%)	Tot. no.	F. (%)	M. (%)	Tot. no.	F. (%)	M. (%)	Tot. no.	F. (%)	M. (%)	Tot. no.
Labour Market (Labour Market and Equality)	29	71	17	65	35	17	-	-	-	42	58	12	59	41	17
Civil	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	41	59	17
Finance	24	76	17	29	71	21	18	82	11	11	89	18	41	59	17
Defence	0	100	17	29	71	17	-	-	-	13	87	8	47	53	17
Justice	41	59	17	47	53	17	-	-	-	50	50	10	53	47	17
Constitutional Affairs (Judicial and Constitutional Review)	-	-	-	41	59	17	44	56	9	22	78	9	41	59	17
Culture (Culture and Education; Family and Culture)	47	53	17	-	-	-	-	-	-	64	36	11	53	47	17
Environment (Environment and Agriculture; Environment and Energy)	-	-	-	59	41	17	56	44	9	33	67	15	41	59	17
Agriculture and Forestry; Agriculture and Fisheries	24	76	17	24	76	17	11	89	9	-	-	-	-	-	-
Industry (Trade)	35	65	17	41	59	17	33	67	9	21	79	14	47	53	17
Taxation	29	71	17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	41	59	17
Social Insurance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	35	65	17
Social Issues	71	29	17	65	35	17	56	44	9	-	-	-	53	47	17
Transport and Communications	12	88	17	29	71	17	33	67	9	27	73	15	47	53	17
Education	59	41	17	53	47	17	67	33	9	47	53	15	53	47	
Foreign Affairs	35	65	17	35	65	17	56	44	9	50	50	17	47	53	17
EU and Europe	47	53	17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	41	59	17

Sources: Fiig 2009; Hart, Holli, and Kovalainen 2009; Styrkársdóttir 2009; Langvasbráten 2009; Alnevall 2009.

Note: 1) The activities of the committees, and, with that their name, differ among the national parliaments. The terms used in the table state the main responsibility of the committees, and, in some instances, the names used in the different countries in parentheses. 2) The data relates to the following years: Denmark, 2003–04 (total number of parliamentary committees, 23); Finland, 2008 (total number of committees, 16); Iceland, 2009 (total number of committees, 12); Norway, 2005 (total number of committees, 13); and Sweden, 2006 (total number of committees, 16).

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Women in Nordic Politics – A Continuing Success Story?

Drude Dahlerup

1 Introduction

In recent years we have been celebrating the centenaries of women's suffrage in the various Nordic countries. This has prompted us to reflect on where we stand today from a global perspective. The Nordic countries have, for a long time, been world famous for their relatively high proportions of women in politics. But people in other parts of the world often ask us how many years it actually took the Nordic countries to achieve such high levels of female representation.

It is precisely the instances of the many 100-year jubilees that force us to admit, as an answer to the above question, that it took us each about a century to reach the current level of between 38 and 47 per cent of female representatives in the parliaments and between 32 and 42 per cent in the local councils in the Nordic countries. Today there is, however, great impatience all over the world in respect of the under-representation of women. On an average, men have 81 per cent of the places in the world's parliaments, and women only 19 per cent (www.ipu.org). Not least after the adoption of the UN Platform for Action at the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, it is obvious that many of the new democracies in the world are not prepared to wait as long as 100 years to achieve gender balance within their political systems. Today the Nordic region, with its "step-by-step" model, is no longer the only possible alternative for the development of women's representation in politics.

Two features have, for a long time, characterised the development of women's representation in politics in the Nordic countries. Firstly, the Nordic countries have had absolutely the highest female representation in the world, which has made waves globally. The Nordic region has for a long time had a positive reputation in the world when it comes to gender equality.

Secondly, since World War II we have experienced a consistent increase in the female proportional numbers among the members of the political assemblies. This has been described as a continuous and advancing process (Christensen & Damkjær 1998). This success story has contributed to the notion that gender balance in politics, perhaps even equality between men and women in general, will "come in due time". Is it not part of our faith since childhood that gender equality is advancing? The official gender equality policy has thus also been built on such optimism. The Norwegian researchers Hege Skjeie and Mari Teigen speak of the "travel metaphor" in the notion of gender equality in the Nordic countries – we are on our way forward (2003).

In this article these two characteristic features will be explored in more detail. Firstly, the developments in the Nordic countries are analysed from a global perspective. Why is the leading position of the Nordic region in terms of gender equality about to disappear? Secondly, the discussion will focus on how we should interpret the historical development of women's representation in the Nordic countries: Can we expect a continually increasing female representation? Is there an invisible glass ceiling? It will also be discussed why at present there is such a large difference between the Nordic countries in, for example, the use of quota systems.

The third part of the article will focus on this empirical development in relation to four partly contradictory theories on the development of women's representation: According to the *theory of patriarchy*, the male dominated society reproduces itself continuously, and when women finally get access to an institution, the power evaporates. An opposing approach to this is the *time lag theory*, which gives a more positive picture, according to which women will slowly but surely be integrated into the power elite. The *saturation thesis*, for its part, says that there will be certain weariness before gender equality is fully achieved, which kicks in

at about the level of 30 per cent. Lastly, the *significance of public debate and pressure from women's movements* will be discussed.

2 The Nordic countries are about to lose the leader shirt

For a very long period the Nordic countries, together with the Netherlands, were alone at the top of the ranking list of women's representation in various countries. First, Finland was number one, then Norway and finally Sweden. Today, the Nordic countries are about to be caught up by a number of other countries, when it comes to women's representation in their political assemblies. The Nordic leading position is challenged by other European countries, but mainly by countries from the global South. This is a new and, in many ways, positive development.

Table 1 shows that today, Rwanda is the leading country on the world ranking list. Generally, the increasing trend globally is modest. Ten years ago, the global average was 13 per cent; today it is 19 per cent. This can be seen as proof of progress. But it can also be regarded as an illustration of how very slow progress is. However, elections take place at certain intervals. If we look only at the countries with the most recent elections, a somewhat better development is discerned. At the same time, the differences between the regions of the world are about to be levelled (www.ipu.org).

Three interesting perspectives can be seen in Table 1. First of all, the table shows that not only Rwanda, but also other countries from the global South, i.e. Argentina, Mozambique and South Africa, now have a female representation of over 30 per cent in their parliaments, thus challenging the Nordic countries. Secondly, the table shows that most of the countries at the top have an electoral system based on proportional representation (PR). Thirdly, the table shows that several of the top countries use some types of quota systems.

Table 1 Top of the world ranking list of female representation in parliament

Country	Women in parliament (%)	Type of quota system	Electoral system
1. Rwanda	56.3 (2008)	Quota law	PR
2. Sweden	47.3 (2006)	Party quotas	PR
3. South Africa	44.5 (2009)	Party quotas	PR
4. Cuba	43.2 (2008)	Non-dem. election	FPTP
5. Iceland	42.9 (2009)	Party quotas	PR
6. Finland	42.0 (2007)	--	PR
7. Argentina	40.0 (2007)	Quota law	PR
8. Norway	39.6 (2009)	Party quotas	PR
9. Costa Rica	38.6 (2006)	Quota law	PR
10. Denmark	37.4 (2007)	--	PR
11. Angola	37.3 (2008)	Quota law	PR
12. Belgium	36.7 (2007)	Quota law	PR
13. The Netherlands	36.7 (2006)	Party quotas	PR
14. Spain	36.3 (2008)	Quota law	PR
15. Mozambique	34.8 (2004)	Party quotas	PR
16. New Zealand	33.6 (2008)	--	Mix

Electoral system: *PR*: Proportional representation including party lists with multiple candidates. *Mix*: Mix of proportional representation and single-mandate constituencies. *FPTP*, first past the post: Single-mandate constituencies in which each party only nominates one candidate, and where the candidate receiving the majority of the votes wins the constituency.

Quota types: Legal quotas are included in the constitution or a law, typically an electoral law or a party law. Party quotas: Voluntary quota system passed by the party itself, e.g. a minimum of 40 per cent on that party's list of candidates must be women. A country is listed as having party quotas if only one party represented in Parliament has quotas. While many quota systems target the proportion of women/both genders on the parties' lists of candidates at elections, the so-called reserved seats quotas which are always legally regulated reserve a number of seats for women. At local elections in India, for instance, a third of the elected candidates must be women. In Rwanda, two women must be elected for each polling district (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2009).

Sources: Interparliamentary Union (2009) www.ipu.org; International IDEA and Stockholm University (2009) www.quotaproject.org; official election statistics. The numbers indicate the proportion of women on Election Day. Some variation may occur compared to www.ipu.org, the latter including certain substitutions between elections.

A country indicated as having a quota law means that the quota rules are included in the constitution or electoral law or party law. Voluntary candidate quotas, on the other hand, mean that individual parties themselves have introduced quotas for their own candidate lists at elections. Research into quotas has shown that voluntary party quotas have typically been started by parties in the centre or to the left of the political spectrum, possibly with a contagious effect on other parties. In a number of cases, certain parties have introduced voluntary quotas, but later the quota system has been introduced through legislation for all parties; this has hap-

pened in, for example, Belgium and recently also in Spain and Portugal (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2008; EUPARL 2008).

2.1 Quotas – a global trend

Today, it is impossible to talk about development of women's representation in politics without involving the issue of quotas. Gender quotas is a new, exciting field of research, since quotas are associated with so many central areas of democracy theory and feminist theory. Empirical quota research has explored a number of themes – for example, the geographical diffusion of quotas and the various quota discourses in different parts of the world. The significance of various types of quota systems has been analysed, and studies have been conducted into the often troublesome implementation of quotas and on the impact of quotas in both quantitative (that is, numbers of nominated and elected women) and qualitative (i.e. in relation to the issue of women's influence and power) terms (Caul 1999; Htun 2004; Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2005; Norris 2004; Krook 2004; Dahlerup 2006; Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2008; Teigen 2003; Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2009).

The use of gender quotas within politics has spread like wildfire over all the continents in the last decade. Even if quota regulations are often controversial, it is precisely this method that has spread – as a means to swiftly change an unwanted under-representation of women in public assemblies. Presently, quotas are used in about half of all the countries in the world, if we combine the approximately 50 countries where quotas have been introduced through legislation and/or a change of the constitution, and the approximately 50 other countries where parties represented in parliament have voluntarily implemented quotas for their own lists of candidates. This is a surprising development in view of how controversial quotas are as an instrument of gender equality policy (Dahlerup 2006; EUPARL 2008; see also the global overview on www.quotaproject.org).²⁴

²⁴ In a co-operation between International IDEA and Stockholm University through Drude Dahlerup & Lenita Freidenvall a global website has been created, where the various quota systems in the many countries with quotas are listed (www.quotaproject.org).

2.2 *New explanations*

The increasing use of gender quotas in politics challenge the prevalent theories as to why some countries are at the top when it comes to women's representation. Differences in socio-economic development have previously explained most variations in women's political representation, although the colour of governments and the contributions of various actors – not least the strategies and strength of women's movements – have been important as supplements to the structural explanatory factors. The nature of each electoral system is an additional important factor for the variations in the proportions of women. While female representation amounted to an average of 20 per cent in countries with proportional representation, it was only 11 per cent in countries with plurality/majority elections, such as the British electoral system, and, finally 14 per cent in countries with mixed electoral systems (Norris 2006). However, the influence of the electoral system seems to be smaller in non-Western countries than it is in Western countries (Norris 2004).

Since it is difficult to construct a quota system that suits elections in first-past-the-post systems (FPTP) – how can a requirement of 30 or 40 per cent female candidates work, when the parties only nominate one candidate in each constituency? – the differences between female representation in the two electoral systems will probably increase in future.²⁵ Research has shown that while three quarters of the countries with proportional elections have quota systems, there are quotas only in one third of those countries that have plurality/majority systems (FPTP) constituencies represented by one person (Dahlerup 2007b).

It would be a mistake to assume that quotas solve all the problems that women encounter in politics. Quota systems are not a miracle solution and cannot be used alone as a measure for gender equality. It should also be noted that from a global perspective, high female representation has also been achieved without quotas, as can be seen in the cases of Finland and Denmark in Table 1. It is important to underline that many different types of quota systems are used around the world. Research on quotas has

²⁵ There are, however, examples of quota systems which work in plurality/majority electoral systems, for example, the Scottish Labour Party's twinning-system, where two constituencies together were obliged to nominate a man and a woman, or the local elections in India, where the places reserved for female candidates rotate between the constituencies from one election to the next.

shown that quotas can remain a purely symbolic gesture, unless the chosen type of quota system matches the electoral system of the country.

On the other hand, quota systems have, given certain conditions, resulted in historical leaps in women's representation, as when Cost Rica moved from 19 to 35 per cent of women in parliament in one single election in 2002, after the introduction of quotas through legislation. Several circumstances must be in place in order for a quota system to have the desired effects: 1) the type of quota system introduced matches the electoral system, 2) the system includes rules on the gendered ranking order of the lists (a requirement of 40 per cent women on the candidate lists does not result in more women being elected, if they are all placed at the end of the list!), and 3) sanctions in case of non-compliance with the quota rules. Legal sanctions are, naturally, restricted to quota systems regulated by law. But a party with voluntary quotas can put pressure on its local organisations, which, in most cases, are those who decide on the nominations. Quotas regulated by law or the constitution is the main form of the quota systems in Latin America, but it has now also reached Europe, where gender quotas for electoral lists have been introduced by law in Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal and several countries in the Balkan region (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2008; EUPARL 2008).

The development has been particularly pronounced in a large number of post-conflict countries. In most countries today, there is an attempt to actively involve women in the efforts to further national reconciliation after catastrophes such as genocide or civil war. In Rwanda, number one on the global ranking list, various women's organisations were active in the process of developing the constitution, and quota rules were included in the new constitution. International organisations have contributed, in Rwanda as in a number of other countries, to creating a pressure on political leaders for increased inclusion of women and other under-represented groups. But without the local women's organisations' active work and mobilisation of women, no long-term changes will be the result. In countries such as Uganda and South Africa, there has also been some success in the attempts to include women in the reorganisation of the country (Tripp, Dior & Lowe-Morna 2006). The international community has strongly supported this development. The requirements for affirmative action and active measures included in the CEDAW Convention and the Platform for Action from the Beijing conference have contributed to

giving increased legitimacy to the claims of national women's organisations for gender balance in politics (Krook 2004; Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2005).

There is, however, also much discussion about the issue of what many see as an inclusion of women "from above", that is, without sufficient mobilisation of women to create a permanent change. The quota systems in Afghanistan and Iraq are such controversial examples. Generally gender quotas are today used in elections in all types of political systems: democratic, semi-democratic as well as non-democratic (Dahlerup 2007b).

In the Nordic countries, we have never experienced such quick leaps of between 10 and 20 per cent units in women's representation. The largest jump has been one of between 8 and 9, but usually the increases have been between 2 and 3 per cent units; a gradual, step-by-step-development which is typically Nordic. But while the proportions of women in the Finnish and Icelandic parliaments leapt upwards in the latest elections, both Denmark and the Netherlands – which can both be described as "glass ceiling countries" are steadily moving down on the global ranking list. Ten years ago Denmark was number two on the ranking list, today it holds the tenth place, see Table 1.

The fact that the Nordic region is no longer alone at the top, and that some of the Nordic countries are about to be overtaken by a number of developing countries, is extremely interesting. This represents a challenge to our self-image in the Nordic countries.

3 A steadily progressive development?

The actual political development in the Nordic popularly elected assemblies has strongly contributed to the formation of a narrative about the Nordic region as a group of countries steadily progressing towards gender equality. Since World War II, continuous advancement in female representation has been the normal situation in the Nordic countries. Not least when it comes to female representation in politics, the Nordic region has become world famous in circles interested in gender equality.

Table 2 Gradual development in the Nordic parliaments

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
1st election	1918	1907	1922	1921	1921
1st election over 10 %	1966	1907	1983	1973	1953
1st election over 20 %	1979	1970	1987	1977	1973
1st election over 30 %	1988	1983	1999	1985	1986
1st election over 40 %	Never	2007	2009	2009	1994
Female repr. in last election	37 %	42 %	43 %	40 %	47 %
Highest female repr.	38 %	42 %	43 %	40 %	47 %
First female prime minister	Never	2003	2009	1981	Never
First female president	N/A	2003	1980	N/A	N/A

Sources: Official election statistics from the five countries. From Raaum 1999:32. Updated. NA = not applicable. Danish numbers based on 179 MPs, i.e. including the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Only lower chamber.

Table 2 shows the development of female representation in the Nordic parliaments. The table as such illustrates the perception of a steadily progressing – perhaps irreversible? – development in the form of achievements reached in the course of history. The table shows how slowly things happened in the beginning, after women had gained the right to vote. Only Finland from the very beginning reached 10 per cent of women in parliament, while women’s representation in the other Nordic countries remained at 2–4 per cent throughout the inter-war period. Denmark experienced a historical low point in the 1943 election, when only two women (1 %) were elected into the Danish *Folketing*. Only in the 1970s did the development actually gain momentum in the Nordic parliaments, with the exception of Iceland, which lagged somewhat behind the other four countries. It was also in the 1970s that the great breakthrough for women’s representation happened in Nordic local politics generally. After this, there was a constant increase in female representation in local governments simultaneously in all Nordic countries. However, Iceland has always lagged a little behind in its development, only reaching a breakthrough in the 1980s. On the other hand, Iceland broke another barrier with the establishment of the feminist political party the Women’s List, which in the early 1980s strongly contributed to a permanent change in the so far very male-dominated political life of Iceland, and in more or less all political parties. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s there was a steady and considerable increase in the proportion of women

in the Nordic parliaments, which contributed to the Nordic region's international reputation as the most gender equal group of countries in the world.

Today, however, we cannot count on a continuous increase in women's representation, and in some Nordic elections we have even seen a decrease. The numbers showing the highest proportion of women ever in Table 2 have in the last few years not always been the figures from the most recent election. However, with the latest increase in female representation in Finland and Iceland, the highest numbers shown here are from the latest election. But generally it is a new phenomenon in the post-war history of the Nordic countries, that it cannot be expected that the female representation will always increase in each individual election.

At the same time, the debate has developed in different directions in the Nordic countries, and the pressures put on the parties vary. When the women's representation in the Swedish *Riksdagen* decreased in 1991 for the first time in decades, a great debate ensued, and the network *Stödstrumporna* (The Support Stockings) threatened to establish a Women's Party, unless the political parties would nominate more women for the next election – which they did. Although the decrease in 1991 was primarily caused by the right-wing party *Ny Demokrati* (New Democracy) entering the parliament with only three women out of 25 places, the 1991 election gave rise to debate, activism and pressure groups (Freidenvall 2006). In Denmark, for its part, women's representation has remained unchanged in recent elections without this attracting any attention outside of the women's movements – except very recently.

In many other areas of society the Nordic countries are not a leading region internationally; for example, when it comes to the proportions of women in managerial positions in the corporate sector, or the numbers of female professors. The Nordic countries score under the EU average in terms of women in leading positions. Furthermore, the Nordic countries display some of the largest differences between the proportion of women on the labour market and the proportion of women in leading positions, that is, a difference of 20 and 30 per cent units, which is a significant imbalance (European Commission 2008:35).²⁶ The perception in Sweden is that their country is the “most gender equal country in the world”. But

²⁶ Managerial positions: ISCO categories 121 (directors and chief executives) and 13 (managers of smaller enterprises).

presently, for example, The UNDP gender-related development index has Norway in first place (2009).

3.1 The responsibility of the political parties

It is interesting that for a long time female representation developed in parallel in all the Nordic countries, despite there being great differences between the countries when it comes to the voters' opportunities to influence which candidates are actually elected. The extreme ends of this spectrum of difference are on the one hand the compulsory preferential voting systems in Finland and on the other the situation at parliamentary elections in Norway, where voters can only choose between parties (closed lists). There is no agreement within research as to what the significance of the personal voting has for the development of women's representation. The answer is complicated by the fact that the net effect of the voters' choices varies from party to party, but also depending on the current the debate. A lively debate on the under-representation of women can result in many personal votes for women candidates in the next election, which, in turn, affects the nominations of the parties.

It is a widespread notion that it is the voters who decide which persons get elected. However, this is actually not true. There is agreement within election research that in most political systems, including those in the Nordic countries, it is the political parties that are the actual "gatekeepers" to membership of local councils or parliament. This pertains both to closed and open lists electoral systems. The reason is that it is the political parties that have the monopoly on nominating the candidates to be presented to the voters. It is the parties that decide whether a candidate be nominated in a constituency where the party has relatively safe seat, or in one where the party traditionally has a weak position. Furthermore, it is the parties that decide the placement of the candidates on the lists. Norwegian researchers have coined the concepts "election places" (for certain winners), "competition places" (for those that may be elected, if the party improves its share of the vote) and "decoration places" (those expected to lose) (Hellevik & Skard 1985). The likelihood of being elected is, naturally, greatest for those who have the election places (the safe seats), followed by the competition places; generally speaking, being an old hand,

which is to say, running for re-election is also an advantage (known as the incumbency factor).

The Danish Equal Status Council (*Ligestillingsrådet*), now dissolved, for many years wrote in its annual report as an explanation of the increasing proportion of women that “the voters’ inclination to vote for a woman has increased” (*Ligestillingsrådets årsberetning 1987:144*). However, the Council had no basis for this conclusion, since it would require detailed analyses of changes over time in the placement of women on the lists, combined with analyses of the effects of the voters’ choice of individual candidates. In general, the party’s ranking order is only seldom changed by the voters. It is therefore always best to be placed at the top of the list. Thus, when discussing women’s representation, the focus must be on the recruitment practices of the political parties. The parties’ actions are decisive, and they, for their part, act according to expectations of how the voters react to the composition of lists in various historical periods. Generally, the curves for the female proportion of the nominated candidates and of the elected ones develop in parallel to each other.

3.2 The use of quotas in Nordic politics

In the Nordic countries quotas are used for the popularly elected assemblies only in the form of voluntary quotas among candidates, not in the form of legislation. It was the parties on the left of the political spectrum that were the first to introduce voluntary party quotas: the Green parties, the socialist parties and the social democrats, and the centre party, *Venstre*, in Norway (Dahlerup 1988). There is, however, considerable variation between the five Nordic countries. In Sweden, most political parties today follow the principle of “*varannan damernas*” (every second a woman), according to which female and male candidates are nominated alternately on the parties’ electoral lists; but formal, written quota rules exist only in the red and green parties (Freidenvall 2006). In Iceland voluntary quotas are used for the candidate lists by two parties, in Norway by five parties (40 %, Labour 50 %). No parties in Finland formally use quotas, but many do so in practice. In Denmark, the Socialist People’s Party had gender quotas for their parliamentary candidate lists for a few years, and this party and the social democrats used quotas for the election to the EU Parliament during a short period, but that quotas were later

abandoned in the name of ‘gender equality’ (Borchorst & Christensen 2003). From a global perspective, it is very unusual that quota rules are withdrawn once they have been implemented. Many, nevertheless, hope that quotas are a temporary instrument, which at some point in future will no longer be needed.

Not least in Norway and Sweden the voluntary quota rules of the political parties have had a considerable influence on the proportions of nominated and elected women (Freidenvall et al. 2006, table 3.2, pp 71–72). While many countries in the global South have introduced gender quotas in order to increase women’s representation above the first 10–15 per cent, voluntary party quotas were implemented in the Nordic countries only after women’s representation had reached a high level of 20–30 per cent. For several decades after women’s suffrage, *the step-by-step model* was prevalent in the Nordic countries, and still is in many areas, as opposed to what has been called *fast track policies*, where pro-active gender equality measures are used to enable historical leaps in women’s representation (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2005). However, Table 3 shows that quotas are not unknown in Nordic politics, not even those regulated by law.

Table 3 The use of gender quotas in Nordic politics

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Since the 1980s Legislation on gender balance in public councils, committees and boards	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Recom.
Since the 1980-1990s Party candidate lists (voluntary quotas)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
1990s Municipal quotas (leadership and committees)	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
2000s Quotas on the boards of public and private joint-stock companies	No	No	Yes	Yes	No

As Table 3 shows, Norway is the “quota country” in the Nordic region. It is also the one of all the Nordic countries where quotas have met with least opposition. Denmark has made least use of quotas. In Sweden quota systems are extremely controversial and trigger much debate and many emotions, but are, nevertheless, used in certain areas.

3.3 Leadership positions

A member of the Danish parliament has said: “It was in the air back in the 1950s, that the women in *Folketinget* should not expect to get any of the leading posts in parliament”.²⁷ This situation has changed markedly. Today the Nordic female members of parliament hold more or less a proportion of leading positions in the parliaments which mirrors the proportion of female members as a whole; see the country reports²⁸ (vertical gendering). Many other countries in the world have perhaps increased their proportion of women in politics, but female politicians have only a small share of the leading posts as, for example, committee chairs or speaker of the house. However, in the Nordic countries there is still a horizontally gendered division of labour within politics; but, apart from the most prestigious posts, this present division in the Nordic region can most likely not be said to represent anything else than the personal priorities of the male and female politicians (Refsgaard 1990; Wängnerud 1998; 2000). It is, nevertheless, important to specify that numerical female representation is not identical with influence and power. A totally different set on analytical tools is needed to study this.

Some might perhaps claim that simply since women’s representation is so high in the Nordic countries today, it is impossible to count on a continued constant increase. But how should this be understood? Firstly, several areas in some of the Nordic countries are far from a 50 per cent gender balance. Secondly, it must be asked whether there is a new boundary at 50 per cent? Despite men having held 100, 90 and 80 per cent of all places for so long, 50 per cent for women is perceived as a kind of upper limit – or is it? The concept of “gender balance” indicates this as the final target.

The assemblies furthest from the 50 per cent target are the Danish local councils with 32 per cent women, that is, as much as 18 per cent units away from a gender balance, if this is defined as 50-50. The highest proportion of women is found in the Finnish government with 60 per cent women (+10). None of the Nordic parliaments have ever, as has Rwanda, passed the 50 per cent limit, but the Swedish *Riksdagen* comes closest to a gender balance with 47 per cent female members. But in some areas the

²⁷ Said by Grethe Philip, member of parliament for the social-liberal party *Det radikale Venstre* (personal communication)

²⁸ Niskanen & Nyberg ed. (2009) *Kön och makt i Norden. Del I Landsrapporter* .

development seems to have come to a halt, and the constant increase of female representation so far has stagnated.

3.4 *The glass ceiling*

The glass ceiling is a metaphor for, or image of, the invisible mechanisms that seem to hamper the advancement of women within politics, business, academia, etc. According to the Danish power study *Magtudredningen*, there were altogether only 12 per cent women in the entire elite in Denmark, and according to the corresponding Swedish study *Maktens kön* (The Gender of Power) the proportion of women in the power elite in Sweden increased from 13 per cent in 1989 to 26 per cent in 2001 (Christiansen et al. 2002; Göransson 2007). The greatest progress has taken place within politics, not least after the take off phase in the 1970s. But within political life there seems to be a stagnation of the development in certain areas. Among the Nordic countries, this pertains particularly to Denmark. Up to the latest election it seemed as if Finland and Iceland, too, had turned into “glass ceiling countries” with a stagnation of female representation, but both countries have recently experienced a considerable increase in the proportion of women in politics. This proves that glass ceilings can indeed be broken!

In Denmark women’s representation has been unchanged at a level of 37–38 per cent in the last four parliamentary elections, and at 28, 27, 27 and 27 per cent in the last four municipal elections, 1993–2005, until the most recent local election of 2009 in which the percentage finally increased somewhat, to 32 per cent. After a merger of municipalities to larger units, the proportion of female mayors in Denmark fell as low as 9 per cent. At the same time, female representation in the last two elections to the now abolished county councils (*amtsråd*) in Denmark fell from 31 to 29 and finally to 27 per cent. The proportion of women in the election to the new Regional Councils nevertheless amounted to 34 per cent; but then, too, the risk for a decrease because of the larger units was also publicly debated. In a comparison of regional elections in the EU/EEA countries, Denmark is only just over the median (European Commission 2008). The question is whether such a stagnation should only be seen as a temporary mitigation, or as a sign of the activation of the attitude “this far – but no further”.

A Nordic comparison is important for the understanding of the character of the stagnation. Denmark holds the lowest Nordic record, when it comes to the proportion of women on municipal councils, since Iceland, which tends to have the lowest level, has now overtaken Denmark. The lack of debate about the problem is without doubt an important factor explaining the stagnation. In Denmark there has been relatively little discussion on the low percentage of women, and only in connection with the celebration of 100 years of women's right to vote in the municipal elections, introduced in 1908, has a debate started on the low and stagnating female proportion in Danish local elections (www.kvinfo.dk). In Sweden, too, the proportion of women stagnated in the last local elections, but at a far higher level than in Denmark: 42 per cent.. Looking at the parallel historical development in the Nordic countries after World War II, a difference of 10-15 per cent between Denmark and Sweden in this area must be taken as an abyss.

However, Denmark is not alone in being stuck at around 30 per cent. This is the case also in the Netherlands. In the past both of these countries were in the world's absolute super league, but today they have gone down to 10th and 13th place respectively; see Table 1. In the Netherlands, too, the question is presently asked as to why a stagnation has taken place (Leyenaar 2007). But what is a glass ceiling actually?

The glass ceiling concept is used to describe invisible, structural barriers (non-legislative), which hamper the careers of women. In their attempts to advance and gain real influence, the women come up against an invisible ceiling. The glass ceiling is a metaphor for structural barriers or, in other words, structural discrimination. Even though the concept of a glass ceiling is primarily used in regard to career opportunities in the labour market, it is also used concerning political representation.

But the glass ceiling, as such, is not an explanation. It does not say anything about which mechanisms can be assumed to lie behind it, nor what or who is doing the hampering, nor how a glass ceiling can be broken. We must therefore dig a bit deeper. Within Nordic research on women in politics, there are several opposing theories when it comes to explaining the variations in the female political representation. Below I will discuss four such theories (Dahlerup 2009).

4 Theories on women's representation

4.1 Theory of patriarchy

The glass ceiling approach is often connected with a notion that it is true that women in the Nordic countries have entered politics, but when they start coming close to power, they encounter an attitude of “this far, but no further”. The hypothesis is that men maintain their superior power over society through various mechanisms. Already when the proportion of women reaches 30 per cent, there are comments to the effect that “now women must not start dominating”.

This perspective claims that men as a group maintain their hold on power because the institutions into which women have entered thereby lose their power (enter women – exit power). In a slightly different version it is claimed that women only manage to enter institutions which are about to lose their power (exit power – enter women). In the research both these versions are called *the theory of shrinking institutions*. It is, however, difficult to test these theories empirically, partly because they are often quite vague. Was the power of the *Folketinget* already diminishing or did it diminish when the proportion of women started to grow rapidly in the 1970s? Diminishing in relation to what? Is it, in that case, explained by the increasing proportion of women? Is the question of minority versus majority governments not more decisive than the proportion of women for the power of parliament?

This tradition also uses the concept of *the law of increasing disproportionality*, according to which the proportion of women decreases progressively the higher up in the hierarchy we look. There is also a great deal of statistical evidence to confirm that the proportion of men generally increases the higher we come in the hierarchy. The law of increasing disproportionality within politics in the Nordic countries is often ascribed to the book *Unfinished Democracy. Women in Nordic Politics* (Haavio-Mannila et al. 1983, in English 1985). Although the power perspective undoubtedly dominated this first co-Nordic book on women in politics, it also pointed out that there were exceptions already in the early 1980s, particularly when looking at politics within the individual sectors, e.g. the social sector versus the financial sector. Tine Kjær Bach gives these thoughts the joint name of the marginalisation hypothesis (2005). The

hypothesis was dominant in the 1970s and 1980s, but is still heard today in the public debate.

These theories are related to the more general theories on patriarchy and as it is called in Sweden, the gender power regime ('könsmaktsordningen' or 'genussystemet'), which emphasize women's structural subordination. Particularly in the 1970s and 1980s the progress of women was often interpreted within such a framework. "This only happens because..." These theories were criticised for being without nuance and too static; a criticism which the historian Yvonne Hirdman, mother of the concept "gender system", has already responded to in the title of her book published in 2001: *Genus – om det stabila föränderliga former* (Gender – On the Changeability of the Stable Form).

If one uses a purely nominal definition of a patriarchy or male dominated society as a society where men hold the majority of all the leading positions in the fields of economy, politics, religion and social organisations, all societies known so far must be called patriarchal. But such a nominal definition does not, however, say anything about what mechanisms are at work, or why there are so many different types of patriarchies.

In Sweden a report was published in 1986 on women and political power with the title *Hit – men inte längre?* (This far – but no further?). At that time, women's representation in the Swedish *Riksdagen* was about 30 per cent. However, since then, the percentage has actually increased to the present 47. So, does the hypothesis of "this far, but no further" not apply in Sweden? The varying trends internationally challenge the thesis of the unambiguous reproduction of male dominated society, and shows the need for the application of nuance to the argument. This entire theory complex has been challenged by the time lag theory.

4.2 The time lag theory

As a reaction to what was seen as too pessimistic a perspective, the time lag theory presented a more positive description: the issue is primarily a question of a historical time lag. The book *Women in Nordic Politics. Closing the Gap* (Karvonen & Selle 1995) presented an alternative thesis to *Unfinished Democracy* from 1983.

The time lag hypothesis is based on the assumption that mobilisation at a lower level must reach a certain level before mobilisation is possible at the next level up. Thus women, too, will reach the highest positions in society – but with a certain time lag. Women are slowly, but surely, in a process of being integrated into the leadership of Nordic society. Although women are still under-represented among mayors and managers, a gender balance will be achieved in due time. The powerlessness of women is a myth, which makes us overlook the new power of women. Therefore a time lag theory is to be preferred to the theory of constant reproduction of patriarchy (Raaum 1995). The theoretical basis for the time lag thesis originates in, among others, the Norwegian researcher Stein Rokkan's ideas of democratic development as thresholds, which are gradually crossed through the mobilisation of new groups of voters. Nina Raaum uses this macro theory for proving also that the mobilisation of women has undergone various stages and has expanded, both as to its width and its depth (Raaum 1995). As is obvious, this theory focuses on the mobilisation and activation of women, and on the improvement of women's resources. The explanation for women's under-representation is sought in a historical time lag. Before a company can have a female president, there must have been a female vice president. The time lag theory can be interpreted as assuming that there is a certain line of development in society, where overspill from one sector to another takes place, and where development is regarded as irreversible (Karvonen & Selle 1995).

Empirically, the time lag hypothesis is supported by the actual, strong increase in the proportion of women in a large number of areas, not least within politics. The presentation in Table 2, with thresholds which are crossed in a historically progressive process, is as such an illustration of the time lag theory. The time lag thesis is applied both to development in society at large and to development in specific areas. As in the case of the theory of patriarchy, this is a macro theory, which has become popular and is included in the general public debate.

As said above, the time lag theory has gained support in the historical development. That is, until now. The very latest stagnation in women's representation attaches a question mark to this theory. Will gender balance appear over time – all by itself? Women are now on the labour market, and young women receive as extensive an education – if not more

extensive – as young men. And nevertheless 75–90 per cent of society's elite are men.

It has been proved in the area of academia that the time lag theory has a significant limp, since the proportion of women among lecturers and professors is only slowly increasing, despite the proportion of female students, candidates and PhDs having increased for several years (Henningsson et al. 1998). Similarly, a cohort analysis on Swedish data also attaches a question mark to the time lag theory. Among a group of women and men who finished their doctorates in 1991, 8 per cent of the men, but only 4 per cent of the women from the same professions became professors within a 12-year period (Personal vid universitet och högskolor 2005).

So, the time lag theory is currently being challenged by actual developments in several areas. One example is the mentioned decrease in the number of female mayors in Denmark after the structural reform of 2005, which merged 276 municipalities into 98 large municipalities. Despite the growing proportion over many years of women who have been chairs of committees within local councils and held other important posts within local politics, the proportion of women among the Danish mayors was lower in 2005 than in the late 1980s. It is this increasing doubt as to whether gender equality will manifest over time which also has stimulated the discussion of quotas. Developments in eastern and central European countries after the fall of the wall has also contributed to dealing a blow to the belief in a constantly progressing gender equality.

The time lag theory, like the theory of the reproduction of patriarchy, focuses on structural factors, but also on the mobilisation of and resources available to women. And naturally women's entry onto the labour market and their increasing levels of education have had a great impact. But even after the women have entered the labour market with at least as long an education as men, old and established sectors remain male-dominated at the top and so also do newer industries, such as IT, which has mainly male managers.

Will the time lag theorists' response be, that a sufficient number of years have simply not yet passed to make judgement? Or must other theories be taken into account?

4.3 The saturation theory

A Danish researcher on local politics, Ulrik Kjær, has presented an alternative theory: “saturation without parity”. It is an interesting thesis, saying that the increase in female representation can stagnate before gender balance has been achieved, because a certain “saturation” has been reached. The saturation theory is based on the assumption that both the party organisations that nominate candidates, and the voters “simply have had enough of women, and are satisfied with the present level” (Kjær 2001: 70).

The time lag theory and the saturation theory, thus, are opposites (Kjær 1999:162). The saturation theory does, however, have certain similarities with the “this far, but no further” perspective, but it operates on the organisational or meso level: the analysis focuses on the recruitment practices of the political parties.

On the basis of thorough analyses of the development of female representation on Danish local councils, Ulrik Kjær even claims to be able to point to the existence of a critical point: that of 31 per cent. This is supported by the fact that the proportion of women in the Danish local elections in 1997 increased most on those lists that had a low female proportion to begin with, while the women’s representation decreased for over half of the lists from which over approximately 30 per cent women had been elected in 1993. Survey data further support the hypothesis. Kjær’s study among the chairs of local party organisations shows that two thirds think that it is important or very important to have a more or less equal number of candidates of both genders. But the study also shows that an equal distribution to them does not necessarily mean 50-50. On the contrary, nine of ten local party chairs, whose lists include over 30 per cent women, are satisfied with that result (2001). According to Ulrik Kjær, the potential for increased female representation has been capitalised – and thus exhausted (1999; 2001). He claims that there is a difference between the “saturation points” of various parties, but the phenomenon is found within all of them (2001).

Ulrik Kjær has developed his saturation theory on the basis of the Danish stagnation. He adds himself that it must be tested in other countries, too. And it is precisely this point at which the saturation hypothesis reveals its shortcomings. If a saturation point of about 30 per cent can be identified in Denmark – and Kjær is obviously making a correct observa-

tion here – why have the rest of the Nordic countries succeeded in reaching between 36 and 42 per cent? The saturation theory cannot explain why it seems that of the Nordic countries only Denmark has come to a saturation point!

Lenita Freidenvall has studied the significance of gender in Sweden, where the proportion of women is already very high. Does this mean that gender plays a less important role now? In her extensive analysis of attitudes and practices in the nomination committees of Swedish political parties for the 2002 parliamentary election, Lenita Freidenvall shows that even if many criteria are considered in the Swedish context when the list is composed, and even if the proportion of women already was as high as 42 per cent, the majority of the nomination committee chairs still ranked an equal gender distribution as the most important factor (2006). Neither have countries such as Costa Rica and Belgium reached a saturation point at 30 per cent, but, on the contrary, they have introduced legislation on even higher proportions, 40 and 50 per cent, of women on the electoral lists, as well as strict rules on the ranking of candidates on the lists.

In short, it seems implausible, that there would exist a general limit of 30 per cent. The feeling of saturation is constructed in a certain context, and is the result of a great number of circumstances. It is obvious, that other factors must be considered.

5 The significance of public debate and the pressure from women's movements

If we disagree with the thesis that gender equality will appear as a historical necessity, and yet do not think that male dominance reproduces itself in all periods of time and in all areas, nor that there is an absolute saturation point at about 30 per cent, then other perspectives have to be included in the analysis and the political debate.

My own analyses of the historical development in the Nordic countries, and my comparisons of the astonishing differences between developments in Sweden and in Denmark since the 1990s, as well as my research on the use of quotas in politics globally, have pointed to the significance of two interlinked factors: 1) changes in the discursive framework about gender, and 2) the power of women's movements.

There are great differences over time and between countries as to the perception of women's political representation. The perceptions vary from the traditional view that politics is a male business or that gender is irrelevant, to specific theories on why women are under-represented. A marked new position is the notion that gender equality has more or less been achieved already. However, this is so only for the "natives", not for immigrants, as it is put in totally unreasonable generalisations (Dahlerup 2004 and 2007a). It is noteworthy that the stagnation in women's representation – and in the gender equality debate in general – happens in both Denmark and the Netherlands at a time, when the immigration debate is at its liveliest and xenophobia is increasing (Leyenaar 2007). This obviously calls for closer comparative analyses.

The general thesis is that the discursive framework, that is, the dominant perceptions of women's position in society at large and in politics in particular, is crucial for the attitudes and actions of the political parties and the voters. This is where the women's movements enter the scene.

The women's movements have continually challenged these dominant views by using various strategies. The progress or stagnation of women's representation is thus also connected with the power of the women's movements. The pressure from women's movements has undoubtedly been crucial for the development of women's representation in the Nordic countries; this pertains to pressure both from autonomous women's movements and from women within the trade unions, and from the women's organisations and groups within the political parties, which were previously so strong (Dahlerup 1998 and 2001). Also gender studies have probably been an additional and important factor behind the increasing women's representation in the Nordic countries.

The perspective used here also includes an actor perspective, and the focus is then on the significance of the women's movement for changing the discursive framework as well as for the various forms of pressure that have been directed at the political institutions. Inspiration for this type of analysis comes from the Australian political theorist Carol Bacchi, whose argument is that policy analyses have been far too problem-centred and focused on how these problems are to be solved. But each suggestion contains an explicit or implicit diagnosis of what is understood as the actual problem, and much of the political struggle is about this – a point which is not unfamiliar to any women's movement, it might be added.

Thus, the central feature in Bacchi's analysis is how the problem is constructed and presented in the first place. She calls her perspective the "What's the problem approach" (Bacchi 1999: 1f). So, how has the diagnosis been made in the debate on women's under-representation? The following are a few focal points:

In the past, it was common to mainly blame the low representation of women on the women themselves. The women are the problem. And when women's representation increased, it was said that the women had finally pulled themselves together! This was typical of the period up to the 1970s, but this perspective was highly problematic (Dahlerup 2001). An alternative diagnosis, which was important not least in the Nordic countries in the 1970s and 1980s, and which created a strong and effective pressure, puts the primary responsibility for women's representation on the political parties. The diagnosis here is that it is the parties, with their traditional recruitment practices and the entire political cultural context, which constitutes the problem. It should be added, that in the present heated debate on gender quotas for the boards of joint-stock companies, following the Norwegian example, the old debate on women's resources and qualifications has nevertheless appeared again in its entirety.

In this alternative view, the parties are criticized for not recruiting women to a sufficient extent. The parties are the gatekeepers, and it is they who are not able to, or do not want to, recruit as many female as male candidates. This view can be named a *discourse of exclusion*. The same perspective can be recommended for analysis of the political under-representation of ethnic minorities and immigrants. As gatekeepers, the parties possess the power to change imbalances. This alternative discourse has appeared strongly in many countries today, also outside the Nordic countries, particularly perhaps in post-conflict countries.

The point of departure here is a justice perspective. In a democracy women have the right to equal representation. Women form half of the population, and if women in a purely statistical sense do not get a corresponding proportion of the places, this must be blamed on various mechanisms of exclusion, primarily in the organisations themselves. These mechanisms affect both the demand and supply side of the nomination process, that is, both the recruitment practices of the political parties and the women's willingness to be nominated.

The UN Platform for Action, adopted by the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, represents this alternative discourse. The focus of this document – and in many corresponding international documents today – is aimed at the institutional and cultural barriers and exclusion mechanisms that obstruct an equal gender distribution in decision-making processes. At the same time, the demand has been radicalised from the earlier “more women in politics” to “gender balance”. Taken together, this diagnosis and this target result in the demand for active political measures (positive action, affirmative action, special measures). Although the controversial word ‘quota’ is not written directly into it, the Beijing declaration has been used by women’s movements all over the world as support for their demand for quotas in order to rapidly remedy the under-representation of women (Dahlerup 2006; see also www.quotaproject.org). However, there are, as has been pointed out, several possible forms of active political measures, of which quotas is only one. The crucial factor seems to be the level of pressure on the political parties and on political leaders in general.

Thus, the conclusion is that it is a lack of political pressure, in combination with a notion that gender equality will manifest automatically, or actually has already been more or less achieved, which explains the stagnation in women’s representation which is being seen within certain areas in the Nordic countries. But this conclusion also indicates that stagnation is not a permanent state; glass ceilings can be broken. The Nordic region has for a long time been at the top of the league in a global comparison when it comes to women’s political representation. Today the leading position of the Nordic countries is challenged by a number of countries both in the global South and in Europe, such as Belgium and Spain. This is a positive development, but seen from a Nordic perspective, this challenge should lead to further attempts to speed up the process of improving women’s representation in the Nordic countries, both within politics and in the many other areas of society where the proportion of women is significantly lower than in political assemblies.

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Gender Quotas on Corporate Boards

Mari Teigen

1 Introduction

Gender equality often appears as a value especially strongly rooted in the Nordic countries' culturally distinctive character and welfare state regimes (Melby, Ravn & Wetterberg 2008). The development of gender equality in the Nordic countries in recent decades has been characterised by a strong participation and presence of women in politics and political decision-making, along with high rates of female employment. Together, these features have functioned as central points of reference for the Nordic gender equality project. Therefore, it has appeared as something of a paradox that the Nordic countries are not also at the forefront when it comes to gender equality in the economic sphere. Within the management and ownership of private enterprise, persistent male dominance has been overwhelming in all the Nordic countries (see the country reports in *Kön och makt i Norden, del I*, Skjeie & Teigen 2003, Göransson 2006, Christiansen & Tøgeby 2007, Teigen & Wängnerud 2009). The lack of gender equality in the administration of economic power has, over the last few decades, attracted increasing attention in all the Nordic countries. Established lines of demarcation between politics and economics, a consideration of the autonomy of private ownership have, nonetheless, framed much of the political debate and willingness to act in respect of the sort of measures that have been suggested and discussed.

As a result of the new Norwegian quota law, these lines of demarcation between politics and business have now been seriously challenged. The law, which was accepted by the Norwegian parliament, *Stortinget*, in

2003, states that Norwegian corporate legislation regulates the gender composition of the boards of Norwegian public limited (joint-stock) companies, state companies and inter-municipal companies. Thus, this means that there must be a gender balance on the boards of very many of the companies that today are the most central actors in Norwegian business life. The law constitutes a drastic move to further gender equality in the corporate sector, and it appears, in many ways, as a break in relation to a gender equality policy tradition of not interfering in the affairs of the business sector.²⁹ At the same time, the quota law can also be said to continue a more or less distinctly Norwegian tradition of using quotas as a means to further gender equality in various areas of Norwegian society (Teigen 2003).

The quota law was approved after a prolonged political process, including much political tussling, intense public debate and a great deal of attention in the media. It must, nevertheless, be noted that the law was approved by a large majority of the *Stortinget*, consisting of all the political parties, except for the right-wing Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*). An analysis of the public debate that took place over a ten-year period in two Norwegian national newspapers with a clear business profile, *Aftenposten* and *Dagens Næringsliv*, shows that it was particularly characterised by two opposing poles (Cvijanovic 2009). Opponents were mainly represented by business managers and representatives of employers' organisations, while supporters were represented by politicians. The politicians who supported the law came from a broad spectrum of political parties; that is to say mainly from the Norwegian Labour Party (*Arbeiderpartiet*), the Conservative Party (*Høyre*) and the Christian Democratic Party (*Kristelig Folkeparti*) (Cvijanovic 2009). The question of justice was a key issue for both opponents and supporters. While opponents of the law emphasize justice in the sense of the owners' private managerial rights and autonomy, supporters emphasize justice in the sense of redistribution of resources, and they also stress that positive action is neces-

²⁹ In connection with the revision of the Gender Equality Act in 2002, the scope of the pro-activity clause (cf. § 1a) which had been limited to public sector enterprises was extended to also apply to employers and labour market organisations which, as a result, have been obliged to work "actively, purposefully and systematically" to achieve gender equality, and to also account for the gender equality situation in their own organisations in their annual reports. In other words, the obligation on the corporate sector to act is relatively new, and has been implemented more or less in parallel with the quota law for the boards of public limited companies.

sary in order to achieve gender equality. Arguments about the benefits of gender equality, too, have been central to the debate. Those who support the use of quotas claim that gender equality is worthwhile, and that a more balanced gender representation will result in a better utilisation of the potential talent within the population. The opponents, for their part, fear that a requirement for gender balance will impair profitability, since it will be difficult to find female candidates who are qualified enough to be board members.

The quota law poses a challenge to what might be termed the more or less generally acknowledged limits of gender equality politics. This, and the extensive changes brought about by the law, has attracted a lot of attention outside of Norway as well. It seems that it has contributed to accentuating and also revitalising a public debate on gender equality in the corporate sectors of numerous countries. The question as to whether to put forward a proposal for similar legislation has been debated at various levels within the EU system, in a number of European national assemblies and other political arenas, including the Nordic countries. Legislation parallel to the Norwegian has been passed in Spain, Iceland and France.

The ongoing debates and serious steps towards imposing similar regulations in several European countries, is surprising and interesting. This makes it all the more important to understand the background to this law coming into being in the first place. In addition, the law also triggers another and broader debate on the boundaries between politics and business. An important question is whether the law can be read as an indication that these boundaries are undergoing change.

In her article on gender and power in Norwegian corporate life,³⁰ Vibeke Heidenreich presents additional information and documentation on a number of central features concerning the gender equality situation in Norwegian business life in general, and specifically on the issue of quotas on company boards.

In this chapter, I will explore some central aspects pertaining to the Norwegian law on gender quotas on corporate boards, and also discuss what circumstances might form the background to such a radical law being accepted. An obvious, but nevertheless important, contextual fea-

³⁰ See Vibeke Heidenreich's article "Kjønn og makt i norsk næringsliv" in Niskanen & Nyberg ed. (2009) *Kön och makt i Norden. Del I Landsrapporter*.

ture of the law, is the strong tradition within Norwegian gender equality policy of actively using quotas as a means to further gender equality. This chapter will therefore begin with a description of the Norwegian quota tradition, including also a glance at the situation in the other Nordic countries. This will be followed by a presentation of various aspects of the new law, which regulates gender representation on the boards of central actors within Norwegian business life. Finally, I will discuss some circumstances, which taken as a whole, can help to explain why the proposal for quotas was introduced in the first place, and why it was actually accepted as an instrument for guaranteeing a gender balance in Norwegian boardrooms. These include the women-for-managers debate, which also contributed to highlighting the fact of male dominance on the boards; possible unintentional consequences of the wave of deregulation within public companies; and the legitimacy of state interference in a field where state ownership in fact is extensive.

2 The extent of gender quotas in Norway

When it comes to the actual establishment of various quota systems and positive action, Norway has held a special position both internationally and in relation to the other Nordic countries. This is due firstly to the fact that quota systems have been a frequently used instrument in Norwegian gender equality politics for furthering gender balance within various areas of society. Secondly, quotas along with quota terminology have met greater acceptance there. This can be illustrated by the fact that a broader set of systems than those entailing direct quotas, such as various forms of positive action, have also been called quotas.

Strictly speaking, quota systems are schemes that specify a given quota for how high a percentage of the under-represented gender is to hold certain positions, as well as where instruments are to be used in order to ensure that the quota is filled. In practice, however, quota terminology is used for a much larger field of systems of positive action. This is illustrated by the difference between “radical” and “moderate” systems. Moderate forms of positive action are primarily found in recruitment in the education sector and in working life. Such special treatment mainly entails systems that enable applicants from the under-represented gender

to be given priority in cases of identical, or almost identical qualifications. Radical quota systems are usually understood as systems where applicants from the under-represented gender are given priority until the quota is filled providing, for example, that they fulfil the required minimum qualifications. This is the principle followed, for example, when selecting persons for political tasks, appointing public boards and committees, and the elected management of a number of member organisations, and it is usually formulated as a requirement for a 40 per cent representation of each gender (Teigen 2003).

During the last 30 years, an extensive quota system has been developed in Norway (see also Teigen 2006). The present systems can be divided into three main categories: priority systems, advancement systems and minimum representation.

Priority systems: Measures for positive action are formulated as systems of preferential rights applying to recruitment (for employment and advancement) by the state and municipalities, and by some private companies, as well as in respect of admission to some educational institutions with an unbalanced gender composition. When it comes to recruitment, the systems are often regulated through general agreements. In which case they take the form of a rule stipulating that applicants of the under-represented gender should be given priority when qualifications are comparable, or when two applicants are equivalent as to their qualifications. In the admissions policy of a number of educational institutions with a strong dominance of one gender, a rule concerning the preferential rights of applicants of the under-represented gender applies in cases of equivalent admissions points. These systems are characterised by the preference for applicants from the under-represented gender being activated in situations where two equally qualified candidates compete for the same position. Priority systems of this kind can be described as a moderate form of positive action that is a direct application of the principle of equality. That is, in cases where two candidates are actually equally qualified, or where there is doubt as to which of the most qualified applicants should be given preference, the benefit of doubt is to be given to an applicant of the under-represented gender. In the main, this means favouring female applicants.³¹

³¹ However, since 1995, section 3 of the Gender Equality Act has provided for a limited access to positive treatment for men in connection to the education and care of children. According

Advancement systems: Another main form of positive action entails improving the opportunities of applicants from the under-represented gender by directly raising their position in an otherwise given ranking order. Such systems are primarily used in admissions to colleges and universities. They take two forms: giving *additional points* to applicants of the under-represented gender, or the *earmarking* of study places or positions for applicants of the under-represented gender. Within the Norwegian education system, additional points are primarily used for the advancement of women, particularly in the case of admissions to some engineering courses, where female applicants are awarded additional entry points. Additional points have been given to male applicants in the case of admissions to veterinary training. Earmarking of positions and study places has, during the last few years, been tried out as an ‘instant solution’ to the problem of getting more women into strongly male-dominated areas of higher education. In admissions to courses in information and communication technology at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), there is a separate quota for female applicants, where a limited number of places are reserved for female applicants who fulfil at least 90 per cent of the current admission requirements. An earlier Swedish system of earmarking professorships and post doc positions was ended as a result of a decision by the EU Court of Justice in 2003, which consequently prohibited the practice of earmarking positions in all the EEA countries.

to the “Instruction on special treatment of men” (17 July 1998), a man can “when filling a post where the main task is the teaching or care of children, and in admission to training for such a post [...], according to the rules given and in agreement with the present instruction, be given preference over a woman, when the male applicant is evaluated as being as equally or almost as equally qualified as the female applicant (moderate quota system)” (§ 2). It has been suggested that the possibilities that exist for giving preference to male applicants in female-dominated occupations and areas of education be extended to a broader range of occupations and educational fields (St. meld. nr. 8 (2008-2009)).

Table 1: Overview of the current systems for quotas and positive action

Field of society	Types	Adopted	Procedures
Education	Preferential treatment	Upper secondary education, 1982 Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration, 1980	Candidates of the underrepresented gender are given priority in cases of equal qualifications (same amount of school points).
	Promoting procedures	Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 1981 (additional points) 1997 (earmarking procedure)	Additional school points granted to applicants of the underrepresented gender; earmarking of school/student places for candidates of the underrepresented gender, with strict restrictions according to qualifications.
Employment	Preferential treatment	State sector, 1981; municipal sector, 1985	In recruitment and promotions applicants of the underrepresented gender are given preferential treatment when qualifications are equal or about equal.
Politics	Minimum representation	Liberal Party 1974; Socialist Left Party 1975; Centre Party 1979; Labour Party 1983; Christian Democratic Party 1989	Quotas (at least 40 % of each gender) regulate party election lists and appointments within party organisations in five out of the seven major political parties
Organizations	Minimum representation	The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions, 2005	Quotas (at least 40 % of each gender) regulate composition of decision-making bodies, as far as it is possible
Publicly appointed boards, councils etc.	Minimum representation	1981, first regulation of gender composition, 1988, 40 per cent of each gender, included in the local government act, 1992	Minimum 40 % of each gender should be represented on publicly appointed boards, councils and committees
Corporate boards	Minimum representation	Adopted 2003, implemented for new companies 2006, full implementation 2008	Minimum 40 % of each gender should be represented on the boards of publicly owned enterprises and large joint-stock companies in the private sector.

2.1. Nordic comparison

Gender equality legislation facilitates positive action schemes in all the Nordic countries. There are, however, some variations in how it does so. Norwegian and Swedish legislation allows for the most extensive of such systems; the Finnish and Icelandic laws are somewhat more limited, while the Danish legislation stands out as the most restrictive in this sense (Borchorst 1999:180). As far as we know, there is no overview of the

exact variations in the extent and use of positive action and quotas between the Nordic countries.

We do know, however, that there are important differences in the extent of quota systems within Nordic politics. As mentioned above, in Norway quota schemes are found in the majority of political parties, with the exception of the Conservative Party and the Progress Party. In Sweden, there are quota programmes for candidates among the parties of the left: the Social Democrats, the Left Party and the Green Party (Wängnerud 2001, Freidenvall 2006). Party quotas were also established in Denmark in the 1980s, but were wound up in the 1990s. In Iceland, one of the parties in the parliament currently uses quotas for candidates.³² No political party in Finland has a quota system for candidates to the national assembly (Christensen 1999). The gender composition of members of parliament is not regulated by law in any of the Nordic countries. It is also worth noting that the gender composition of the Nordic parliaments does not directly vary with the extent of quota systems. For example, women constitute the same percentage of parliamentarians in Norway and Denmark, although most Norwegian parties apply quotas, while none of the Danish parties currently have quota systems (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2008: 35).

Internationally, over the last few years there has been something of an explosive increase in various forms of gender quotas within politics. A number of quota systems currently contribute to regulating the gender composition of national assemblies in almost half of all the countries in the world (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2008: 33).

The corporate sector (here referring to public boards, committees and councils) forms another central arena for political influence and it is one which has received quite a lot of attention as a field for gender equality and quota systems (see Solhøy 1999). In Norway a requirement for gender representation was included in the Gender Equality Act in 1981, and a rule setting a minimum quota of at least 40 per cent for each gender was established in 1988. In Finland there is a corresponding law requiring a gender balance on public boards, councils and committees.

Sweden has no law on gender representation on public boards and in councils and committees, but it does have a government decision instead.

³² See Auður Styrkársdóttir's article "Kön och makt i isländsk politik" in Niskanen & Nyberg ed. (2009) *Kön och makt i Norden. Del I Landsrapporter*.

In Iceland, the gender composition of public boards, councils and committees is not regulated by legislation.

3 Gender quotas on corporate boards

In 2003 the Norwegian parliament adopted a law stipulating that at least 40 per cent of the boards of public limited companies and of publicly owned enterprises must be comprised of each gender.³³ The law was presented by the second Bondevik government, which was a right-wing coalition consisting of the Christian Democrats, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party. In publicly owned companies, the rules on gender representation were implemented in January 2004, and for these companies, the minimum 40 per cent target for gender representation was already achieved at that point. For the public limited companies, the 40 per cent requirement involved a much larger change, in addition to the fact that the proposal here was far more controversial. Therefore a somewhat more complicated process was chosen for the private corporate sector. The law was provisionally adopted with the reservation that if the gender composition on the boards reached the requirement of at least 40 per cent of each gender during the summer of 2005, the law would not be implemented. Upon the expiry of this deadline the 40 per cent target was far from having been realised. The new red-green coalition government, headed by Jens Stoltenberg, therefore decided in cabinet meeting in December 2005 that the law on gender representation on the boards of public limited companies would come into force in January 2006. It was to have an immediate effect on newly established companies from January 2006, while existing public limited companies were given a two-year transition period, thus leading to full implementation of the law from January 2008 onwards.

In other words, almost six years elapsed from the date the law was adopted until it came into full force. If the political process and the preparatory rounds preceding the parliamentary decision to pass the law are taken into account, it actually took close to ten years from the issue first

³³ For municipally controlled companies, which are not otherwise covered by corporate legislation, the rules on gender representation on the boards were passed in 2008 (Ot. prp. nr. 57 (2008-2009)). A parallel measure was also accepted for the boards of co-operative enterprises (Ot.prp. nr. 21 (2006-2007)).

being presented by government until the law came fully into force. The fact that the political decision-making process was so drawn out reflects, not least, the controversies that took place over such a quota law.

The proposal for gender quotas on corporate boards was initially presented by a right-wing coalition government in 1999, in connection with an extensive revision of the Gender Equality Act. The suggestion that was put forward was that each gender should be represented by at least 25 per cent of the seats on all Norwegian company boards. Such legislation was intended as a revision and extension of the requirement in section 21 of the Gender Equality Act, saying that each gender shall be represented by at least 40 per cent of the members of publicly appointed committees, councils and boards (see Teigen 2002; McClimans & Langvasbråten 2009). Partly because there was a need to elucidate the legal aspects attached to the law, this suggestion was excluded from the revision of the Gender Equality Act during the short term of office of Stoltenberg's first government (2000–2001). After a closer legal evaluation, it was suggested that such a law belonged to corporate legislation. In addition, the quota target was increased from 25 to 40 per cent, on the basis that it should be in line with the requirement for public bodies set out in section 21 of the Gender Equality Act. The bill was then presented to Parliament by a new right-wing coalition government (Bondevik II) in June 2003 (Ot. prp.nr. 97 (2002–2003)).

3.1 The personal-political factor

The fact that the political process which led to the acceptance and full implementation of the law on gender quotas on the boards of publicly owned enterprises and public limited companies took almost ten years, is explained not least by the proposal being controversial, even within the parties that supported it. The significance of the personal factor within the prolonged political processes was probably crucial. Firstly, this was the case with respect to the bill being proposed at all and, secondly, when it came to the law eventually being adopted.

The whole political process was started by the Minister for Gender Equality Valgerd Svarstad Haugland of the Christian Democrats. She issued the suggestion for quotas on corporate boards for a hearing in 1999, in connection with a larger revision of the Gender Equality Act.

The fact that an issue containing all the elements of traditional social democratic politics, when it comes both to the type of measure and the wish to regulate the private business sector, was suggested by a Christian Democrat minister, probably contributed to setting a somewhat different framework for the debate, than if the suggestion had come from a Labour Party minister. When quotas for corporate boards were first introduced, this was seen as a solution to the problem of the lack of women in leadership positions in business life. This was a particularly topical theme in the public debate on gender equality in the 1990s. However, the proposal of quotas for corporate boards can also be interpreted as a move to re-establish confidence in Haugland, as minister for gender equality, as well as the government more generally, in relation to the objective of furthering gender equality. Such confidence was at that time very low as a result of the parental cash benefit,³⁴ an issue close to the heart of the Christian Democrats, having been much debated and perceived by many as being indicative of a strong backlash against gender equality politics. The extensive opposition against the cash benefit system, particularly among women, in the public debate, created problems for Haugland's legitimacy as minister for gender equality. The strong pressure brought to bear to pass the quota bill, first by Gender Equality Minister Haugland in Bondevik's first government, and then by Gender Equality Minister Laila Dåvøy in Bondevik's second, can thus be interpreted as an expression of a need to demonstrate that consensus prevails on main issues within Norwegian gender equality policy and development.

However, in the final stages of the process, it was to the role of the Conservative Party Minister of Trade and Industry, Ansgar Gabrielsen, that particular importance was attributed. In short, he gave an interview to Norway's largest newspaper *VG* (22.2.2002) just before the government's final discussion of the issue. In the newspaper interview, Gabrielsen said that he was "very tired of the male dominance in business life".³⁵ This move was probably especially important in that it contributed to securing the support of more sceptical representatives of the Conservative Party in both the government and parliament, who were on the verge of express-

³⁴ The cash benefit is a cash allowance given to parents of children between one and three years of age, who do not, or only partly, make use of state funded nursery provision. There has been and still is a strong debate about the system.

³⁵ <http://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/artikkel.php?artid=3024189>.

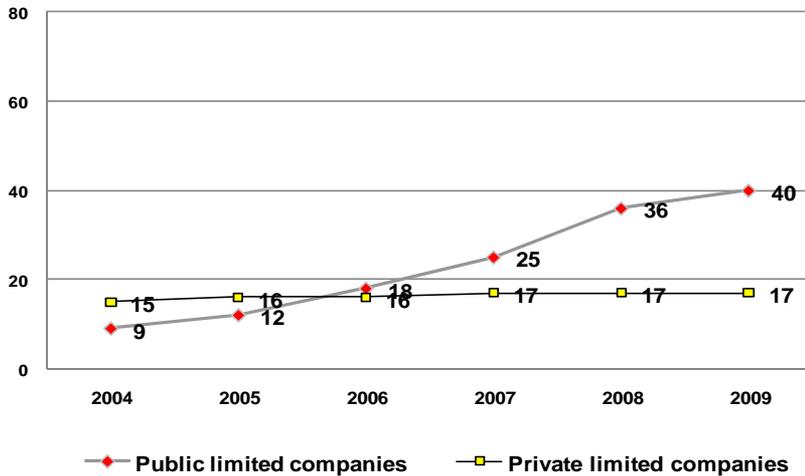
ing opposition to the proposed quota law. A voiced resistance could, on the other hand, have shaken the basis for a broad majority on the issue.

The unusual political constellations regarding this question probably contributed to undermining the opposition to the proposal, among other things since it was impossible to dismiss it as an attempt on the part of social democrats to regulate corporate life.

3.2 The impact of the law on gender balance in the boardroom

The quota law has undoubtedly resulted in great changes on the boards of public limited companies. It is illustrative of the situation in the mid-1990s that there were at that time no statistics registering the gender of the members of company boards. The main impression was, nevertheless, that there were hardly any women in the corporate boardrooms. So it did not require much adding-up for it to be established that Norwegian corporate boards were almost exclusively a male domain. The numbers showed that women comprised between 2 and 4 per cent of board members (ECON 2003). Gradually, regular statistics were established. The 2002 figures revealed a 6 per cent increase in the number of women on the boards of public limited companies. This figure subsequently rose to 9 per cent in 2004, 12 per cent in 2005, 18 per cent in 2006, and 25 per cent in 2007, 36 per cent in 2008, and the target was fully reached in 2009 with women comprising 40 per cent of the board members. The requirements of the act are adjusted in cases where board members are elected by the employees in enterprises where one gender constitutes less than 20 per cent of the staff. The requirements for representation on the smallest boards also contributes somewhat to a lowering of the average (see Facts Box 1 below).

Figure 1 Proportion of women on the boards, public limited and private limited companies, 2004-2009, per cent



Source: Statistics Norway

Despite these considerable changes in the gender distribution on the boards of public limited companies, which have taken place over a relatively short period of time, the board chairperson continues to be a man in 95 per cent of all cases. Correspondingly, there is still an overwhelming male dominance in managerial positions within Norwegian business. Among the CEOs, male dominance is, so to speak, total, while women are marginally better represented in the overall corporate management, making up approximately 10 per cent of the managers at that level.³⁶ And although the percentage of women on the boards of public limited companies has increased significantly, women still only represent 17 per cent of the board members of limited liability companies, which are not covered by the quota law.

³⁶ See Vibeke Heidenreich's article "Kjønn og makt i norsk næringsliv" in Niskanen & Nyberg ed. (2009) *Kön och makt i Norden. Del I Landsrapporter*

3.3 Enforcement

One main challenge in relation to the law on quotas for corporate boards was that of the choice of sanctions. The result of thorough evaluations of what would be legally correct and reasonable, was that control and enforcement of the rules on gender representation on boards should be enforced by the general system for the enforcement of rules within company law.³⁷ This will happen through the Register of Business Enterprises in connection with the general legal control, which is to be conducted according to the Registration of Companies Act.³⁸ Concretely, this means that a company that does not fulfil the requirements when the Register of Business Enterprises conducts its legal control, in the final instance runs the risk of being forcibly dissolved. A forced dissolution will not, however, be carried out without a number of prior warnings.³⁹ In addition, negative financial sanctions are also possible in the form of imposed fines. That is to say, a possible forced dissolution can be postponed by imposing continuous fines until the situation has been remedied.⁴⁰

After the law entered into force, the Register of Business Enterprises sent enquiries to the companies concerned, requesting an explanation as to why it was that the gender distribution of their boards did not fulfil the requirement that at least 40 per cent of seats be filled by representatives of each gender. According to the latest information, the companies have accounted for the circumstances in their undertakings in such a manner that there are, at the moment, no companies in the searchlight of the Register of Business Enterprises because of a failure to meet board gender balance requirements. Thus we currently do not know whether the authorities will ever implement the sanctions available for guaranteeing gender representation on corporate boards, or what situation would lead them to do so.

³⁷ Cf. Ot. prp. nr 97(2002-2003), s 50.

³⁸ Cf the Registration of Companies Act of 21 Jun 1985 nr 78.

³⁹ Public Joint-Stock Companies Act § 16 – 15, of 13 June 1997

⁴⁰ Cf. Ot. prp. nr. 55 (2005-2006)

Facts box 1**Public Limited Companies Act**

Section 6–11a. Requirements for representation of both genders on the board

(1) On the boards of public limited companies both genders must be represented as follows:

- If the board has two or three members, both genders must be represented.
- If the board has four or five members, each gender must be represented by at least two members.
- If the board has six to eight members, each gender must be represented by at least three members.
- If the board has nine members, each gender must be represented by at least four members, and if the board has more members, each gender must be represented by at least 40 per cent of the members.

The rules in numbers 1 to 4 also apply to the appointment of deputy members.

(2) The first part does not apply to board members appointed from among the employees according to section 6–4 or the first part of section 6–37. When appointing two or more board members as mentioned in the first paragraph, both genders must be represented. The same applies to deputy members. The second and third paragraphs do not apply if either gender forms less than 20 per cent of the total number of employees of the enterprise at the time of the appointment.

Added to the Act of 19 December 2003 no. 120 (in force 1 January 2006. According to a Resolution passed on 9 December 2005 no. 1429, the composition of the boards of public limited companies established and registered in the Register of Business Enterprises before 1 January 2006 must conform to the law within two years.)

Facts box 2

A public limited company is a limited liability company registered as a public limited company in the Register of Business Enterprises.

Public limited companies are characterised by a broad structure of ownership, and by the shares being open for buying and selling. In order for a company to be able to be listed on the Oslo Stock Exchange, it must be a public limited company, but nonetheless approximately half of these companies are not listed on the stock exchange.

4 Discussion – why a quota requirement for corporate boards?

The requirement in the Company Act that each gender make up at least 40 per cent of seats on company boards breaks the established boundaries for both gender equality politics and state intervention in the conditions and mode of operation of business. I therefore wish to conclude by presenting some of the main points which are probably important for under-

standing why the idea of gender quotas on Norwegian corporate boards was not dismissed as an over-ambitious regulatory initiative of gender equality politics, but instead resulted in a law which, to a considerable extent, has changed the gender composition of the boards of central actors in Norwegian business life. At the same time, it is a law that has contributed to new debates in a number of European countries, with demands for implementing similar systems for improving the gender balance when it comes to access to power and positions within corporate life.

The circumstances that will be discussed below do not, on the whole, reflect the government's own arguments and grounds for such a quota regulation. The arguments of the government focussed particularly on two aspects: democracy and profitability. The democracy argument was directly associated with the idea that the principle of gender equality will further the participation, impact and influence of women. Secondly, it was emphasized that a better gender balance in the boardrooms would be both beneficial and profitable. The argument here was that a better utilisation of potential female talent in the population will result in positive productivity effects (see Teigen 2002, 2003; Skjeie & Teigen 2003, 2005).

However, in the following the focus will not be on arguments or motives, but on the question as to what factors and circumstances were decisive in the process where a reform, which essentially breaks the boundaries of gender equality politics and state intervention, eventually was passed by a broad political majority in the *Stortinget*. These factors include a strong public focus on promoting women as leaders, on the gender equality consequences of the deregulation process within public enterprises, and on an increasing state ownership of central parts of Norwegian business life.

4.1 Women and management

The public debate on promoting women as leaders is the first factor which creates an important backdrop to the issue of quotas on corporate boards coming onto the agenda in the first place. The assumption that there is a glass ceiling, an invisible barrier to the advancement of women at the top levels of the hierarchies in organisations, particularly in the business sector, was the main theme in many of these debates (see e.g.

Baxter & Wright 2000). In the light of this, the Norwegian quota law can be seen as a direct regulatory push to break the glass ceiling. The relative absence of women in leading positions has probably appeared to be particularly problematic in the Nordic countries. The stagnation in the development of gender equality at senior management level within corporate life raises questions about the success of the gender equality politics that has been a central and pronounced special Nordic characteristic, among other things, described as a “passion for equality” (Graubard 1986). This discrepancy between a common Nordic development towards a high level of female representation in political decision-making, at the same time that both Norwegian and Nordic working life has been characterised by a strong gender segregation and a weak representation of women in managerial positions in working- and business life, has been called “the Nordic gender equality paradox” (Kvande 1999).

Despite the issue of the lack of women in managerial positions appearing on the agenda, statistics showed only a marginal change over time. At the top level of business life in all the Nordic countries there were, more or less, only men. At the turn of the millennium, parallel studies on power and leadership conducted in all the Nordic countries showed that women occupied only 5 per cent of top level corporate positions (Teigen & Wängnerud 2009). The issue of women and management thus appeared to be a major problem for many years, with an acute lack of suggestions for good solutions. There were, to be sure, a number of initiatives in the form of management courses, empowering courses, mentor systems, and so on. These measures might have been important, as such, at company level and for the individual women who participated in such arrangements, but there was little to indicate that such, often sporadic, initiatives to any significant extent contributed to a change in the statistical realities of extreme cases of male dominance at the top level of the corporate sector.

One contributory aspect here was that private business life was not directly governed by specific gender equality policy regulations and measures. Analyses contained in the management study of the Norwegian Report on Power (den norske maktutredningen) showed that there were far fewer gender equality measures for corporate managers to report on in respect of their own companies than was the case for managers in other fields of Norwegian society. Corporate managers were also revealed in

the study to have the most negative attitudes to gender equality measures and gender equality politics (see Skjeie & Teigen 2003, chaps. 4, 5, 6 and 9). At the same time, however, an important parallel change took place in connection with the revision of the Gender Equality Act in 2002, which extended the scope of the preamble (§ 1a). The obligation stated in section 1a of the Gender Equality Act that public authorities actively, systematically and purposefully promote gender equality was now extended to also apply to employers and labour market organisations.

The large amount of interest generated in the public debate, not least in the media, around these issues, that is on male dominance in corporate life, on the lack of will to act and on opposition to gender equality, form an important background to the thorough evaluation that took place in the political field as to whether and, if so, how efficient gender equality measures could be implemented in corporate life. That the debate came to centre especially on corporate boards may be linked to the fact that this issue was further highlighted because the deregulation of parts of the public sector resulted in a bottleneck in the field of action of gender equality law.

4.2 Deregulation of the public sector

Another factor which probably contributed to the fact that the quota issue came to be debated is associated with the extensive restructuring processes that took place in the 1980s and 1990s in the form of deregulation and the introduction of competitive procurement in the public sector. The background to these developments in the public sector was the existence of a growing concern that the public authorities' exercise of control by means of centralisation and regulation had negative consequences for the national economy (Hagen 1997:7). A central argument was that market competition entails incentive systems with beneficial effects on the state of the national economy (Norman 1997). Discussions on restructuring, deregulation and competitive procurement, including on the New Public Management reforms within the public sector, were central themes in the public debate. One issue running alongside these debates concerned the gendered and gender equality consequences of the new thinking, where particularly the New Public Management approach was harshly

criticised for aggravating working conditions, particularly for many women within the public sector (Thomas & Davies 2002; Kvande 2007).

The fact that a number of enterprises that earlier had been subject to the requirement contained in section 21 of the Gender Equality Act that at least 40 per cent of board members be drawn from each gender were now exempted from this rule, provides a clear example of how the policy of deregulation affected gender equality politics. This applied to a number of companies, including the state telecommunications company Televerket/Telenor, the state alcohol monopoly Vinmonopolet, the national broadcasting company NRK, the state oil company Statoil and many others. In view of competitive conditions there was no suggestion of applying special gender equality policy regulations to these enterprises. The most important reason for this was that it could have caused distortions in the competitiveness of the companies. There are grounds to believe that this lead to an evaluation of alternative solutions for securing a gender balance on the boards of large, publicly owned enterprises. As a limited policy of regulation was not possible from a competitive point of view, an extension of the legislation could function as an alternative, so that all companies of the same type as the recently exempted public enterprises would also be subjected to the requirement of a balanced gender representation on their boards. This illustrates how deregulation of parts of public enterprise was followed by certain forms or re-regulation.

4.3 State ownership

A third factor concerns the extent of public ownership of Norwegian corporate life in general, and of companies listed on the Oslo Stock Exchange in particular. The share of stock exchange quoted companies in public, and especially state, ownership has increased considerably in recent decades. This is a result of, among other things, the deregulation of public enterprises, and of large state owned joint-stock companies such as Telenor and Statoil being listed on the stock exchange (St. meld. Nr. 13 (2006-2007)). This might partially have affected the perception, not least by the state itself, of what constitutes legitimate interference in the management and running of Norwegian business life. At the same time, it has brought to the fore the issue of the state as an active owner. It is probably the case that the legitimacy of state interference changes when the extent

of state ownership in business life increases. In addition, the larger spread of shares in the public limited companies will mean that it is less clear whether a quota law can be said to be a direct threat to the managerial rights of concrete owners. Private ownership on the Oslo Stock Exchange is actually rather marginal. The public sector has increased its share of ownership markedly in recent decades, such that close to 40 per cent of the shares are owned by the state or municipalities. Foreign owners make up one third of the Oslo Stock Exchange, while private companies constitute 19 per cent. Private persons own 4 per cent of the shares. By contrast with other categories of listed companies, the private limited liability companies are often small family enterprises where the owners and board members are physically one and the same group of people.

Taken together these aspects might have had the effect of making the boundaries of state intervention less clear. The fact that the quota law was limited to the boards of public limited companies can be seen as a modification and as a form of acknowledgment of the scope of the rights of private management. In reality, the state and various forms of institutional owner, such as the Government Pension Fund, are the most important single actors on the Oslo Stock Exchange. These ownership structures probably form an important precondition for the legitimacy of state interference, and, not least, they complicate claims that the quota legislation breaks with the principles of private managerial rights and owner autonomy.

5 Conclusion

In a Nordic context, Norway differs from the other countries by virtue of its particularly extensive quota systems and use of positive action as tools for furthering gender equality. The latest addition to the quota policy is the law on gender quotas on corporate boards, which this chapter has particularly focussed on. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that also in a Norwegian context this quota reform implies a strong break with established frameworks for gender equality policy initiatives. Non-interference in relation to possible gender equality efforts within business life has, until recently, formed an important boundary for the Norwegian public gender equality politics.

On the one hand, the new quota law appears as a continuation of a Norwegian tradition of implementing relatively strict regulatory measures in order to further gender equality. The corporate sector was, as it were, a new stronghold for the Norwegian state feminist project to tackle. On the other hand, the quota law constituted a severe break with the established boundaries between public politics and the corporate sector. In such a field of tension between continuity and rupture, in other words, we understand the backdrop to the quota law to be an interplay between a tradition of using quotas as a solution to gender equality problems and, in addition, some other important circumstances which, as it were, paved the way for the quota solution.

In this chapter I have argued for there being certain features in the public debate of the 1980s and 1990s, which taken together made quotas appear to be a well-suited solution to gender equality problems at the top level of Norwegian business life in general, and on corporate boards in particular. These concerned, firstly, the debate on the promotion of women as leaders, which was in the public spotlight at that time, not only in Norway, but also in a large part of the Western world. The debate as such did not result in moves to apply the quota solution but rather, in the context of a Norwegian tradition of solving gender equality problems, quotas appeared as a possible strategy. Another central debate in Norwegian public life at that time concerned the deregulation of public enterprises. The consequences of these processes were particularly topical, as the extent of public, and especially state, ownership in Norwegian corporate life was relatively large. This level of ownership probably contributed to the strengthening of an understanding on the part of the state that it had the authority to interfere in the corporate sector by implementing a quota requirement. In addition, the quota requirement set out in section 21 of the Gender Equality Act provided a concrete and direct example of the unfortunate consequences of the deregulation from the point of view of gender equality.

In this light it is very interesting to follow the current on-going debates in a number of European countries that are seriously considering introducing similar legislation. Since even if it is probable that the distinctly Norwegian circumstances were decisive for understanding why it was that the Norwegian law was passed, this does not mean that these

factors need be present in any dispersion of the legislation to other countries.

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Summary of the results from the research project *Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries* (2008-2009)

Kirsti Niskanen

In international comparisons the five Nordic countries are frequently ranked among the most gender-equal in the world. At the same time, studies in the statistics of the distribution of power between women and men show that there is nevertheless still a disproportionate number of men in top positions in the Nordic countries. Aiming at achieving a gender balance in the access to societal power is a cornerstone of the Nordic concept of democracy and gender equality politics. A key tool in gender equality policy work is knowledge of the distribution of women and men within various sectors of society, jobs and positions of power. This is the background to the one-year research project, *Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries*, which Finland initiated as chair of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2007.

The project comprised two sectors of society – politics and business – in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden and the autonomous territories of the Faeroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. It had four main objectives: 1) to compile comparative figures of the representation of women and men in decision-making positions within politics and business, 2) to analyse and interpret data from a Nordic, comparative perspective and 3) to discuss explanations for the existing gender distribution. In addition, 4) the project discussed the measures taken in the various Nordic countries to distribute social power and influence more evenly between the genders, and evaluated gender equality policy methods and

opportunities. The research group consisted of eleven senior researchers and eight junior researchers from the five Nordic countries and a further four researchers who compiled basic data pertaining to the Faeroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. The results are presented in a report in two parts: *Kön och makt i Norden. Del I Landsrapporter* (Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries. Part I Country Reports) and *Kön och makt i Norden. Del II – Sammanfattande diskussion och analys* (Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries. Part II Summary Discussion and Analysis).

The most important results

The project used a broad definition of its two target areas, politics and business. We studied national politics, the presidential elections in Finland and Iceland, governments, international politics/foreign policy, regional/local politics and, to a certain extent, public administration. As to the corporate sector, the project studied companies listed on the stock exchange and state companies, financially oriented authorities and, to some extent, also financial organizations.

A first observation is that it is no longer a given that the Nordic countries are in the forefront when it comes to gender equality development in parliamentary representation. From a global perspective, a post-conflict country such as Rwanda with its female majority in parliament, has superseded all the Nordic countries in terms of gender equality in that area (regardless of all other differences). And several countries in the global South (South Africa, Argentina, Costa Rica) with a female proportion in parliament of over or just under 40 per cent, are coming into line with the Nordic countries. The previous Nordic comparative study was published ten years ago.⁴¹ At that time, the female proportion in the Nordic parliaments was between 25 and 43 per cent, and the Nordic countries appeared to be the most gender-equal region in the world. Today women make up between 37 and 47 per cent of the members parliament in the Nordic countries, but, as seen above, this region is no longer evidently world leading in this respect. Other countries are reaching the same level and

⁴¹ Bergqvist, Christina et al., *Likestilte demokratier? Kjønn og politikk i Norden* [Equal Democracies? Gender and Politics in the Nordic Countries]. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget

challenge the Nordic self-image as the most gender equal region in the world.

Another finding of the project is that the problems of gender equality are far from solved within Nordic politics. The area of local government is one example of this. In all the Nordic countries, political representation is less gender-equal in local government than at the national level. The proportion of women in the local governing bodies varies between 32 per cent in Denmark and 42 per cent in Sweden. The lack of gender equality is even clearer when looking at the management of the municipalities. There, male dominance is still very strong. For example, the proportion of female leaders in local government is as low as between 20 and 32 per cent in Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Denmark is a special case where the strong male dominance among the mayors was further strengthened after the local government reform in 2006. Today there are only 14 per cent women at this political level in the Danish municipalities.

One area seldom included in gender equality discussions, but where we observe interesting changes, is diplomacy. The proportion of female ambassadors (excluding ambassadors to international bodies) in Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway has increased from very low numbers (between 3 and 10 per cent in the mid-1990s) to about 15 per cent in Denmark and Iceland and to about 30 per cent in Finland and Norway. The Swedish figures also indicate a growing trend: the proportion of women as heads of embassies and ambassadors to international bodies has increased from 10 to about 30 per cent since the mid-1990s. This indicates that the situation within the foreign policy administration might be changing. In Finland women have been over-represented at the Foreign Ministry trainee courses in the 2000s. In Norway the gender distribution among the trainees has been relatively balanced.

A general impression provided by our surveys is that the decisive difference is that between visible positions, which are thus sensitive to observation, as for example in parliamentary politics, and less visible positions where gender equality issues are not observed as intensively or not at all.

A further important – but hardly surprising – result of the project is the continued male dominance of the business sector. The project focused on companies listed on the stock market and state-owned companies

and their management structures, but did not study other parts of the corporate sector in the Nordic countries. As far as possible, the researchers have also compared changes over time. Our results show that there has been progress, while there are, however, considerable differences between the countries. The proportion of women on the boards of listed companies is today between 7 and 36 per cent, as compared to 4–9 per cent in the late 1990s. The numbers are higher in state-owned companies, since these are usually regulated by the Nordic gender equality legislation stipulating that at least 40 per cent of each gender must be represented on boards and in leading positions. In state-owned companies, women make up between 26 and 46 per cent of the board members, compared to 20–30 per cent ten years ago. So, it is obvious that politics contribute to increasing gender equality within the business sector. The situation is best in Norway, where the law on gender quotas has increased the proportion of women also on the boards of companies listed on the stock exchange to 36 per cent in five years, from nine per cent in 2004. Sweden is second best; there, the threat of a gender quota law and the so-called company code has resulted in an increase of the proportion of women on the boards of listed companies to 19 per cent in 2008 from 4 per cent in the late 1990s. However, the picture is less bright in Norway and Sweden if we look at the management structures of listed companies. There are very few women in the position of CEO, or members of management groups. Between 93 and 97 per cent of all CEOs and between 85 and 90 per cent of the management group members of listed companies are men. The conclusion is that although a gender equality discussion has started within the business sector, and although the state-owned companies have shown the way, there is still a long way to go before we start seeing serious results in the private corporate sector. Gender equality measures within the world of business are often – with the exception of the Norwegian quotas in public joint-stock companies – aimed at increasing the number of female managerial candidates. Such measures might be important for individual women and improves the gender equality climate in individual enterprises. However, it remains to be seen when the business sector starts actively seeking female leaders, as the world of politics does today.

Parliamentary politics in the Nordic countries is a gender equality success, if a representation of 40–60 per cent of each gender is regarded as gender balanced. The current governments of the countries are gender

balanced in this sense, as is the proportion of women and men in the parliamentary committees and most other leading positions in the parliaments. There are female party chairs leaders in all of the Nordic countries today – also in some of the largest parties – and we have seen female ministers in traditionally male dominated posts, such as defence policy, finance and industry, and foreign affairs. State companies and the Norwegian public joint-stock companies are in the vanguard of increased gender equality in the world of business.

The gender equality problems in this field are caused by subtler, but systematic differences. Women and men are seen to hold different functions and positions, within both politics and business. Most commonly, men are over represented and women under represented in political areas such as defence, finance and industrial policy. The opposite is true of areas such as social issues, culture, education and gender equality. One example can be taken from parliamentary committees. When looking at the gender distribution in the committees, and in which of them women make up 50 per cent or more of the members, we find that socio-cultural functions, such as culture and education, are more or less always female issues, and the prestigious areas, such as finance and industrial policy, are dominated by men. In addition, women form the majority in the committees in areas such as the labour market (Denmark and Sweden), environmental issues (Finland and Iceland), justice (Norway and Sweden) and foreign policy (Iceland and Norway).

It is more difficult to survey the horizontal division of gendered labour in the corporate world. But our preliminary results indicate that there are larger proportions of women on corporate boards within finance and business services and in the health sector. Earlier research also shows that men are over represented and women under represented as middle managers in posts from whence CEOs are recruited.

What, then, does actually promote gender equality? One of the project's most important results is that the maintenance of a social-political debate on the subject, as well as coverage of gender equality issues and pressure from women's organizations (both within and outside of the political parties) are decisive for the development of gender equality. The results of the project show that legislations (or in the case of Sweden, recommendations) that since the latter half of the 1980s have prescribed a gender-balanced representation on public committees, commissions and

boards, have had an impact. This is proved by the relatively even gender balance in parliamentary bodies and state companies, provided that the ministers in charge monitor the observance of the laws. In Finland and Norway the regulations have been extended to pertaining also to corresponding bodies within the municipalities. Since the 1970s and 1980s, pressure from feminist debaters and women's organizations has also more or less forced the political parties to adjust their internal party democracy and nomination practices. The parties play a crucial role in the development of gender representation, since the parties nominate the candidates that the voters can choose from, and place them in eligible or non-eligible positions on their lists.

Party quotas (quotas for the parties' internal bodies) and candidate quotas have been introduced in all countries, except for Finland, by the central and left wing parties. (In Denmark, some parties applied gender quotas, but they were soon abandoned.) The competition between the parties and the gender equality debates that the measures have generated have, in turn, forced the whole political spectrum to actively discuss and take a stance on issues of representation. There has not been similar pressure from women's movements as to the appointment of corporate board members within the world of private enterprise. Consideration for the autonomy of industry and respect for private self-governance has put limits to the gender equality discussion.

Conclusions and suggested further research

One important conclusion from the project *Gender and Power in the Nordic Countries* is that there are gaps in the public statistics in all countries, which makes it impossible to follow the development of gender equality within politics and business in a structured way. This concerns, for example, certain areas of parliamentary politics in Denmark, local government and public administration in all countries, as well as the private corporate sector.

Another, theoretically important conclusion is that numeric gender equality, or equal representation of women and men at the same level, can lead to stratifying and status differences by women and men dominating different functions and working within different areas. Finding indicators

for measuring and evaluating horizontal segregation is a challenge for gender equality research.

A third conclusion, and a task for future research, is to survey and assess the gender equality consequences of various quota measures. On the one hand, quotas (voluntary and statutory) have proven to be efficient openings for a more balanced distribution of power. On the other, widespread gender equality has also been reached without quotas, for example within parliamentary politics in Denmark and Finland. Thus, a more varied discussion and research-based knowledge on various gender equality measures and their impacts, including different forms of quotas, is urgently needed.