

## Abstract

The European Union faces new challenges, as the labour market we know today, is being disrupted in terms of technological development. The future job market brings new challenges, which must be addressed by the EU. This thesis seeks to explore how a small state can gain influence by acting as a smart state, in context of a future labour market. The study will be based on a case study, which investigates how Denmark's role as a small state performs regarding new initiatives in the future labour market. More precisely, this thesis will examine whether and how Denmark uses norm entrepreneur strategy, within the smart state strategy, to influence their opportunity for influence.

Empirical data on the Danish approach, was collected through interviews with civil servants containing comprehensive knowledge of the Danish strategy, as well as documents stating the Danish position and discussions concerning the future labour market within EPSCO Council meetings.

The collected data shows that Denmark indeed practices the norm entrepreneur strategy within the smart state strategy, to exert influence through the Commission and the EPSCO Council. The critical resource that Denmark possesses, and depend on, is their role as a frontrunner at the labour market. The Danish government uses its frontrunner position to channel Danish norms through the concept of norm advocacy.

*Key words:* Smart state strategy, norm entrepreneur strategy, small state, Denmark.

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## Abbreviations

CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
EPSCO	Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs
QMV	Qualified majority voting

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# 1. Introduction

The number of small EU member states has increased significantly since the origin of the Union; nevertheless, their influence opportunities are under pressure. In line with EU expansion, institutional developments have disrupted the balance of power between large and small member States (Panke, 2010:313). In recent years, structural changes in the EU Council of Ministers' vote distribution present new challenges for every small member state. Even with traditional small-state strategies and an emphasis on institutional bonds, they cannot maximise their impact (Wivel, 2010). The institutional settings challenge small states' ability to be influential; therefore, if small states want to continue to exert influence on future legislation, new approaches must be applied (Grøn & Wivel, 2011).

The traditional voting methods' unanimity and simple majority voting favoured smaller EU member states. Today, a qualified majority (QMV) applies to most areas. QMV is applicable when 55% of the member states- representing at least 65% of the EU population vote in favour (European Parliament, 2014). QMV enables larger states to build coalitions relatively more comfortably than small member states (Steinmetz & Wivel, 2010:20-23).

Structural changes challenge the ability of small member states to influence the negotiation process within the legislative bodies. The lack of ability to influence is caused by narrow financial resources and slimmer and fewer delegations at the international level in comparison to larger member states (Panke, 2012:313). Empirical findings suggest how small member states can turn disadvantages into advantages by the use of "*smart state strategy*." The transformation into a smart state is achieved if the small state succeeds in acting like a lobbyist, a self-interested mediator or as a norm entrepreneur (Grøn & Wivel, 2011:530-535). The literature is relatively unexplored in practice, and there is a lack of empirical evidence that emphasises the subject. This thesis will thus contribute to new empirics in the area. This thesis focusses on the branch within the smart state strategy – the *norm entrepreneur*.

## 1.1 Research purpose & research question

New global challenges enable smaller states to engage as norm entrepreneurs within areas where legislation has not already taken place (Grøn & Wivel, 2011:530-535). One problem discussed across the entire EU is the *future labour market* that is causing challenges as well as opportunities. The disruption of the labour market calls for attention and best practice sharing all over Europe (European Commission, 2019a). The challenges are entirely new, and solutions

on an EU level are unexplored, allowing member states to transfer national preferences to the EU system in a new and debated area. It is these kinds of opportunities that lend themselves well for a small state to act smart. Thus, it will be interesting to explore the theoretical perspective from a new and newly-explored area such as the future labour market.

It is out of the scope of this thesis to explore how several member states act as norm entrepreneurs; therefore, this thesis will turn its focus towards one small state, Denmark. Denmark is a special case within the EU due to several opt-outs, which, to some extent, prevent Denmark from exerting influence in essential areas, such as the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (Folketinget, 2020). The Danish opt-outs impact Denmark's influence opportunities, and it must be assumed that the opt-outs somewhat compel Denmark to strive towards influence within other areas (Adler-Nissen, 2015:200-205). Furthermore, Denmark is one of the leading countries within the future labour market (OECD Employment Outlook, 2019), making it particularly interesting to investigate how Denmark uses its role within the future labour market to achieve influence.

The thesis will thus contribute to the literature with theoretical specification of the norm entrepreneur strategy within the strategy of smart states. The developed theoretical framework is also linked to an empirical study of how Denmark, as a small state, uses the norm entrepreneur strategy in practice. The thesis aims to answer the following research question:

*How and to what extent does Denmark apply the norm entrepreneur strategy within the future labour market as an influence strategy in the EU?*

It is important to note that this thesis will *not* investigate to what extent Denmark *is* achieving influence, but *how* Denmark uses the strategy to possible gain influence.

## 1.2 Thesis outline

The thesis is structured as follows to answer the research question posed above: Chapter 2 consists of a case presentation of Denmark and the future of work relating to Denmark and the EU. Chapter 3 contains a literature review presenting small state theories, smart state strategy and theories of norm entrepreneurs. Chapter 4 presents the theoretical framework of this thesis: the theory of norm entrepreneurship in general and smart state strategy. In Chapter 5, I outline the relevant methodological matters for this study. Chapter 6 comprises the analytical findings presented concerning Denmark's use of the norm entrepreneur strategy, followed by a

discussion of how Denmark uses the strategy. Finally, Chapter 7 consists of a conclusion on the findings in the analysis.

## 2. The Case of Denmark and the future of work

The purpose of this chapter is to present Denmark as a case study. The chapter will describe *why* Denmark is a special case within the EU by presenting the Danish approach towards EU membership. In addition, the Danish and the European approach towards the future labour market will be described to provide a basis for a later analytical discussion of how Denmark uses the norm entrepreneur strategy within the EU.

### 2.1 Why football is more important than EU membership

Denmark has been a member of the European Union since 1973 (Kelstrup et al., 2017) and according to the official webpage of the Danish government, Denmark's relationship with the EU is significant. *"Denmark has a historical, political and economic close connection with the European corporation (...) the European membership is a great advantage for Denmark"* (Regeringen, 2017). However, the relationship between Denmark and its European counterparts has had some bumps in the road, mainly caused by a lack of Danish commitment (Kelstrup et al., 2017).

Denmark won the European championship in football in 1992. The pride of the victory has never vanished, and the triumph will rightly never be forgotten. 1992 was also the year where 50.7% of the Danish population voted no to the Maastricht Treaty, even though the government heavily supported the Treaty. The "no vote" was a shock, not only for the Danish government but in the EU as well (Kelstrup, et al., 2017:446).

The Danish no vote shocked the political establishment and blurred the illusion of an EU in agreement. The Maastricht Treaty would enter into force with or without the support of Denmark, leaving the political parties with no other choice than to negotiate a compromise (Altinget, 2015). The agreement consisted of a comprehensive formulation of Danish European politics giving priority to employment, environment and democracy, and four Danish opt-outs. A united Folketing, except for the "Fremskridtspartiet", supported the agreement. (Kelstrup et al., 446:2017). The national compromise was named the "Edinburgh Agreement".

In 1992, the European Council agreed upon the Edinburgh Agreement, which acknowledges Denmark's four opt-outs: The Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) and Citizenship of the European Union (Folketinget, 2020). Following a referendum on May 18, 1993, Denmark could ratify the Maastricht Treaty and the Edinburgh Agreement, and the Treaty and Danish opt-outs subsequently entered into force in November 1993 (ibid.). In addition to outlining the four opt-outs, the national compromise clarified that the opt-outs should be unlimited and that they could only be abolished after a referendum (ibid).

Unlike the European championship, the opt-outs have lasted twenty-six years, and no changes are anticipated in the nearest future. The four opt-outs are on par with Danish identity, sovereignty and autonomy (Miles & Wivel, 2014). The Danish population seems to have a dualistic approach towards the European membership in terms of protecting Danish autonomy while wishing to be influential. Lee Miles and Anders Wivel argue that Denmark is "suffering from an integration dilemma" (ibid). The integration dilemma embraces the Danish difficulty of being an executing member without being entrapped or forced to accept decisions they do not agree upon (Kelstrup et al., 2017:14). Further integration weakens the national autonomy while the rejection of further integration increases the risk of being abandoned by European counterparts (Miles & Wivel, 2014:9). The four opt-outs stress how Denmark has avoided becoming entirely loyal to European membership through the years by ensuring they are not trapped in policy areas that have the potential to reduce Danish sovereignty and autonomy (Miles & Wivel, 2014:9).

Since 2004, various Danish governments have worked towards the abolishment of the opt-outs without any success, leaving Denmark in the centre of the integration dilemma (Miles, 2014:222). Small states pursue influence within international organisations such as the EU to influence greater member states — where smaller states' survival lies, to some degree. Additionally, autonomy is essential, leaving the integration dilemma to be a question of influence versus autonomy (Miles, 2014:229).

The integration dilemma is deeply intertwined with the opt-outs, as it explains Denmark's complicated relationship with the European Union. Denmark strives for influence, like any other country in the world, but remains protective of its national autonomy. Denmark "protects" its bastions of national autonomy through the opt-outs while pursuing influence by being an active member that leans towards status quo solutions. Denmark must seek to be influential within areas not covered by the opt-outs. Several initiatives can be taken to achieve influence within



the EU without renouncing the opt-outs. One solution is to use Denmark's role as a frontrunner within the future of work.

Rebecca Adler-Nissen (2015) argues that the opt-outs force Danish ministers and officials to be more active and better organised than their colleagues to gain influence (ibid.). The argument is supported by an investigation conducted by Diana Panke that names Denmark as an "activity leader," placing Denmark as one of the most active small state members (Panke, 2010:804-808). The argument put forward by Panke is that Denmark is well-organised and well-prepared when entering EU negotiations (ibid).

One area where Denmark has acted as an frontrunner is within the changes brought to the labour market. Many EU countries fear the changes, while the Danish government welcomes the economic initiatives brought by new technologies and acknowledge the challenges that follow (Regeringen, 2017). Hence, it is essential to keep pace with the technological development and internal national structures that have to develop in line with the technology (Regeringen, 2017). One main issue is how the workforce should adapt to the future of work, since new technology and digitalisation will most likely disrupt traditional businesses and change the labour market as we know it (ibid.).

In many EU countries, the government controls labour market legislation. However, Nordic countries such as Sweden and Denmark have a strong tradition of incorporating social partners in legislation (Marcussen, 2010). Danish labour market regulation is characterised by the exclusive role of the social partners. The role of the social partners has proven to be the solution to the question of how to adapt to new forms of work (Regeringen, 2017). Denmark is a technological frontrunner and has, compared to many other EU states, already adopted national policies for future challenges within the labour market (ibid.).

Development and challenges are not new phenomena within European labour markets, just imagine how they has changed throughout the centuries — starting with simple farmers growing crops on their fields to today, where technology has taken over various tasks that facilitate efficiency and economic gains. Human beings have always lived by the mantra, "learning by doing", and history has thought us that wealth and power flow to the states that are able to harness innovation in production technologies as we have witnessed during the industrial revolution (O'Brien & Williams, 2013:67). Manufacturing and mass production have already reshaped the labour market in various ways (Dicken, 2015:101).

Today's future of work subsidises artificial intelligence and new technologies, and new types of work are already present in today's labour market. Still, artificial and new technologies is expected to become much more integrated in the future (Regeringen, 2017). The European Commission and the OECD have both published new reports addressing opportunities and challenges introduced by the technological changes (OECD employment outlook, 2019; European Commission, 2019a). Both the OECD and the EU agree that the future labour market should not be feared, but embraced, as the future of work has the opportunity to bring economic leverage and employment development (ibid.). However, financial gain often does not arise without hard work, and innovation is required from European leaders if the economic benefit is to be ensured. In contrast, decent working conditions, social protection and equal opportunities for all are guaranteed (ibid.).

### 2.1.1 The European Pillar of Social Rights

Political actors recognise the degradation of traditional labour market structures and the need to create flexibility, collective bargaining and better access to social security systems (Mailand, 2018). On November 17, 2017, the EU member states approved the European Pillar of Social Rights (Social Pillar) at the Gothenburg Social Summit. Former Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker proclaimed the Social Pillar by stating:

"Today, we commit ourselves to a set of 20 principles and rights. From the right to fair wages to the right to health care; from lifelong learning, a better work-life balance and gender equality to minimum income: with the European Pillar of Social Rights, the EU stands up for the rights of its citizens in a fast-changing world." (European Commission, 2019b).

The Social Pillar aims to ensure social rights for workers all over the EU. This includes, among other things, workers being entitled to reasonable wages that provide a decent standard of living (European Commission, 2019b). The Social Pillar was established to overcome challenges caused by global technological developments, and the Social Pillar's creation is an attempt to meet the future labour market by discussing the opportunities and challenges of the individual countries. The Social Pillar is about delivering new and more effective rights for citizens, built upon twenty key principles, the ones of concern within the labour market are: *equal*

*opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion (ibid.).<sup>1</sup>*

### 2.1.2 The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council

Three years later, the Social Pillar is addressed and discussed at every meeting at the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO). The Social Pillar are the foundation of all discussions concerning the future labour market. Hence will this thesis investigate the Danish strategy employed at EPSCO meetings. Sharing of best practises and legislation within the labour market is discussed within the EPSCO Council attending ministers for the employment of all EU member states four times a year (European Commission, 2019b). The Council is responsible for drawing up annual employment guidelines, which the member states take into account in their national policies (ibid.).

The Social Pillar covers both hard, legally-binding regulation, as well as soft and non-legally binding regulations (Mailand, 2018:52). Non-binding initiatives can be perceived as tools to overcome challenges based on a common desire for improvements in the labour market (ibid.). The EPSCO Council intends to share experiences and good practices among the member states (ibid.). To share good practices and to keep track of country developments, an online social scoreboard is created and was first presented in the Joint Employment Report in 2018 (European Commission, 2018). The report addresses future challenges and opportunities caused by global technological developments that continue to affect people's working life (ibid.). The problems addressed are the same as mentioned by the OECD; new forms of work, the requirement of new skills, and development of inequality, which must be accomplished through established labour market regulatory frameworks and solidarity mechanism (ibid.) Additionally, safeguarding of the welfare state and adequate protection for workers is at the centre of concerns. The social scoreboard detects member states challenges and solutions, and each state is judged by twelve indicators, divided into three main topics: *equal opportunities and access to the labour market, dynamic labour markets and fair working conditions, and public support/social protection and inclusion (ibid.).*

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<sup>1</sup> For a specification of all principles see:  
[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

Denmark is one of six countries who has not received any marks or red flags within the twelve measured indicators. Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden are all frontrunners within the social scoreboard (European Commission, 2019b). Countries that perform well are perceived as benchmark countries (ibid.).

Inclusion of social partners and adaptable social security systems are necessary to overcome global labour market challenges (OECD Employment Outlook 2019; European Commission, 2019b). Social dialogue is emphasised as essential and necessary to meet current and future labour market challenges. The impact of social partners' involvement within national legislation varies significantly across the member states. This is mainly due to varying social partners' capacity and contributions, as well as diversity between member states' social dialogue practices and institutional settings (European Commission, 2018:61).

When studying the Joint Employment Report 2018, it becomes clear how social dialogue is within the heart of preparation for future challenges.

"Whereas there is no single existing national social dialogue system that serves as the standard reference, an effective and well-functioning social dialogue should be fostered to promote welfare in the EU. This can only be achieved by promoting social partners' capacity by respecting their autonomy and strengthening their roles in the design and implementation of reforms and policies and by actively involving social partners at all stages of policy-making and implementation" (European Commission, 2018:61).

Social models can rarely be transferred from one country to another, as they have grown out of the individual countries' histories, cultures and customs. But it is possible to be inspired by the principles of another country's models in terms of sharing best practises (Misslbeck-Winberg, 2018:41).

The reaction towards the Social Pillar differentiates across member states and social partners. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which represents 45 million workers from 90 different unions, poses a positive attitude towards the Social Pillar, especially with a view to create a better work-life balance. Contrary is BusinessEurope, who represents the business community, different sceptic towards the Social Pillar (Mailand, 2018:51).

The discussion on the expansion of social Europe divides the member states into a classic combination. Scandinavia and the new EU countries are doubtful of the Social Pillar, whereas

Germany, France and the countries of continental and southern Europe are more favourable. Denmark, together with the other Scandinavians, filed a written concern about the Pillar's violation of the subsidiarity principle (Mailand, 53:2018). Once again, the integration dilemma becomes relevant, since Denmark is not prepared to allow EU legislation to interfere with national policies. The Danish trade unions have also expressed concern about violations of the subsidiarity principle and interference with the Danish model despite an otherwise positive attitude towards the Social Pillar (ibid).

### 3. Literature review

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the literature relevant to the topic of this thesis: small states' opportunity to exert influence within the EU. The chapter is divided into three sections, each dealing with previous research about small states' opportunity to influence.

#### 3.1 How to define a small state

The rapid expansion of the EU and recent changes within the decision-making process have created challenges as well as opportunities for small EU member states. Scholars within European studies acknowledge that smaller states constitute the majority of the EU (Panke, 2010; Grøn & Wivel 2011; Thorhallsson & Wivel, 2006).

Disregarding the recognition that the role of small states has changed within the EU, the academic literature on small member states appears to be diverse and fragmented (Thorhallsson & Wivel, 2006:651). Scholars have not yet been able to create consensus regarding the definition of a "small state," what role small states have within the EU, or how small states influence European policy-making (ibid.). This literature review aims to identify leading scholars' interpretation of how a small state should be defined, and how influence is best achieved.

In the following, the literary fields in which the problematic problem is inscribed will be outlined. As different theoretical debates are drawn, their relevance will each be addressed and illustrated where there are shortcomings and weaknesses in the literature.

*Who is a small state?* It depends on which criteria are used to define a small state, such as military capacity, economy, prosperity, population, etc. (Marcussen, 2016:68). Before the end of the Cold War, the distinctive role between a small state and a great state within international relations was clear and "well-known". Greater states drew up agreements and treaties, and smaller states followed (Thorhallsson & Wivel, 2006). "The category 'great power' became a legal category, signalling the inequality of states and coexisted with the principle of sovereign equality" (Thorhallsson & Wivel, 2006:652). Today, states are equally sovereign, and international agreements are not drawn without the attention of smaller states (ibid.).

Additionally, the "size" of a state can be based on subjective criteria as well. A self-image of being a great state can influence other states' perception through actions. According to Martin Marcussen, the state's own perception can be mirrored to the outside world, creating a subjective understanding of "great power" (Marcussen, 2016). Additionally, as noted by Robert Keohane, an alternative subjective definition of a small state is: "A state whose leaders consider that it can never, acting alone or in a small group, make a significant impact on the system" (Keohane, 1969:296). This definition will not be useful in this thesis, since it must be argued that none of the member states have entered EU membership without believing they can influence EU policy-making (Thorhallsson & Wivel, 2006: 654).

A straightforward way to define a small state is, by definition, "*not being a great power*", but then the question is just reversed, because who is a great power? The question seems more feasible to answer during the times of colonies and empires than in today's world of many small states, middle states and bigger states (Thorhallsson & Wivel, 2006:653). Using objective criteria in the case of the EU leaves us with more questions than answers, such as why should a state with great military capacity be able to influence decision-making in the EU? One of the most active members in the EU is Germany, who, due to their violent history, does not possess a great military capacity.

Caroline Grøn and Anders Wivel define small states as "*the weaker part in an asymmetric relationship unable to change the nature or functioning of the relationship on their own*" (Grøn & Wivel, 2011:524). The definition embraces the power that states exercise

instead of the power they possess. A state can be seen as a great state in one relationship and as a small state in another, or within different areas. A small state is bound to the presumption of not being able to change the fundamental encounter of the relationship; a small state is "stuck" within the power configuration, no matter what their specific relations are (ibid.). If Germany chose to leave the EU, the dynamics and the power of the EU in international affairs would change significantly, whereas Denmark's departure would primarily just affect Denmark. Another example is Brexit, which stirred up the entire EU, because their leaving will impact the EU as a whole, both economically and competitively.

So how do small states assert influence in the EU? A more extensive study has been conducted of small states' influence strategies focusing on the Council, which provides excellent insight into the challenges and compensation opportunities associated with council negotiations (Panke, 2010:9). Diane Panke's definition draws on objective criteria by defining small states as states that have fewer votes in the Council of Ministers than the EU average, leaving 19 countries within the definition of a small state (Panke, 2010:799). However, today's voting structure within the Council of Ministers and the extended use of QMV leaves the definition unusable, since it does not paint a significant picture of the actual division of power.

According to Hans Branner, the definition of a small state is somewhat flexible, since one strong argumentative definition has not yet been developed, and the definition of a small state must be seen as relative, rather than absolute (Joenniemi, 1998:61). Joenniemi embraces the argumentation by Branner in his brief and concise critique of the applicability of the small state concept in a modern world, characterised by the absence of significant power conflicts and the increased importance of multilateral organisations such as the EU. The entire "issue" with defining a small state arises because a definition is necessary to investigate small states' opportunity to assert influence in today's world. Joenniemi questions the need for an objective truth towards the definition of a small state, since it becomes questionable how much the small state designation can predict expected behaviour and influence. He argues that by adapting to the new conditions, small states can exert more influence than ever before - and that it opens the possibility for "small" to become synonymous with "smart" (Joenniemi 1998: 62). This has inspired

a new approach to research in EU small states, which focusses on how being a small state can be changed from a weakness to a strength. Only a few academic contributions relate systematically and theoretically to the implementation of a Smart State strategy's elements (Grøn & Wivel, 2011:8). The following section will briefly explain the Smart State strategy.

### 3.2 Small state theory

The small state literature discusses the ability of small states to exert influence on the world stage. The literature is often divided into three different degrees of how small states utilise their freedom of action (Marcussen, 2016:72). The literature points out that small states have little or no existing scope of action and must, therefore, solely rely on alliances with greater states (ibid.). At the opposite end of the spectrum, it is believed that small states have developed some unique qualities that make them innovative frontrunners in the global world due to their smaller size (ibid.). However, the majority of the literature points to the fact that small states gain the most leeway within an institutional framework, which is achieved by joining international organisations (ibid.). The Smart State strategy emphasises how the institutional framework expands the domains of small states and stresses how they should utilise their small state weakness to gain influence within the EU (Grøn & Wivel, 2011).

### 3.3 Norm entrepreneur's strategy

The norm entrepreneur strategy within the smart state strategy allows small states to achieve influence by being a frontrunner that practices domestic policies desirable by other EU states. Being a frontrunner or a norm entrepreneur is not new within the academic literature. Joseph Nye (2005), and Ian Manners (2002) both propose theories that embrace the possibility of influence if the individual state succeeded in assuming the role of a trendsetter. While Manners' studies are concerned with how the EU as "one" state can act as a normative power, Nye explores the ability of individual states to achieve normative status. Nye's studies are more focussed on states foreign policy domains, and more frequently deal with states' diplomatic domains rather than institutional ones.



Finnemore and Sikkink argue that unlike the definition of a small state, there is a general agreement on the definition of a norm: "*As a standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity.*" (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998:891). Promoting norms through norm advocacy or by being a norm entrepreneur is, according to Nye (2019), Manners (2002) and Björkdahl (2008), within the term "soft power." Soft power is "attractive power", and is related to values, norms and ideas where seduction and one's ability to persuade others becomes essential (Nye, 2019:95; Björkdahl, 2008:136). Soft powers are often practised by the ones who do not possess "hard power" and often lack military capacity (Björkdahl, 2008).

The definition of a norm entrepreneur seems consistent throughout the academic literature and is perceived as "*an actor strongly committed to a certain norm, and ready to actively promote this norm to shape the behaviour of others*" (Sundström & Elgström, 2019:3). Grøn and Wivel elaborate on this definition, which further defines being a norm entrepreneur within the EU: "*Norm entrepreneurs successfully convince others of their normative convictions, thereby creating an ideational basis for changing the institutional environment and/or specific values*" (Grøn & Wivel, 2011:534).

The norm entrepreneur strategy by Grøn and Wivel is, to some extent, innovative within the academic literature, which has often described norm entrepreneurs as "non-state" actors (Sundström & Elgström, 2019; Davies & True, 2017:701). Unlike Finnemore & Sikkink (1998), who argue that norm advocacy is carried out by civil society and non-state actors, Davies & True argues that governments also have the ability to act as norm-entrepreneurs (Davies & True, 2017:701). Non-state actors are mainly concerned about establishing new norms on the world's agenda, while states are concerned about the elaboration of already established norms (ibid.) Advocating already-existing norms leaves scope to promote domestic policies embracing already-accepted and desired norms.

The literature, which focusses exclusively on the actions of states within the EU institutional framework, is relatively small. The term "norm entrepreneur" is thus not newly invented in European political research. Still, the theory contributes new perspectives on the influence of small states within the three decision-making bodies,

the Commission, the Council, and Parliament. Academic literature has argued how small states having a frontrunner position may be a useful tool for increasing influence (Larsen, 2005; Kronsell, 2002), but there is still a gap in the academic literature to test the theoretical assumption that a small state can optimise its influence by acting as a norm entrepreneur. This gap specifically points to a lack of case studies within the theoretical field.

## 4. Theoretical framework

The purpose of this chapter is to develop the theoretical framework, aiming at creating a structured approach to the analysis. The chapter starts by explaining the claims and assumptions of the theories, which will be reviewed, and their relevance to the thesis's extracted problem. This will be followed by an explanation of how to operationalise the smart state strategy through the legislative bodies of the EU. The literature can thus be used to set theoretical expectations for the actors' behaviour and strategic choices.

### 4.1 Smart state strategy

The small state literature is relatively "small", and the smart state strategy developed by Grøn and Wivel is so far the best way to encapsulate small states' potential for influence. Based on the discussion conducted in the literature review, this thesis uses the definition by Caroline Grøn and Anders Wivel: small states are *"the weaker part in an asymmetric relationship unable to change the nature or functioning of the relationship on their own"* (Grøn & Wivel, 2011:524).

Grøn and Wivel argue that the institutional environment within the EU has changed (this is specified in Chapter 1), and small states must act like "smart states" to exert influence within the great machinery of the EU. To determine what is meant by "influence", influence is defined in line with Robert A. Dahl's classical definition (Dahl, 1957) by Grøn and Wivel as: *"Member states seeking influence in the EU will attempt to make other member states and/or institutions act in a manner they would not otherwise have acted in"* (Grøn & Wivel, 2011:524). The strategy specifies how influence is achieved through three different smart state strategies, which often should be intertwined to accomplish the best result, and thereby maximise the opportunity of influence.

The small state can act as a *lobbyist*, who, in the same way as private actors, utilise knowledge resources to gain access to the various EU institutions, especially the Commission and Parliament, gaining expert knowledge of the various legislative proposals (Grøn & Wivel, 2011:530-532). The small state can also act as a *self-interested mediator*, working in favour of the common European interest. This is done by exploiting the Council's consensus norm by acting as a "neutral negotiator" between larger states, in an attempt to place the outcome closer to the state's preferences (Grøn & Wivel, 2011:532-533). And last but not least, the small state has the opportunity to act as a *norm-entrepreneur* by promoting domestic norms within specific policy areas by dominating discourses or by being a benchmarking country (Grøn & Wivel, 2011:534). As a result of the chosen problem formulation, the focus is exclusively on the latter strategy - the norm entrepreneur strategy.

## 4.2 The Norm Entrepreneur Strategy

The overall lines of the strategy are already drawn in the literature review, but this section offers some elaboration on how to promote the domestic policy to the European arena.

*"Norm entrepreneurs in the EU successfully convince others of their normative convictions"* (Grøn & Wivel, 2011:534). The road to influence within the EU is long and bumpy, but promoting normative convictions provide an opportunity to small states that do not possess "hard" power. Small states have the opportunity to contribute intellectual power to the Union, and thereby prove their capacity and ability to provide soft power in general terms: *"There are no great powers in the area of spirit, intellect, culture and science unless proven by doing"* (Steinmetz & Wivel, 2010:109).

As noted in earlier sections, norm entrepreneurs have better opportunities to be influential if the member state is in a leading position. This can be achieved by being a benchmark country within certain policy areas and obtaining a role as a frontrunner. Being a frontrunner and thereby practising a domestic policy desired by other actors is one significant step towards exerting influence (Grøn & Wivel, 2011:534). The role of a

frontrunner is acknowledged in previous research (Larsen, 2005; Kronsell, 2002; Jakobsen, 2009) and is considered an essential tool for small states. One crucial element of being a frontrunner is to "practise what you preach", meaning that small states who are capable of showing well-functioning domestic policies have a strong influential position (Björkdahl, 2008).

When seeking influence by using the promotion of norms as a strategy, one must present norms that "fit" within the overall ambition of the European Union (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998:897, 915). In practice, small states must designate the most important actors within each policy area and identify the distance between their norms and the agenda-setters. If the small state succeeds with its attempt, promotion of their interest within the broader discourse may become possible (Grøn & Wivel, 2011:54).

Norms should be exerted well within domestic policies before moving on to the European context, where, ideally, they are institutionalised and adopted by other member states (Björkdahl, 2008:137). Furthermore, policy initiatives should not be radically different from policies conducted by greater states, and most importantly, initiatives should not "clash" with proposals from any of the major actors (Steinmetz & Wivel, 2010:24). Norm entrepreneurs have the power to set the stage because they control specific resources, subjectives as well as objectives, including their ability to gather information, mediate their reputation, and their material resources (Bunse, 2004.4; Panke, 2010).

Small states must identify the most crucial policy areas where the desired norms can be strongly advocated (Grøn & Wivel, 2011:534). It is, therefore, necessary to invest a significant amount of time and resources when promoting norms in order to shape the desirable behaviour of theirs (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998:897).

The three sub strategies within the smart state strategy: norm entrepreneur, self-interested mediator, and lobbyism are entangled and difficult to separate. Additionally, the distinctions between the strategies are challenging to identify, and the differences are only vaguely described by Grøn & Wivel. Hence, this thesis will be based on the general norm entrepreneur literature, and the smart state strategy by Grøn & Wivel will

be applied to operationalise how small states can act *smart* by normatively influencing the three legislative bodies in the EU. This will be described in detail in a later section. Furthermore, Democratic corporatism will contribute knowledge regarding small states ability to transfer domestic policies to the European level.

The theoretical frame will take Davies and True's notion of states acting as norm entrepreneurs into consideration: *"Policy leaders leverage their identity and position to advance the recognition and diffusion of already established norms by reframing the moral prerogative of the 'national interest'"* (Davies & True, 2017:701).

Consequently, desired national norms transferred to the Union must be in line with already-acknowledged norms referred to as a "normative fit." Being a frontrunner enables smaller States to introduce normative fits.

### 4.3 Democratic corporatism

This concept is not part of Grøn and Wivel's smart state strategy, but added as an additional concept that creates another framework for how small states can make use of the norm entrepreneur strategy.

According to Baldur Thorhallson, "The power of the weak" becomes essential when smaller states seek influence in the EU, since small member states are more adaptable and have more open economies due to their small domestic markets (Thorhallsson, 2000). Smaller member states are more dependent upon export and the European single market than greater member states. Since smaller member states are more dependent, they become more adaptable to change, and they can be seen as "competitive loners" (Thorhallsson, 2000; Marcussen, 2016). Competitive loners are able to adapt to international challenges through democratic corporatism by being innovative, and, together with public and private actors, preparing for the changes that globalisation brings (ibid.).

Democratic corporatism can briefly be defined as a community where the social partners and central administration have good and well-coordinated cooperation; thus, national

as well as international agreements should be reached through consensus across all engaged parties (Marcussen, 2016; Thorhallsson, 2000:17).

Democratic corporatism is a powerful component of many small states' DNA that differs from greater states. Small states tend to live by a more social mantra that tries to include all crucial organisations in decision-making, which creates cohesion in the country (Thorhallsson, 2000). The close cooperation with interest organisations and unions enables consensus before agreements are concluded and tends to minimise potential conflict (Thorhallsson & Kattel, 2013:88-89). Cohesion and agreement between actors become obtainable due to a reduced number of policy-making sub-units, compared to greater states (ibid.). "*Democratic corporatism is the result of historical choices and the smallness of a society*" (Thorhallsson & Kattel, 2013:83).

The close cooperation between stakeholders in Denmark constructs decent conditions for influence with regard to the future labour market. Denmark is accurately able to be a frontrunner *because* of the political measures already taken at the national level. The steps are the result of close cooperation between the government and the social parties, which is also the result of a labour market with a focus on the possibility of change.

In the following chapter, small states' abilities to act smart and to influence the three legislative bodies, the Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council of Ministers, will be presented and evaluated.

#### 4.4 How to approach the norm entrepreneur strategy

This section argues that institutions do matter (Hall & Taylor, 1996). Institutions matter because they can empower or constrain policymakers, and because they provide a framework within which actors interact, shape their experiences, and limit what options they perceive as possible (Elgstöm & Bjurulf, 2005:46). Institutions do matter because they develop power and preferences of actors (Hall & Taylor, 1996). Institutions set out guidelines or, among other things, determine who has the right to be present, who holds the initiative and how decisions should be made and implemented (Elgstöm & Bjurulf, 2005:46). Political institutions consist of rules, formal as well as informal. Rules

structure how government works, and thereby, how institutions provide privileges to some actors while restraining others. It is, therefore, essential to clarify the role of the three legislative bodies within the EU decision-making process to analyse the extent to which small states can exert influence.

#### 4.4.1 The Commission

The Commission is the guardian of the Union's treaties, and a technocratic body working in favour of the entire EU (Miles & Wivel, 2013:110). Additionally, the Commission is perceived as a "good friend" to small states who often lack powers when negotiating in the Council of Ministers. The Commission is about to ensure that the Union does not become an implementing tool for greater states to establish political priorities (Grøn & Wivel, 2011). Power battles are typically seen in the Council of Ministers, and the Commission is the mediator acknowledging small states' policy priorities (Miles & Wivel, 2013:110).

The Commission is fundamentally an important actor to be on good terms with, because they hold initiative powers (Art. 17(2) TEU, 2008). All legislative acts are usually adopted based on a Commission proposal, leaving the Commission as one essential actor when influencing legislative acts. Early interaction with the Commission is crucial to influence new policy initiatives and uploading preferences and policies to the Commission gives smaller states a head start before entering the arena with greater states (Panke, 2010). The Commission has a unique power over the decision-making process, as it decides which measures to bring into the process and how to frame the various actions.

Close corporations with the Commission are essential and are usually achieved by national ministries contacting the relevant desk officer through the ministry's attaché. On this level, dossiers are drafted, and this is where small states can promote desirable actions. Once the dossier climbs through the hierarchical system, the decisions are further politicised, and it is, therefore, more accessible for small states to seek influence early in the process. "*It is much easier to fight to maintain a good idea in a proposal than introducing it at a later stage*" (Grøn, 2014:110). Thus, by introducing desirable norms

early in the process, small states can achieve their interests incorporated into a proposal even before it is presented to the Council of Ministers. At the beginning of the negotiations in the Council of Ministers, it is only a matter of maintaining the political direction of the Commission, rather than fighting for the introduction of new ideas (Grøn & Wivel, 2011).

Small states may convince the Commission of measures that include desirable standards if the country is perceived as a frontrunner. The Commission submits not only legislative acts, but also guidelines, such as the Social Pillar. Common guidelines are encouraged to be implemented in national policies and the Commission exercises periodic monitoring in terms of benchmark and sharing of best practices (Borrás & Jacobsson, 2004:188). Small states who are benchmark countries have an excellent opportunity to influence the Commission, since they usually are seen as frontrunners.

Arguments constructed upon scientific and technical knowledge are well suited when constructing strong positions (Panke, 2010:803). However, small states often lack political as well as financial resources, which influence their ability to conduct analysis and fact-checking. Early sparring with the Commission can provide small states with background information that can be beneficial when building up strong arguments. Small states face challenges when gathering background information due to a lack of domestic resources, collecting information from the Commission is obtainable with fewer resources (Panke, 2010:803).

#### 4.4.2 The Council of Ministers

Smaller states are often less successful when it comes to direct bargaining and negotiating policies in the Council of Ministers. *"If a big member state makes an argument, everyone listens carefully. Small states do not usually get so much attention"* (Panke, 2010:802). The continuous use of QMV in the Council introduced with the Nice and Lisbon Treaty favours greater member states compared to unanimity and simple majority voting, which mainly favoured smaller member states (Pedersen, 2013:101). Furthermore, small states are challenged by day-to-day negotiations due to fewer capacities in terms of economic and financial resources and less staff in the



ministries back home (Panke, 2010:896). However, less personnel can be converted into an advantage, since fewer civil servants working on dossiers enables closer corporation and a better ability to embrace a holistic approach (ibid).

One way for small states to compensate for formal voting procedures is through active participation (Pedersen, 2013:96; Panke, 2010). The group of small states are not homogenous, since they are diverse in activity level; some are very active, while others are almost silent. Denmark, as Panke notes, is an activity leader who copes better with small state disadvantages than others (Panke, 2010:806). Activity leaders have a better opportunity to shape EU policies according to national interests, because they are better at entering into early negotiations. This is often due to enhanced national coordination, where the position is expressed early in the process, and the national position is prepared at the beginning of the working groups. Besides, collaboration with NGOs and other private actors is critical as expert knowledge contributes to a more substantial argumentative basis (Panke, 2010:813).

A study conducted by Johansson Naurin and Lindahl supports the argument by Panke and argues that the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden are the most important actors within Council cooperation right after the UK, France and Germany (Johansson et al. 2019). The studies by Panke and Johansson et al. show that small states can compensate for their size within the Council of Ministers, and a high activity level seems to help smaller states to gain influence (Panke, 2010).

A strong norm of consensus exists behind the closed doors of the Council and in decisions preferred to be taken in consensus rather than by voting (Wivel, 2010:20). However, research shows (Wivel, 2010:20; Heisenberg, 2005:77) that small states are more likely to embrace the consensus norm and are less prone to vote against a majority than larger states who do not hesitate to vote against proposals that do not satisfy them. Furthermore, vetoing legislative acts is extremely rare for small states (Wivel, 2010:20).

When negotiating in the Council, solutions that are in the best interests of the Union are preferred instead of narrow self-interest. Small countries that can actively promote norms addressed within the framework of the Union have a better chance of being

accepted in the Council (Wivel, 2010:20) Besides, the Council, like the Commission, shares best practices, where the various working groups share knowledge and solutions. Again, there may be an opportunity to increase influence in the Council if the country manages to position itself as a priority country for the benefit of all.

#### 4.4.3 The European Parliament

The votes of the Parliament are distributed according to country size; therefore, the Parliament is not considered to be an arena where the small states are the most capable (Grøn & Wivel, 2010:528). When the Maastricht Treaty entered into force in 1992, the co-decision procedure was introduced.

The aim was to empower the European Parliament and to strengthen the legitimacy (Peterson & Shackleton, 2012). The introduction of qualified majority voting in the Council made it difficult for national parliaments to control the decision-making process at the European level. Empowerment of the EP should create a more direct link between the European citizens and the EU. The introduction of the Maastricht Treaty was biased in favour of the Council, whereas the revised version introduced by the Amsterdam treaty (1999) and later the Lisbon Treaty favoured the EP on terms with the Council. The adoption of legislative acts requires approval from both the EP and the Council (Costello & Thomson, 2013). The co-decision process has formally made the EP as "powerful" as the Council within the decision-making process (Ibid.).

The introduction of co-decision might favour the EP in the decision-making process, but there is no reason to believe that small states face fewer challenges. The strengthening of Parliament is more likely to benefit greater states because they have more members. Even though the number of small states increased with the 2004 and 2007 expansion, the increased number does not necessarily strengthen small states' positions within the EP, as small states do not necessarily share interests across policy areas (Grøn & Wivel, 2010:528).

#### 4.4.4 Summarising

Small state influence is obtained through interaction with the decision-making bodies. Interference with the actors of the three legislative bodies provides different possibilities. It must be expected that small states seek influence through different strategies, depending on the actors that are desirable to influence.

- Small states seek influence through close interaction with the Commission by influencing the Commission in the early stage of a dossier or by being a benchmark country.
- Small states seek influence in the Council of Ministers through active participation and by influencing working groups by providing well-documented arguments based on expert knowledge.
- Small states are not expected to seek influence through the European Parliament as the EP is not an actor where small states have a great deal of influence within the strategy.

## 5. Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodological considerations, since the choice of method and design is relevant to answer the research question. The premise on which the analysis is based will be explained, and scientific-theoretical as well as practical reflections on the choice of analytical strategy and its consequences will be included. The implications of the research design and methodological choices will be elaborated, and weakness, as well as strengths, will be discussed. Qualitative data sources are the centrepiece of the research design, and the purpose is to explore and investigate whether Denmark uses the norm entrepreneur strategy to within EPSCO Council meetings.

### 5.1 Analytical strategy and research design

The theoretical framework has been developed through previous chapters and has created expectations of the empirical findings. The analysis strategy thus has a pronounced deductive nature, in that the theory forms the basis for the conditions on which data collection and subsequent empirical analysis focus (Bryman, 2004:24; Andersen et al. 2012:73-74). The deductive strategy means that there will be no "naive empiricism," but that any empirical trends can be mapped from the theoretically controlled data collection and analysis. It will partly provide an opportunity to reflect on the context that the theoretical framework requires, as well as to create descriptive inference with broader relevance (King et al. 1994: 34; Olsen 2005: 14).

The task of the analysis is to determine how different pieces of knowledge that already exist can be combined to form new insight. Attached to this analytical strategy are qualitative data sources in the form of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Both approaches will be elaborated on in later sections. The study design draws on the ontological position of constructivism, which views social phenomena and its significance as continuously accomplished by social actors (Bryman, 2004:33). Thus, a constructivist perspective sees concepts of organisation and culture as realities that are regularly assembled and reassembled by social actors (ibid.). Concerning the current study, it is essential to note how some constructivists, but not all, view the researcher's statements and conceptualisations of the phenomenon under exploration as produced through social interaction and as in a "constant state of revision", and thus not definite (ibid: 33). The findings in the current research should not be considered as a definitive truth or as a mirror of social reality. In contrast, social actors must regard the research as a study that considers social reality as continuously produced and reproduced.

## 5.2 Qualitative case study

Qualitative sources are all things that are not quantitative sources, i.e., data that does not consist of numerical calculations (Elklit & Jensen, 2012:117). A qualitative case study has been conducted to examine how the branch of smart state strategy, norm entrepreneurship, can be used by small states at the EPSCO meetings. "A case study is a research design that entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case" (Bryman, 2004:709). It is out of the scope of this thesis to conduct an analysis of all small states within the EU; therefore, the analysis is based on Denmark as a single case (Andersen et al., 2012:90).

The strategy points out that a norm entrepreneur can benefit from being a frontrunner and an activity leader. Denmark fulfils some of these criteria within the future labour market. Due to their reservations, they have a unique position in the EU, a position that exacerbates influence in different areas. The dualistic Danish approach to the EU and the whole question of the integration dilemma encourages active participation by the Danish government in areas where influence is possible.

The European Commission points out countless times that social security and extended cooperation with the social partners might contribute to challenges caused by the future labour market (European Commission, 2019a). In this context, the Danish model is awarded, and the Scandinavian labour market model generates a great deal of attention, which, in several instances, is referred to as the desirable model (ibid.). It is, therefore, to be expected that Denmark has a unique position concerning sharing best practices, a position that may favour Denmark in future employment negotiations. Furthermore, Denmark is chosen as a case to test the theoretical framework, and Denmark provides the theory with the best possible conditions as they already meet many of the theoretical criteria for being a norm entrepreneur. Denmark can, therefore, be regarded as a *most likely case*, and it is expected that the theory is valid. However, if the theory proves not to be valid for this case, then it is most likely not adequate for many other cases (Andersen et al., 2012:90).

### 5.2.1 Validity

To be able to answer the research question scientifically, it is necessary to conceptualise and operationalise the problem and the its related concepts. When social phenomena such as norm entrepreneurship are examined, the challenge is that these cannot be immediately observed or measured. Thus, an analysis requires that the non-measurable be made measurable. This is achieved utilising a simplification and concretisation - in the form of indicators - based on the

theoretical framework upon which data collection is based (Andersen, 2012:99-102). Consistency between the theoretical and operational definition helps to ensure validity regarding the researcher's ability to measure the desired target (ibid.). From the theoretical concept, an operational variable is derived, which covers all dimensions of the theoretical concept. The operationalised variable creates the basis for data collection. The specification of operationalisation is elaborated upon in the coding table in a later section.

### 5.2.2 Reliability & generalisability

Reliability refers to the degree of consistency, and thereby, to what extent other scholars would be able to produce the same results (Andersen, 2012:103). The data material is centered around the assigned codes, and the interviews are transcribed, which allows an external measurement of the data. With regards to the present study, the aforementioned comprehensive explanations of methods would enable a conceivable replication of the research. However, this is not the case for the results. The results are a product of several situational factors, including the researcher's interpretation.

One essential question concerning generalisability is whether general conclusions can be drawn from a research project (Andersen, 2012:92). This question must be answered with the notion that the case study in concern can be associated with theory testing and is in a position to generalise by drawing on findings from equivalent cases investigated by others (Bryman, 2004:71). However, only one case has been selected, and the generalisation potential can, therefore, be questioned. Although Denmark is a most likely case, it is also a very specific case, which can be difficult to generalise to other cases (Andersen, 2012:9-95). This thesis expects to find a connection between the case and the theory, as it is expected to be a most likely case, and it is, therefore, uncertain whether the same result would be found with another case. Nevertheless, Denmark belongs to the group of active small states in the EU and share democratic corporatism with the other Scandinavian countries. It must, therefore, be pointed out that there may be an opportunity to generalise the result to small states that also fulfil these conditions, such as Sweden and Finland, for example.

This study does not intend to provide a case study relatable to all small states in the EU; instead, it aims to see if the part of the theory, norm entrepreneurship, can be complemented in other studies.

### 5.3 Document analysis

To test whether the theory applies to the case study, it is necessary to investigate the Danish approach, and documents that depict the Danish strategy must be included. Hence, document analysis is employed to investigate Danish strategies within the EPSCO Council. According to Bowen, document analysis is a “*systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents*” (Bowen, 2009:27). Various types of documents can be included in document analysis, including electronic as well as written documents. The criterion for a valid document is that the document has been conducted without the intervention of the researcher (ibid.). This method is, according to Yin, extremely applicable as it aids in producing the in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon investigated, which is characterising of case studies (Yin, 1993:81-82).

The theoretical framework presented relevant actors to which Denmark can extend the norm entrepreneur strategy. The theory drew a clear picture of the Commission and the Council of Ministers as important actors, and the analysis will thus focus on these actors. Guidelines and best practices about the future labour market is constituted in the Social Pillar where the Commission issues guidelines that meet the principles of the Social Pillar. The guidelines are discussed within various areas related to the future of work by ministers of employment at EPSCO meetings. The discussions are based upon questions asked by the presidency and ministers of employment are usually asked to consider two to three questions in each session. The documents of interest are the livestreaming videos of the meetings of concern since the Danish minister's answers build the foundation of understanding the Danish strategy. TV and video records are as valid as written documents, according to Bowen: “*Documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem*” (Bowen, 2009:29). However, not all meetings are publicly available, therefore, it has been necessary to include “samlenotater” (summary notes, in English) from the Danish Folketing. Samlenotater are drafted by civil servants within the Ministry of Employment and states the minister of Employment's position towards the political discussion at the EPSCO meeting. The minister needs approval from the Danish “EU-udvalg” (EU Committee) before stating Danish opinions in the EU. Hence, the documents are considered valid with regard to emphasise the Danish strategy.

Document analysis has been chosen because of its *efficiency* and *availability*. The selections of documents are less time-consuming than other research methods, and the documents in question are easy to retrieve, as they are available to the public (Bowen, 2009:31). As it has not been possible to get an interview with the then-Danish Minister of Employment, it has been

essential to include documents that can contribute to the interpretation and information regarding the strategy (Elkit & Jensen, 2012:132-133). The use of document analysis has thus been a necessary and useful method. Moreover, documents provide *stability*, since the authors' presence does not interfere with what is being studied (Bowen, 2009:31).

Limitations of document analysis must also be taken into consideration, and there will always be a risk of documents providing insufficient details, since the documents in question are produced for some purpose other than research (Bowen, 2009:31). The challenge may be to extract the Danish strategy from the statements of the minister. It must also be considered whether the minister is being direct in their remarks, or whether an attempt is being made to keep the strategy hidden. Furthermore, it cannot be avoided that information collected from the documents will have some form of bias as the researcher interprets the statements.

According to Yin, utilising more than one method to collect data is imperative in case of study research, as it provides the grounds for a more inclusive interpretation of the case: "*The qualitative researcher is expected to draw upon multiple (at least two) sources of evidence; that is, to seek convergence and corroboration through the use of different data sources and methods*" (Yin 1994: 80). To meet the challenges, semi-structured interviews with government officials are included. This research aims to contextualise the findings from the interviewees' perception of reality.

## 5.4 Semi-structured interviews

The interviews in question were prepared as a semi-structured interview in which various officials with specialised knowledge of EPSOC Council meetings act as respondents. This qualitative methodological approach is used for "*(...) understanding the world from the interviewee's point of view, expressing meaning in people's experiences, uncovering their world of life before providing scientific explanations*" (Kvale, 1997:15, author's translation). However, it should be pointed out that the results of the interviews have inevitably been influenced by my presence and role as an interviewer. A semi-structured interview can be classified as less controlling, where an interview guide mainly focuses on uncovering specific themes or topics (Brinkmann & Tanggard, 2010:38). The interview guide used was based on gaining complementary knowledge about Denmark's strategy to gain influence in the future labour market. The theme of the interview questions should, therefore, try to open up the underlying thoughts about Denmark's participation in the EPSCO Council meetings. The interviews were conducted within the respondent's offices, securing a private space in which the interviewees



could feel at ease psychologically, which is vital in individual interviews (King & Horrocks, 2014:42). Two of the interviewees wanted to stay anonymous. There anonymity in the study was emphasised to avoid risk exposure, which could potentially influence the data as well as leaving room for answers not being biased by this risk (ibid:43).

The interviews have been conducted with the following informants:

- *Troels Blicher Danielsen*, Head of Division at the Ministry of Employment.  
Advises the minister on EU questions. Assists the minister at EPSCO Council meetings.
- *Nicolas Davidsen*, Chief Advisor at the Ministry of Employment.  
Advises the minister on the future labour market. Assisted the former minister within meetings at the Disruption Council.
- *Torben D. Jensen*, Labour Market Policy Consultant at "Fagbevægelsen Hovedorganisation" (The Trade Union Central Organisation). And a member of the European Trade Confederation (ETUC) and works in close cooperation with the Danish government with regards to protecting the interest of the Danish labour market.
- *Anonymous1*, Chief Advisor within the Ministry of Employment  
Advises the minister with regards to EPSCO Council meetings.
- *Anonymous2*, special consultant within the Ministry of Employment.  
Close cooperation with the Danish EU representation in Brussels. This interview has not been recorded due to technical problems. Quotes will not be applied from this interviewee, but it will be specified when the interviewee agreed upon quotes from other interviewees.

A more significant number of interviews would have been preferred to strengthen the reliability. However, the small number of collected interviews allows for a more in-depth study with the possibility to interpret each interview in great detail (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015:168).

The interviewees had been given a very limited description of what the interview was about before we met, which should allow them to talk about what they thought was relevant in specific topics. However, my task was to continuously guide them towards the appropriate issues in

answering the research question. The interviewees have been exposed to the phenomenon of interest, since they all have significant knowledge of the Danish strategy about EPSCO Council meetings, and it must be argued that they are able to provide insight to answer the research question.

The reliability of the statements by the interviewees has been taken into account. Schaefer & Alvesson disclaim the value of interviews by stating *"researchers treat sources like authorities. Scholars present interview statements as definitive evidence on a phenomenon or authentic experiences (...) much assessment and analysis of the credibility of the statements"* (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2017:35). Source criticism is essential, and the statements from the interviewees should not be interpreted as the absolute truth, as they have the possibility to aim at emphasising Denmark and Danish initiatives, leaving out any critical remarks. Hence, this it is not perceived as a direct obstacle, since this thesis' aim is to investigate the Danish strategy, and it can be argued that the interviewed respondents are able to elucidate this. In addition, the author will make reservations about statements from the interviewees by complimenting statements with quotes from the included documents.

Concerning the use of the data collected, a sound recording was made during the interviews, which will be prepared by transcribing the material so that it can be treated as a unified text. This will make it more tangible to work within an analysis section. However, there are some elements of an interview that will be lost in this process where the transcript is *"(...) a decontextualised version of the interview. It does not include the visual aspects of the situation, neither the physical location nor the participants' mimics and gestures"* (Kvale, 1997:161, author's translation). However, this is not seen as problematic for the knowledge that is most relevant to answer the research question. The interviews have the sole function of understanding Danish officials and understanding Denmark's strategy.

## 5.5 Coding

Coding will be used to analyse Denmark's positions; this will be done by a systematic coding of each statement by the Danish Minister of Employment at the given meetings. To avoid irrelevant documents, only the items on the agenda related to the future of work will be included. Four meetings a year are held, and documents from the 2018-2019 meetings will be included, and will contribute to a summary analysis. The content of the documents will be encoded by associating labels that represent the content of the text with specific pieces of text (Jacobsen & Harrits, 2012:182). Additionally, the interviews will be coded with the same labels.

To use coding, one must define categories enlightening the observations and statements from the collected data. The report utilises a deductive analytical strategy, and the analysis thus consists of clearly-defined concepts in the form of theories in their *purest form* (Jacobsen & Harrits, 2012:182-183). According to Kuckartz, categories are used to: "*perceive the world around us and organise what we perceive, e.g., to form concepts, make comparisons, and decide which class we should assign a given observation or event to*" (Kuckartz, 2013:3). Categories applied to the coding scheme are theoretical categories recovered from the theoretical framework (Kuckartz, 2013:5). Accordingly, the affected classification is a result of classifications of smart state strategies recovered from the theoretical framework. *Categories are always linked to text or parts of a text like words, sentences, paragraphs, or even pages or chapters*" (Kuckartz, 2014:7). These parts of a text in this thesis are referred to as "quotations." Additionally, the coded text can have two directions: from text to codes or from codes to text. The documents will be analysed based on *closed coding*, as the text will be coded based on concepts already defined, identified from the theoretical section. Closed coding contrasts with open coding, where the concepts typically are developed in step with the coding (ibid.). The use of closed coding means that codes are associated with the individual pieces of text because the contents of the text pieces are expected to measure a term expressed by a given code (Jacobsen, 2012:184).

The documents and the interviews will be systematically coded with the text, and all sections in which the theory definition can be associated will be included in the analysis. The analysis will only include pieces of text that can be linked to the codes and will, therefore, not involve general EU political positions. The systems will be defined from a clearly-defined position before the theory; besides, each code will consist of indicators that can guide the coding. The precise definition of the codes aims to achieve more substantial reliability and avoids the selection of random pieces of text.

The analysis will be structured based on a code list with a code hierarchy constructed by Jacobsen & Harrits (2012). The list is organised into groups of general concepts as aggregate categories for more specific concepts (Jacobsen & Harrits 2012:182-183). Norm entrepreneur strategy guidelines will be used as parent node, and the less abstract concepts will be used as child node. This creates a hierarchy that is constructed based on the theoretical findings.

Code hierarchy:

Parent note	Child note	Description
Frontrunner	Denmark is seen as a leading country within specific policy areas	All statements containing "Frontrunner/leading Country".
Normative fit	Denmark promote their norms by presenting proposals "fitting" with the Union	All statements containing the "interest of the Union".
Normative advocacy	Denmark promotes norms by portraying successful domestic policies.	All statements containing "domestic policies".

## 6. Analysis

The current analytical chapter, as explained in detail in Chapter 5 *Method*, builds on the data collected through a document analysis and interviews, intending to elucidate the research question through the chosen theoretical perspectives. The data from the document analysis, consisting of discussions at the EPSCO meetings from 2018-2019, forms the basis for identifying inclinations for the Danish strategy. Each meeting has an agenda entailing different concerns regarding employment policies. This analysis will take every discussion concerning the future labour market into consideration from 2018-2019 to create a coherent picture of Denmark's strategy. The analysis contains documents from three meetings where the future labour market is discussed. It has not been possible to access multiple meetings, and there has been a lack of publicly available documents. In order to achieve higher reliability, the encodings extracted from the documents will be supplemented with the conducted interviews.

The first section presents the preliminary findings from the documents and provides evidence of the Danish strategy. The second section will elucidate *how* Denmark uses the norm entrepreneur strategy.

### 6.1 EPSCO Council meeting, 6 December 2018

The 6. December 2018 digitisation and robotisation were discussed on behalf on the steering note "*Social Aspects of Digitalisation and 'Digitalisation and Robotisation of Work'*" (Council of the European Union, 2018a). The main concern of the steering note applied to new forms of work and to what extent the social security system was able to adapt to these new forms of work. The Committee asked the ministers to: "*Wherever needed, Member States should take steps to ensure that workers have access to adequate social protection and incentives to participate in the social protection systems.*"(ibid.).

#### 6.1.2 The Danish Position

New forms of work disrupt the labour market, and many countries are challenged with long-term unemployment, to some extent, caused by digitalisation and robotisation (ibid.). The background papers prepared by the Employment Committee (EMCO)<sup>2</sup> highlights Denmark as a leading country due to their low unemployment rate (European Commission, 2018). Hence,

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<sup>2</sup> EMCO is the main advisory committee for Employment and Social Affairs Ministers in the Employment and Social Affairs Council (EPSCO) in the employment field.

Denmark does not “self-promote” them as a frontrunner, but is referred to by the committee. Denmark being a frontrunner is further elaborated by T. Jensen, who states that:

“All statistics specifying developments in various countries within areas such as: workforce, social security and well-being in the labour market, education, etc. places Denmark among the top three, ALWAYS, and on all parameters. There is no other country performing so well within all the different parameters” (Jensen, interview; author's translation).<sup>3</sup>

The Danish position is extracted through “Samlenotater” since no video session of the meeting is available. The Danish government supports the key conclusions of the committees on digitalisation and robotisation as:

“They focus on the Member States' efforts to organise the labour markets and social security systems to embrace technological development and new forms of employment (Folketinget, 2018a, author's translation).”<sup>4</sup>

Denmark puts forward the need for national reforms and stresses that the EU should have respect for national security systems (Folketinget, 2018a). Hence, Denmark emphasises the need to respect national policy, which is in line with the Danish democratic corporatism encouraging close cooperation with the social partners. Furthermore, it implies the quote that Denmark is concerned about sovereignty as they advocate room for different national approaches. Embracing other countries' approaches are arguably perceived as a normative fit, where Denmark praises norms that are already at the centre of attention in other countries.

Following the discussion of digitalisation and robotisation, adequate social protection for all persons employed and self-employed was discussed. According to the Commission, is there an increasing number of people in the EU who, due to their employment or self-employed status, do not have sufficient access to social protection (ibid.).

When discussing the concerns of the Commission regarding access to social protection, the Danish Government stated that:

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<sup>3</sup> All interviews are authors' translation.

<sup>4</sup> All “samlenotater” are authors' translation.”

“It is crucial for the government that the Commission proposal is not binding on the Member States and that the proposal does not interfere with the Member States' right to organize national social protection systems” (Folketinget, 2018a).

The Danish model and the close corporation with the social partners are once again identifying the Danish position towards Commission recommendations. It is not only highlighting the protection of the Danish corporatism but also the dualism towards the Danish membership where EU legislation within employment policies is not desired. The Danish government further notes:

“The government is already dealing with new and atypical forms of employment within the future labour market, this happens, among other things, under the auspices of the Disruption Council. (Folketinget, 2018a).

The Danish government highlights the Disruption Council established by the previous government (Regeringen, 2017) The Council aimed to meet the future labour market by discussing possible arrangements. The council was made up of ministers, government officials, business leaders and trade unionists (ibid.) According to Davidsen Denmark used a lot of resources to promote the Disruption Council and Danish strategies. He stated that:

“Denmark has spent a lot of time talking about the Disruption Council, especially the social partners role within the Disruption Council (...) “There is great interest in the Disruption Council abroad. Everybody wants to hear about the future of the work agenda. There has been a lot of interest from Germany, Finland, France, Portugal, Norway and the Netherlands” (Davidsen, interview).

Denmark arguably uses the Disruption Council as a positive input to the Danish approach and Danish norm advocacy. The emphasis of the Disruption Council can be seen as an attempt to focus on national initiatives and thereby promote domestic solutions both in terms of norm advocacy and a normative fit. Davidsen explains that there has been a considerable focus on the Disruption Council from abroad and several European ministerial delegations have visited the Disruption Council to gain an insight into the initiative. It must be interpreted as an attempt to convince others that Denmark takes the upcoming challenges seriously and that they have possible solutions for the encounters. In addition, the unique thing about the Disruption Council is that it consists of the government *and* the social partners. They have to argue that the best results are achieved through social dialogue, and it is emphasised that cooperation with the

parties must be respected. When I asked Davidsen about Denmark being a frontrunner within the future labour market, he responded: "*The Disruption Council has help to promote us as a frontrunner*" (Davidsen, interview). Additionally, Denmark emphasises itself as a leading country by the use of "*already dealing with new and atypical forms of employment.*" Denmark actively aims to take on the role of frontrunner. It can be argued that this has succeeded in part, when, as previously shown, both the EMCO Committee and the statistics refer to Denmark as a "priority country".

The Government further elaborates upon domestic initiatives by stating:

"At the same time, the government has adopted a change in the unemployment benefit system for self-employed persons, which makes it possible to combine employee and self-employment activities to obtain the right to unemployment benefits" (Folketinget, 2018a).

The Danish government mentioned concrete national policy initiatives striving to accommodate possible challenges. Hence, norm advocacy is addressed by presenting Danish solutions that, in the long-term, can be beneficial to other countries. Addressing successful national policy initiatives may arouse the interest of other countries that most likely will face the same challenges. It can, therefore, be argued that Denmark uses norm advocacy by accommodating possible challenges with domestic solutions beneficial to other member states. This is agreed upon by Anonymous interviewee1, who states that:

"Denmark is clearly trying to influence the discussions at ESPCO meetings by trying to portray concrete ways in which Denmark has addressed challenges. The discussions are often kind of "fluffy," and Denmark has tried to make it very concrete by specifying exactly what we have done to address these challenges" (Anonymously1, interview).

The final remark from the Danish government states that:

"The member states have the right to institute their social security system, and the ESPCO Council recommendation mustn't interfere with that right" (Folketinget, 2018a).

Denmark, once again, express concerns about by the member states right to organise their social protection systems, and a substantial distance from further integration is taken.



### 6.1.3 Summarizing

Denmark uses norm advocacy as national initiatives are emphasised. The story of the Disruption Council seeks to strengthen Denmark's role as a frontrunner advocating national policy initiatives and substantial autonomy of the social partners. The attempt to emerge as a frontrunner enables national policies to be taken more seriously at the European level, which is a necessity if norm advocacy shall be successful. The interest in the Disruption Council shows that this works, in part. Increased focus on the Danish "solution" may help to transfer Danish norms to the European level in terms of normative fit, where the Danes, in particular, have a great emphasis on respecting the dialogue with the social partners.

## 6.2 EPSCO Council meeting 24 October 2019

In recent years, there has been a major focus on how the Member States in the EU ensure the workforce's technological and digital skills, and how they can be adapted to the demands of the future labour market (Council of the European Union, 2019a). In 2016, the EPSCO Council adopted a recommendation on skills upgrades and new opportunities for adults, urging member states to strengthen adult skills, with a particular focus on those with the weakest abilities and those farthest away from the labour market (ibid.). The agenda also focuses on effective investment in education and lifelong learning. (Folketinget, 2019a).

The Finnish Presidency submitted a debate paper for the purpose of discussing a more strategic and coordinated approach to lifelong learning within the EU. Lifelong learning policies must be responsive to social and labour market needs and involve all relevant stakeholders, not least social partners. Learning opportunities must be broadly offered regardless of the individual's background and previous education. Qualification is a shared responsibility, shared between the individual, the public sector, and employers (Council of the European Union, 2019a). The Presidency refers to the Social Pillar by stating that:

"The European Pillar of Social Rights promotes the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning, as well as the right to receive support for training and reskilling" (ibid:2).

### 6.2.1 The Danish position

During the EPSCO meeting, ministers were asked to discuss life-long learning concerning the future labour market. The quotes are extracted from a video session of the meeting. The Danish minister stated:

“Denmark is one of the countries where most people participate in education. and we have a comprehensive vocational education and training system with close collaboration with the social partners” (Council of the European Union, 2019b).

Denmark takes the positions of a frontrunner within education, and outlines how Denmark has a strong educational system. The minister does not specifically point out domestic policies, but refers to the educational system in general, and it must be argued that the minister advocates Danish norms when he “praises” national policies. This is further elaborated upon by Danielsen, who, when asked how Denmark influences the EPSCO meetings, stated:

“There is no doubt that the more concrete you can be the more you can influence. So when we say: in Denmark we have done that, and that, and that, the more people listen (.....) we have reached the tripartite agreement on lifelong learning, there are some concrete measures that other countries could also think of” (Danielsen, interview).

From the highlighted quotes, one could argue that by being concrete and addressing successful initiatives, Denmark is positioning itself as a frontrunner while using norm advocacy to view Danish policies as desirable.

The minister further states:

“Finally, I believe that a responsive vocational training and education system will only happen if we cooperate closely with our social partners. They are the most able to ensure that provided possibilities are relevant for the labour market and that acquired competencies are useful for the individuals” (Council of the European Union, 2019b).

The minister implies the importance of close cooperation with social partners. It can be argued that the role of the parties is emphasised as part of promoting Danish norms and national policies. It can also be interpreted as a warning that national competencies should not be

changed and legislation at a European level are not necessary. The minister is thus trying to feature Denmark while making it clear that Denmark is *not* interested in legislation that may exceed national competencies. This is clear evidence of the dualistic approach placed at the centre of the integration dilemma. However, the clarification of the role of the parties may also refer to norm advocacy. This is complemented by Danielsen, who stated that:

“Other countries are envious of us with regard to our ability to have a very strong dialogue with the parties where, after all, they are at war in some of the other countries. The other countries have a hard time understanding it.... it's a cultural thing” (Danielsen, interview).

In his final remark, the minister stated:

“Chair, Denmark welcomes a more strategic and coordinated approach to lifelong learning in the EU, especially through sharing of best practices and lessons learnt. A strengthened cooperation should, of course, continue to be in full respect of national competencies, different labour market models and the autonomy of the social partners” (Council of the European Union, 2019b).

The sharing of best practices relates to the normative fit as it advocates shared interest in solving problems across the EU. The desire to share best practises can be perceived as a genuine attempt to shape the future labour market for the benefit of all member states; this is further elaborated upon by Danielsen, who stated that:

“The EU is a best practice club, where you say see how good we are, and then the others say we would also like to be this good, and that is how development occurs (...) There is no doubt about that having a high level is what drives others” (Danielsen, interview).

When the Danish government addresses the sharing of best practices, it emphasises both the desire to enter into a positive dialogue with other member states, accentuating their willingness to cooperate, while stressing national initiatives. In fear of repetition, it must be mentioned that the minister once again emphasises the role and national competencies of the parties in terms of democratic corporatism. Therefore, it cannot be emphasised enough how important it is for Denmark not to enter into full cooperation with the EU and how important national sovereignty to the Danish government who embraces the national sovereignty.

### 6.2.3 Summarising

The collected quotes from the speech held by the Danish Minister of Employment and the interview complies with the developed codes regarding Denmark acting as a norm entrepreneur. Denmark portrayed itself as a frontrunner and presents desirable national policies through norm advocacy. Thus, Denmark praises the common good in terms of sharing best practises, which, arguably, can be translated into creating a normative fit. But most notably, the importance of the role of social partners and respect for national competence is highlighted several times, embracing Democratic corporatism as well as the integration dilemma.

## 6.3 EPSCO Council meeting 10 December 2019

Based on the accession of the new Commission and the start of a new legislative period in the EU, the Finnish EU Presidency asked for a forward-looking debate in the EPSCO Council on EU regulation in the social and employment sphere. This included the EU's role, and opportunities for adapting the regulation to the rapid changes in areas such as climate, globalisation, migration and new technologies (Council of the European Union, 2019c). At the initiative of the Finnish EU Presidency, the Council held a political debate on the adaptation of EU regulation on social and employment to the future labour market, including challenges concerning implementation and possible legislative balances (ibid.).

The Finnish Presidency noted that the incoming Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, has identified minimum wages and terms of employment for workers in the platform economy as areas that need further attention. In the context of minimum wages, she highlighted the value of social dialogue between workers and unions - the people who know their sector and region best: *"Social dialogue and collective bargaining are important tools for reaching agreement on working conditions and wage setting. The right of platform workers to conduct collective bargaining is a growing issue"* (Council of the European Union, 2019c:3).

The desire for minimum wage is in line with the European pillar of social rights where minimum social rights are proclaimed, several of which are already part of existing law. In contrast, the EU and the Member States must implement others jointly. The social pillar helps to identify the measures to be taken to strengthen fundamental social rights (ibid.).

### 6.3.1 The Danish position

This meeting has no video footage of the ministers discussing the *“The future labour market and the EU's social and employment regulation”*. However, the Danish position towards the political debate is stated in *“samlenotater:”* *“The different labour and social models across the EU must be taken into account, and the role and autonomy of the social partners must be respected”* (Folketinget, 2019b). The Danish position is once again crystal clear when it comes to further EU regulation within the labour market. Denmark uses norm advocacy heavily concerning the autonomy of the social partners encouraging national respect. The word *“autonomy”* undoubtedly refers to disbelief against further EU integration, which certainly will be the result if EU adopts legislation concerning minimum wage. The Danish government denounces the proposal of a minimum wage by stating:

“The Danish government is therefore also opposed to a statutory minimum wage, and an upcoming EU minimum wage proposal mustn't challenge well-functioning national models” (Folketinget, 2019b).

The strong distancing from the proposal should be found within the Danish labour market model, where wages are not defined by legislation, but negotiated by the social partners. This is further elaborated upon by Jensen, who states that:

“We will not be dictated by rules, or anything, on how to regulate wages in Denmark. We are not even dictated to by the government. Why should we then be dictated by the EU Commission or the Council of Ministers? We simply deny that” (Jensen, interview).

The quotes strongly clarify the rejection of further EU regulation within the labour market, and one must ask how and why Denmark strives towards being a frontrunner when there is no desire of applying national policies to EU? Jensen clarifies the question by stating:

“An alliance has been established between the southern European and eastern European countries that want a minimum wage on the European level. To them we must say: Dear friends, it has not always been easy in Denmark. We have struggled too, and it has cost a lot to develop the system we have today. Do you know what you have to do? Take off your gloves and work for your future” (Jensen, interview).

This statement places a strong focus on how Denmark wants to contribute to sharing of best practices without compromising national legislation. Norm advocacy is in the absolute centre as national policies, and the construction of the Danish labour market is once again highlighted. Hence, the quotes embracing Denmark as a frontrunner with a labour market are desirable by other member states, and the Danish labour market is underlined. Still, it is also accentuated that Denmark does not want further legislation at the EU level. On the contrary, the desire is indeed to emerge as a country with solutions that others can implement. When I asked Danielsen about his opinion regarding further EU regulation, he stated: *"Social security systems should not be designed in a 'one-to one-model,' instead, ideas should be converted into the member states' own context, that is how the EU works"* (Danielsen, interview). This quote further embraces the idea of Denmark sharing best practises without having any initial desire of creating EU legislation within the labour market.

### 6.3.2 The Position of the minister

As no publicly-available documents of the EPSCO meeting concerning the discussion on minimum wages were available, an opinion piece written by the minister concerning the discussion on minimum wages at national level is employed (Altinget, 2020). The document is from a Danish newspaper, but the content has been shared with the European Commission related to a hearing regarding minimum wages (Anonymus1, interview). Arguably, this is the same opinion shared at EU level.

"In Denmark, wages and working conditions are agreed upon by employees and the companies themselves. This is what we know as the Danish model, where, as far as possible, we politicians do not interfere. The Danish model is the reason why we in Denmark have good wages, good working conditions, and the companies are more competitive because we allow the social partners to agree on wages and working conditions themselves" (Altinget, 2020; author's translation).<sup>5</sup>

The statement by the Danish minister arguably highlights Democratic corporatism by mentioning the role of the social partners. Hence, he does not only indicate the corporation with the partners, but also *how* the corporation has led to a strong labour market. It can be argued that the quote embraces norm advocacy by endorsing the Danish model, which is portrayed as a very desirable model. The Danish model is highlighted once again as the solution to the labour market challenges, as the minister elaborates:

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<sup>5</sup> All quotes from the opinion piece are authors' translation.

“This is, among other things, the reason why Danish employees - in contrast to the vast majority of other EU countries - get a fairer share of the growth, prosperity and productivity gains that are created. In other words, our model is one of the reasons why we do not have the same great inequality as other Western countries” (Altinget, 2020).

With this statement, the minister is stepping on his high horse, and it can be argued that the minister positions Denmark as a frontrunner by emphasising the desirable benefits that Denmark has compared to many other countries. The statement may sound a bit self-indulgent, but this can only be attributed to the desire to "seduce" others by arguing that the norms implemented in Denmark are precisely the ones desired by other member states. This is deepened by Denmark distancing itself from problems that exist in other countries, by stating, *"look what we are able to do, and we have the solutions."* Hence, it can also be understood as a warning of further integration, since it is stressed that it is *because* of national expertise that the labour market works so well, which the EU should not interfere with.

"The model has also managed to adapt to the free movement of EU - the social partners are constantly working hard to ensure that foreign workers get paid according to the agreements and work under safe conditions" (Altinget, 2020).

The minister uses Denmark's role as a frontrunner to promote Danish norms through norm advocacy, and with this quote, frames the Danish solution towards the future labour market as required within the spirit of the common good. Hence, national policies are presented as a normative fit, appropriate with the Union's norms in terms of a pleasant work environment and good working conditions. In his final remarks, the minister concludes: *"Secondly, we should work to strengthen the dialogue between employees and employers - both at the EU and individual Member States level"* (Altinget, 2020). The last quotes entail desirable actions taken by the EU and the member states, and the minister refers to endorsement of democratic corporatism, which should be embraced at the European level. Hence, Danish norms are advocated in terms of democratic corporatism while the minister dissociate from further European integration. The quote is also relatable to creating a normative fit when addressing the strengthening of the social dialog at a European level, something that the Social Pillars are very concerned with.

### 6.3.3 Summarising

The Danish minister positions Denmark as a frontrunner by endorsing the Danish labour market and Danish initiatives. Additionally, the roles of the social partners are embraced, and norm advocacy is used by portraying the Danish labour market as “the best” in the EU. It can be argued that the presentation of the Danish labour market aims to seduce others by providing solutions to common problems. In contrast, some might perceive the quotes as arrogant. Finally, the “normative fit” is central to this discussion as the minister points out how enhanced cooperation with the social partners can lead improve the conditions for the labour market for all.



## 6.4 How Denmark uses the norm entrepreneur strategy

When taking the previous sections into account, it becomes clear that Denmark evidently fulfils specific criteria within the norm entrepreneur strategy. It is not within the concern of this thesis to what extent Denmark actually *exerts* influence. Instead, it is of interest to investigate *how and to what extent* Denmark uses the strategy to increase influence. Hence, the definition of Grøn & Wivel must be included: "*Member states seeking influence in the EU will attempt to make other member states and/or institutions act in manner they would not otherwise have acted in*" (Grøn & Wivel, 2011:524).

The analysed documents outline that they *do* portray themselves as frontrunners within specific areas, and that they manage to present themselves as a frontrunner within the future labour market by highlighting national initiatives such as the Disruption Council. Denmark's role as a frontrunner is complimented by statistics and council conclusions that place Denmark at the top, compared to having a well-organised labour market. It can be argued that it reinforces Denmark's ability to promote itself as a frontrunner. Denmark's position is, according to Jensen, achieved through Denmark's positive attitude towards future challenges:

"Digitising and modernising of the labour market is often perceived as a threat, but you could also see it as an opportunity. Denmark has never feared the "threats", and we do not sit and weep because jobs are lost due to digitalisation. NEVER. Instead, we say, something else has to happen (...) The French weep for months if they have to close business" (Jensen, interview).

He further elaborates: "*Yes, changes are happening, and we have to be part of that*" (Jensen, interview).

Denmark embraces the role as a frontrunner by stating "we are not afraid of the future; it is full of possibilities and not limitations," and this is shown through national initiatives. The assumption of the position as a frontrunner is thus complemented by Björkdahl's statement about the importance of *practising what you preach*; this is also evident when discussing the role of social partners. Denmark clearly emphasises the importance of good cooperation, and it is often made clear that legislation should not interfere with the partners' work, thereby promoting national initiatives as potential solutions to other countries. Taken the position as a frontrunner allows for the promotion of desired norms through norm advocacy.

Norms are more accessible to embrace by others if they are already successful within national policies (Björkdahl, 2008). Denmark uses norm advocacy multiple times by framing national initiatives as solutions to the problems of concern and must thereby be the criteria within the norm entrepreneur strategy that are used the most. According to Danielsen, Denmark is "pushing" Danish norms to the European level through the Commission. Additionally, contact with the Commission is not only concerned with positioning Denmark as a frontrunner or to advocate norms, but also to prevent further EU legislation. Danielsen elaborates:

"The Commission looks at us and some other countries and says; "okay, they probably have some very clever solutions in some areas." And in general, the Commission is receptive towards the Danish model because we are so rich and skilled and have low unemployment and high mobility; many of the things other member states would like" (Danielsen, interview).

He further states that the Commission is the legislative body within the Union where most resources are distributed: *"Objectively, we are best to promote our self to the Commission (...) they have the initiative right, so we have always spent an incredible amount of effort working towards the Commission"* (Danielsen, interview). The statement from Danielsen is agreed upon by Anonymous interviewee1, who states that: *Denmark participates in a lot of committees, which we use as an opportunity to present the Danish model"* (Anonymus1, interview). This is further agreed upon by anonymous interviewee2.

The interviews could not further specify exactly how Denmark tries to influence the Commission, since it varies from case to case (Anonumusly1). Anonymous2 stipulates that the contact with the Commission comes from various Danish institutions and civil servants. In some cases, the contact is administrated by ministry attaché, other times, it is directly through the ministry, and most times, it is through the Danish EU representation and working groups (Anonymously2).

All interviewees point at the Commission as the primary source concerning implementing the Danish strategy. Arguably, Denmark is implementing the strategy within the Council of Ministers through EPSCO Council meetings; this is shown when analysing the discovered documents. The contact with the Commissions helps to establish a picture of Denmark as a frontrunner. At the same time, the Danish minister implements normative fit and democratic corporatism; this is shown in the quotes highlighted in the previous section.

Denmark uses the EPSCO meetings to influence the Council of Ministers by turning small state disadvantages into advantages. According to Wivel (2010), small states should promote norms embracing the greater good within the Union; this goes hand in hand with the normative fit. Denmark is then able to strengthen its position within the Council of Ministers by advocating a normative fit. As discussed above, Denmark uses norm advocacy heavily by promoting norms as a normative fit. Furthermore, small states stand a better chance if they manage to position themselves as a frontrunner. Hence, Denmark's role as a frontrunner "fits" within the theoretical framework of how to implement norm entrepreneur strategy within the Council of Ministers.

Danielsen further elaborates on the contact with the Commission and the Council of Ministers by stating:

"One of the few strengths we have is the advantage of being a few. All civil servants working with EU questions across the Danish ministries know each other. It is effortless to share knowledge, and we have a much better holistic understanding than other countries. We are a small state and can never be as big as Germany, so we have to use our disadvantages as an advantage" (Danielsen, interview).

The statement encapsulates Grøn & Wivel's smart state strategy by specifying how small state disadvantages become advantages. It must be argued that Denmark, according to the statements, are well aware of small states achieving influence within the two legislative bodies; the Council of Ministers and the Commission. When taking the definition of influence into account Denmark is using the bodies to promote norms through norm advocacy, normative fit, and democratic corporatism to convince other EU states how to act in regard to the future labour market.

The collected data specifies how Denmark promotes domestic norms with particular focus on the role of the social partners. The cooperation with the social partners is strongly advocated by highlighting concrete domestic initiatives prepared in association with the social partners. It is debatable whether it is the cooperation with the social partners that creates the basis for the dualistic approach towards the EU. The Danes use a lot of resources to accentuate the Danish model while stating countless times that further integration is not desirable, as respect for national initiatives must be respected. It must be discussed if Denmark's strategy of being a norm entrepreneur is employed to prevent further EU regulation by advocating norms, which embraces respect for national competencies. If this is the case, Denmark uses its position as a frontrunner to advocate norms that strengthen Denmark's national approach on the labour market.

When I asked Anonnumysly1 whether Denmark is a norm setter, he stated:

"Yes! Despite the bumps, generally, Denmark is seen as a norm setter or frontrunner. There is great recognition in the EU that one system cannot just be transferred from one country to another." But many countries strive for social dialogue" (Anonymus1, interview).

Davidson also mentions interest within the Danish social dialogue: *"The fact that we work together (with social partners) is very concrete, and there has been a lot of interest in that"* (Davidson, interview). The statements outline how democratic corporatism and norm advocacy, according to the interviews, position Denmark as a norm setter. The contrary, the desire to avoid further integration, is enfolded in the desire for a normative fit. Denmark emphasise domestic initiatives as possible solutions for other countries; this is done by encouraging knowledge sharing and sharing of best practices and by arguing against further European legislation. According to Danielsen, however, the Danish approach should not be seen as selfish, but precisely as being for the greater good: *"Denmark is a member of the EU because of the community, and Danish civil servants are working towards the greater good."*(Danielsen, interview).

However, this approach is not entirely shared by anonymously1, who emphasises that Denmark, at times, is perceived as lacking solidarity. He refers to Denmark's opposition to further legislation within the labour market, but also to the Commission's presentation of the Social Pillar. As stated in Section (2.3.2), Denmark does not share an exceptional level of enthusiasm for the pillar, which may cause Denmark to appear unsoldered. He elaborates: *"The Social Pillar is not legislative, but a compass for labour market regulations that we are used to being regulated through the social partners"* (Anonymus1, interview). He further elaborates:

"The Danish scepticism towards the Social Pillar challenged Denmark's position as a frontrunner in the field of employment. There were a number of countries that simply could not understand why Denmark was so sceptical about the Social Pillar. The Commission presents a proposal for a Social Pillar inspired by the Nordic welfare states, why can't Denmark support it? How can Denmark, however, oppose other countries for raising their social standards in the areas of the labour market to a level that is closer to the Scandinavian level? (Anonymus1, interview).

### 6.4.1 Summarising

It is interesting to discuss if the Danish strategy is undermined to a lack of solidarity. According to Anonymous1, Anonymous2, Danielsen and Jensen refers the Commission to the Scandinavian welfare model when introducing the Social Pillar. Hence, Denmark succeeded in taking on the position as a frontrunner, which mainly has been accomplished through norm advocacy. However, the lack of solidarity towards other countries is arguably creating a spot on Denmark's reputation. Hence, the strategy of creating a normative fit is damaged, as Denmark favours democratic corporatism and national sovereignty. The Danish dualism is highlighted in this dilemma, and the integration dilemma becomes essential since Denmark does not wish to be integrated further within the labour market. Denmark is thus able to advocate for national solutions which are presented as desirable throughout the EU. Denmark offers solutions in the form of best practice sharing and knowledge sharing, but not as a genuine desire for more EU legislation. Unlike Denmark, the Commission and other EU countries are interested in more legislation in this area, and it can be considered selfish and arrogant that Denmark will not "share." This is especially highlighted in the section on minimum wage (6.3). One can, therefore, question whether the Danish integration dilemma counteracts the possibility of influence. Hence, the integration dilemma is well known in the EU, and was referred to as the "Danish Paradox" by former Labour market Commissioner Marianne Thyssen, who questioned the Danish approach towards the Social Pillar (Anonymous1 & Anonymous2).

## 7. Concluding remarks

This thesis aimed to investigate how a small state can benefit from its immediate disadvantages and thereby, how a small state can seek to counter the inferior opportunities their size brings regarding European influence. In terms of the future labour market within the EU, the analysed material presents a reasonable conclusion, as to how Denmark uses the norm entrepreneur strategy - to turn small into smart.

The investigative result of the collected documents and interviews, all support the necessary criteria and can be regarded as cornerstones within the norm entrepreneur strategy, which is employed by Denmark within EPSCO Council meetings. Denmark operates the position as a frontrunner within the future labour market, not only through self-promotion, but also by being referred to as a benchmark country. The subject examination outlines how Denmark, through several times, uses norm advocacy by framing national policy initiatives as desirable solutions; this is mainly achieved through accentuating democratic corporatism and by embracing the role of the social partners and the Danish labour market model. Additionally, the Danish model and the close cooperation with the social partners is referred to as a normative fit, where labour market conditions and sharing of best practices is presented within the interest of the Union.

The norm entrepreneur strategy is mainly implanted through the Council of Ministers and the Commission. According to interviewees, Denmark acts smart by embracing the disadvantages of being few, by utilizing its numbers to form close relational cooperation's, which is valued as a beneficial and holistic approach. According to Danielsen, Danish civil servants are working towards the greater good, which can also be a way to implement a normative fit within the Council of Ministers. However, most resources are delegated towards influencing the Commission, due to their initiatives power. Denmark participates in many committees embracing their role as an activity leader. A close connection with the Commission enables Denmark to promote their position as a frontrunner, since the Commission refers to Denmark as a benchmark country with a well-functioning labour market.

It must be noted that there are no obstacles for larger states to make use of this strategy. It should therefore not be considered accessible only to small states, but as a strategic tool, small states can make use of.

Future research could explore a relatable subject, that investigates if Denmark implements the strategy within other areas, one example could be within the EU development policy. It could also be of great interest to examine if and how the findings of this thesis could be applicable to other small member states. It could be fascinating to explore other Scandinavian member states with similar labour market models. It would be expected that nations applying the same strategy, would provide various results. This was elaborated upon by anonymous interviewee Anonymous1, who explained that Denmark is often perceived as hawkish within EPSCO meetings, due to the straightforward appearance of the minister. In contrast, Sweden is considered to be more polite and friendly, even though it often shares the same views as Denmark (Anonymous1, interview). The norm entrepreneur strategy could also be applied to other policy areas where other member states are perceived as a frontrunner. One example could be Sweden and its promotion of feminist foreign policy or environmental policy.

Therefore, this conclusion presents how Denmark uses the norm entrepreneur strategy within the EPSCO Council, to exert influence. However, the outcome also presents the Danish dualistic approach towards the membership of the Union embedded in the Danish opt-outs incorporating the integration dilemma.

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## Interviews

*Troels Blicher Danielsen*, Head of Division at the Ministry of Employment. Advises the minister on EU questions. Assists the minister at EPSCO Council meetings.

*Nicolas Davidsen*, Chief Advisor at the Ministry of Employment. Advises the minister on the future labour market. Assisted the former minister within meetings at the Disruption Council.

*Torben D. Jensen*, Labour Market Policy Consultant at "Fagbevægelsesens Hovedorganisation" (The Trade Union Central Organisation). A member of the European Trade Confederation (ETUC) and works in close cooperation with the Danish government with regards to protecting the interest of the Danish labour market.

*Anonymous1*, Chief Advisor within the Ministry of Employment. Advises the minister with regards to EPSCO Council meetings.

*Anonymous2*, special consultant within the Ministry of Employment. Close cooperation with the Danish EU representation in Brussels. This interview has not been recorded due to technical problems. Quotes will not be applied from this interviewee, but it will be specified when the interviewee agreed upon quotes from other interviewees.

## **Apendix 1: Topic Guide**

### **Presentation questions**

1. What is your position?
3. For how long have you worked with in your position?
4. What are your main tasks?

### **The future of Work**

1. How does the Danish government address the future labour market?
2. How are Danish initiatives addressed within EPSCO Council meetings?
3. Is Denmark actively promoting domestic initiatives?

### **The European Pillar Of Social Rights**

1. What is the Danish opinion towards the Social Pillar
2. How do other countries perceive Denmark's position towards the Pillar?
3. Does Denmark have close cooperation with the Commission?

### **The Danish labour market model**

1. What is the Danish model?
2. Is Denmark actively promoting the Danish model?
3. Is Denmark actively promoting close corporation with the social partners?
4. Is there a Danish paradox?

### **EPSOC Council**

1. Do Denmark uses its position within the future labour market to dominate EPSCO meetings?
2. How do you think other countries perceive the Danish position?
3. Is Denmark positioning itself as a frontrunner?