

Identity Through Vision

An Ontological Security Approach to the Nordic Council's
“Our Vision 2030”

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the Nordic Council constructs and employs narrative within its implementation of Agenda 2030 as a means of strengthening its ontological security and collective sense of self. This approach implies that security is not only a product of material protection rather also a product of interpretive coherence. The Agenda 2030 is treated as a tool that frames complex policy questions into manageable categories and processes. While Agenda 2030 is outwardly framed as a roadmap for sustainable development, the Nordic Council's interpretation of the agenda reveals additional motives tied to safeguarding regional identity and cohesion. By applying a conceptual framework derived from ontological security theory, this study identifies the narratives embedded in Nordic policy documents, their socio-psychological foundations, and their influence on how the Nordic region understands and reproduces its internal sense of "Nordicness."

Using textual analysis through an interpretative methodological approach, the thesis explores how specific narratives shape the Council's actions, priorities, and self-presentation. This combination of methods highlights the essential role that narrative plays both in policy formation and in shaping public perceptions of the Nordic region's values, responsibilities, and global positioning. A detailed examination of several narrative strands, such as the Nordic Council as a frontrunner in sustainability, a guardian of shared Nordic values, and a promoter of inclusive and resilient societies, allows for deeper insight into how these storylines work to reduce intra-Nordic uncertainty and reinforce a stable collective identity. At the same time, critical lenses are applied, given the doubt that narratives that stabilise may also oversimplify. Namely, by introducing goals as a win-win, the narratives may reduce the visibility of trade-offs and conflicts. Thus, stabilisation efforts are strongly dependent on credibility and how the audience interprets the success of implementing promises into their everyday lives.

The findings indicate that these narratives operate simultaneously as external policy tools and internal stabilising mechanisms, helping mitigate ontological insecurity that traditional security approaches often overlook. Consequently, ontological security theory proves particularly valuable for understanding the Nordic Council's broader security environment, shedding light on how the region cultivates continuity, belonging, and self-assurance through its Agenda 2030 narrative.

Key words: The Nordic Council, Agenda 2030, ontological security, anxiety, biographical narrative, narrative analysis, international relations

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1 Background

In an increasingly interconnected global landscape matters of identity, security and feeling of belonging have gained great significance. This shift matters since it shapes how political agents organise priorities, interpret disruptions and crises and most importantly the way in which they implement change without threatening continuity and stability. For regional actors, such as the Nordic Council, challenges lie in creating, maintaining and articulating a coherent idea of identity which resonates with the region as a whole. Some might argue that this balance of identity has been found due to the peaceful existence of the Nordic region. The Nordics are often admired for their international roles as peacekeepers, innovative collaborators and model global citizens. They have even been called international “do-gooders”, even though it might appear somewhat morally superior (Puyvallée and Bjørkdahl, 2021). While the do-gooder status is clearly something positive, it may also create high expectations to live up to. When a region is framed as a model, it is expected to act like one even during change and this way the positive reputation may become a vulnerability that can turn policy failures into identity failures.

The idea that the Nordic countries create a uniquely peaceful region has deep historical roots, closely connected to their shared institutional framework. The creation of the Nordic Council in 1952 which marked the formal effort to create inter-parliamentary cooperation among Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden in the post-war period. The Helsinki Treaty of 1962 deepened this cooperation and laid out the legal principles for policy coordination, joint consultations and common values. The institutional framework was further broadened by the establishment of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1971. This institutional framework created a formal channel for governments to cooperate and to speak with a unified voice. Through these developments, the Nordic collaborative structure helped to create a shared identity that highlights the region’s peaceful, collaborative and normatively strong commitments (Tuominen, Kronlund 2025:6). It is important to bear in mind that institutionalism doesn’t automatically produce unity. Institutionalism can make the collaboration, which derives from repeated routines, feel normal and thus produce a sense of unity. Therefore, the existing institutional framework matters, not only for its collaborative nature but for the act of performing together.

Deriving from Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, Finland and Sweden joined NATO. This exemplifies the increasing importance of security, stability and identity. This shift shows how sovereign states interpret peace as something which is not static anymore, rather it is something that one’s security should be organised. Thus, not only sovereign states have had to recourse their actions but international actors such as the EU have taken actions in order to maintain their

stability. Examples of these are for instance the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and as argued in this thesis, the Nordic Council's Agenda 2030. The NATO shift additionally implies that the Nordic peace is not just a stable inheritance, rather narratives can be rapidly reinterpreted when the environment changes. In this sense, policy changes become also changes to identity. In the face of apparent tensions, the sense of continuity, stability and stable identity become increasingly more important in order for one to feel secure both as an individual and in their collective. This concept is referred to as ontological security, which captures the security of the self and stable sense of identity. When actors experience uncertainty which threatens their stability, they become unsure in their actions and decisions on which dangers to confront, thus experiencing ontological insecurity (Mitzen, 2006:344-346). Mitzen argues that ontological security is achieved when individuals have clear and confident expectations about how the social world around them works and this way freeing them to act meaningfully and sustaining a continuous sense of who they are even when uncertainties occur (Ibid.). Therefore, there is a need for actions that stabilize the sense of self and feeling of belonging (Ibid.).

Given that political tensions don't usually appear overnight, actors are expected to take precautionary cautions in order to estimate the future line of course, at least to a certain extent. The fact that the Nordic region has been seen as a unified, peaceful region for many years, must be the result of some work. The policy document adopted by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2019, aims to shape the region by 2030 into the most sustainable, egalitarian, safest and innovative region in the world. These big goals, which are gathered in related policy documents of *Our Vision 2030* can thus be interpreted as means of stabilisation. Visions tend to shift political promises and debates into management by translating burning questions into goals, indicators and implementation routines. And the way in which this management is done can be stabilising but it can also produce disappointments and credibility loss. How the Nordic Council's narrative is built, how it reflects their common identity and whether it is used as an aim to stabilise their ontological security are undefined. Therefore, this thesis focuses on the underlying meanings of that document and the possible contribution to their stability with regard to identity, feeling of belonging and stability.

1.1 Purpose and Research Question

Due to increasing global insecurity, the Nordic Council adopted a 2030 agenda to strengthen the region. The purpose of this research is to analyse how *Our Vision 2030* constructs and communicates concerns related to Nordic identity and ontological security. Therefore, the analysis treats *Vision 2030* as a policy and performance. The analysis focuses not only on what the policy documents propose

but emphasises the way in which they manage to produce legitimacy and coherence within the region by using specific moral and political language.

By analysing the scope, objectives and enforcement methods of this policy, a question arises as to what extent and in which ways their narrative enhances ontological security in the Nordics. Through this analysis, useful insights and measures are acquired into understanding what kind of identity is being portrayed, what uncertainties are implicitly addressed and how the collective narrative is communicated. The central concern is how the Nordic Council's Vision seeks to maintain a stable and continuous sense of Nordic identity in times of global uncertainty. This thesis doesn't assume that the Vision and the Nordic identity are automatically contributing to stabilisation. Instead, the research asks what kind of anxieties are managed through different narratives. The purpose is thus both interpretive, by mapping meanings, and critical, by examining their consequences. To address this concern, the following research question will be answered:

How does the Nordic Council's Our Vision 2030 policy construct and communicate Nordic identity, and how does it support the Nordic Region's ontological security?

By first identifying different narratives in the Nordic Council's documents and then examining their input in enhancing the Council's ontological security the thesis will systematically analyse the role of narratives in the documents to define key aspects that enhance the Nordic Council's ontological security while diminishing existing anxieties. This thesis additionally assumes that ontological security is not a product of just one narrative but of an ecosystem of narratives that reinforce each other. When aspects of for instance sustainability, integration and competitiveness are put together the identity becomes more resilient but also more dependent on other sectors and policy areas.

1.2 Study Significance

This thesis firstly aims to address the empirical gap of the existing scholarship of ontological security studies and non-state actors. By examining the Nordic Council, this research gives insights into how the Nordic identity is perceived within today's global uncertain times and thus contributes to a more balanced understanding of the Nordic Council and its stability. An important contribution is to illustrate how non-sovereign, supranational agents can act as security-providers despite having the military authority. By organising meaning, these actors can produce routines, common goals and moral understanding that connects the region and their citizens.

Having the Nordics as an object of analysis is valuable because it stresses how stability may be pursued through soft governance instruments and means. If

narrative and the routines they create become key tools for one's security, it suggests that identity may operate through administrative and communicative practices. Another contribution of this study is to show how regional, supranational identities and their narratives intersect with global governance logic. The Vision isn't only meant for the Nordic citizens rather it aims to position itself as a model and a global actor. This outward projection can thus affect the internal interpretation and overall cohesion by linking the regional identity to reputational aspects and external recognition. This study also addresses a broader question of how communities try to secure themselves in an era in which crises are overlapping. When uncertainty turns into a chronic stage of being, visions and plans can transform into narrative technologies for coping with continuous instability.

Additionally, the study contributes to a broader debate of ontological security by demonstrating that actors' identities are a construction of multiple factors which are not tied to a individual, rather contributing to a common feeling of belonging, same values and sense of continuity. Most importantly, the significance of this study is in shedding light on the Nordic Council as possible creators of stability and ontological security. This way more analytical insights are given into how non-state actors are interpreted through ontological security lenses.

1.3 Method

This thesis adopts an ontological security approach, primarily focusing on the construction and communication of Nordic identity within the Our Vision 2030 Policy framework. The ontological security approach is chosen given the fact that it allows the examination of how actors sustain a stable sense of collective self and identity even within times of uncertainty and change. This means that the thesis approaches language as constructive rather than descriptive. In practice this means asking how categories of integration and sustainability for instance are portrayed as identity makers and in which ways these define the Nordic values and what the region stands for. This way, instead of focusing on what the policies claim or aim to achieve, the focus lies in on how the meanings are produced and stabilised in policy language.

The study follows an interpretative textual and narrative analysis of specifically chosen Nordic Council of Ministers policy documents. An important aspect which is analysed is (1) how the documents normalise certain futures and (2) frame certain threats but also crucial is (3) what they propose administratively, such as routines, coordination mechanisms and cooperation structures. The theoretical lens of ontological security theory in international relations are particularly the works of Jennifer Mitzen (2006) and Catarina Kinnvall (2020).

Collectively these scholars conceptualise ontological security as the fundamental need for a stable, predictable and coherent sense of self, upholding routines and social practices that reduce existential uncertainty. Thus, within this framework, the Nordic Council's *Our Vision 2030* serves as a discursive space where the Nordic Council expresses and preserves collective identity and stability. By utilizing textual analysis in the form of an interpretative approach, the consideration of material security is left to a minimal and the focus is shifted to the symbolic and existential factors of identity reproduction. The selection of this method is justified given that textual analysis allows the interpretation of data's ideological meaning in a deeper and broader context (Halperin and Heath, 2017:376). Additionally, this method aligns with ontological security framework, which focuses on biographical narratives and the construction of a coherent sense of self (Giddens, 1991:39-40 and Steele 2008:6).

Completing this ontological lens, this thesis also draws on narrative theory and explores certain aspects such as temporality and future-oriented narratives, narrative's foregrounding as well as the role of audience and credibility. By applying interpretative textual analysis this thesis will recognise that policy documents function as narratives (Halperin and Heath, 2017:376). Thus, the thesis will draw on the underlying narration of the Nordic Council's narratives and examine to what extent the different narratives can aim at alleviating intra-Nordic anxieties. Rather than treating narrative analysis as a separate method, these concepts of narratives are treated as sensitising tools within the interpretative textual analysis. While policy documents don't only describe reality they can also be seen as tools in constructing it by means of invoking shared values, highlighting desired features and contrasting the region within broader global dynamics. This combination of ontological security and narrative theory allows the thesis to use a dual interpretative framework. Namely, one addressing why there is need for identity stabilisation, drawing on ontological needs and the other on how this is done, drawing on discursive performance. Therefore, the core methods used in this thesis are interpretative textual and narrative analysis, with the discursive performance taking OS studies as a baseline. From this perspective the *Our Vision 2030* policy and associated additional documents are examined. This layered approach allows this thesis to investigate the policy's intentions and the institutional reproduction of its identity narrative in their communications.

1.4 Materials

The materials used for this thesis include a comprehensive set of policy and institutional texts from the Nordic Council, given their relevance to the Nordic Council's 2030 agenda. The data was collected from the Nordic Council's official website in order to remain authentic and in order to gain the most accurate and relevant data. The primary materials used in this thesis are the *Our Vision 2030*

declaration (2019), Nordic Programme for Agenda 2030, Programme Description 2017-2020 (2017), The Nordic region – towards being the most sustainable and integrated region in the world, Action Plan for 2021 to 2024 (2020), Guidelines for involving civil society in our work relating to Our Vision 2030 (2021), Co-operation Programme for Regional Development and Planning 2025-2030 (2024). Together these documents build a narrative chain. First the declaration introduces the purpose, the programme description and the action plan introduce concrete routines based on the purpose after which the civil society guidelines strengthen the Nordic Council's legitimacy. This trajectory enables traceability of the identity.

In more detail, the first document is the declaration itself, which functions as the foundational political vision statement of the agenda. Adopted by the Nordic prime ministers and the Nordic Council of Ministers, it stresses the shared long-term identity claim where the Nordic Region will become “the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030” Our Vision 2030 declaration 2019, p.1). Additionally, this document establishes the moral and symbolic tone of the upcoming instruments. The Nordic Programme for Agenda 2030- Programme Description 2017-2020 in turn is an implementation-oriented framework. By strongly focusing on institutional coordination, supporting for the UN sustainability goals, and participation of the region as a whole, it offers an additional layer which will function as a further support for the upcoming efforts. The Action Plan of 2021-2024 in turn translates the vision's goals into concrete actions of 12 objectives, whereas the Guidelines for involving civil society in work relating to Our Vision 2030 establish formal involvement mechanisms to ensure the activation of individuals and groups. Lastly the Co-operation Programme for Regional Development and Planning 2025-2030 is a more specific sector-divided document which outlines the political goals and priorities for 2025-20230. These documents combined provide insight both into the construction and the ongoing reinforcement of the Council's narrative of regional identity and security. The temporal focus of the thesis spans from the adoption of Our Vision 2030 in 2019 to the most recent communications of 2024. This enables the analysis to trace discursive developments and possible shifts in the articulation of the Nordic identity and their security. Therefore, this study is qualitative and interpretative in nature. By using these materials and measures the purpose is to enhance the understanding of how institutional narratives operate as mechanisms of ontological security by shaping collective identity, reducing uncertainty and preserving a stable Nordic self in a shifting global context.

1.5 Operationalization

Given the chosen method and material, this thesis applies a narrative framing coding framework, which allows the identification of different frames on narratives that the Nordic Council utilizes in its Agenda 2030 related documents. Since narratives play a crucial role in shaping an entity's sense of ontological security, examining the motives and influence of these narratives helps clarify how a collective sense of self is strengthened. Through the content analysis, this study examines how meaning, identity and security are linguistically and symbolically produced. The purpose here is to expose underlying patterns of meaning and to illustrate how the Nordic Council constructs ontological security through its narratives of regional identity and cooperation. Drawing on methodological approaches used in previous ontological security research, this framework is well-suited for uncovering how security, identity and meaning are constructed and reproduced in policy texts. Analysing the material requires systematic coding and thematic analysis of the text. The structure of the operationalization is divided into 4 separate categories of distinct narratives. This division of the categories was the result of first thoroughly reading all the chosen Agenda 2030 related material which consists of the above mentioned 4 documents. By first identifying key concepts, recurring formulations and thematic clusters in the Agenda 2030 material, the relevant narrative patterns can be grouped and analysed accordingly. By identifying and dividing frequently recurring notions the following themes were identified: (1) Nordic unity through integration and borderless everyday life, (2) green transition as shared mission and moral leadership, (3) competitiveness through innovation, knowledge and digital integration and (4) social sustainability through welfare, equality, trust, culture and inclusive participation. The first category focuses on how the narratives manage to establish Nordic unity through emphasizing mobility, borderlessness of the region and the removal of obstacles. In this section, an emphasis is given to the 'we' vs. 'other' references. The second category of green transition will look into the notions of the transition based on existential and moral responsibilities. In addition to framing sustainability as something compatible with the region's prosperity and welfare, the notion of urgency and temporality is stressed. Thirdly, a specific focus will be laid on competitiveness narratives, where lifelong learning and technological change and digitalization are mentioned, whereas the fourth theme of social sustainability and cohesion aspects of democracy, values, language and culture will be emphasized and explored.

1.6 Delimitations

The scope of the thesis is limited to the official, top-level discourse documented by the Nordic Council and affiliated institutions. No other media perspectives or citizen perspectives are included. This selection is done because that these texts most directly express the institution's intended narrative and measures when it comes to their collective identity and its narrative. However, these documents

won't capture how the policy and overall identity are received and interpreted by the public or let alone other actors. This means that the analysis will only reflect the intended narrative of the Nordic Council as an institution. Other perspectives are deliberately excluded in order to ensure a coherent qualitative discourse analysis aligned with the thesis' objectives. The temporal frame from 2019 to 2024 captures both the introduction and implementation of Our Vision 2030, allowing the analysis of changes in the Council's portrayal.

1.7 Outline

This thesis consists of three investigative chapters , with the findings summarized in a concluding chapter. Following this introductory chapter, chapter two will represent current relevant literature on this topic, which touches upon ontological security, narratives in a broader sense and then narrowed down to a regional level as well as narratives' role in security. This chapter establishes the ground for identifying the key narratives within the chosen material. By identifying the main narrative themes of (1) Nordic unity through integration and borderless everyday life, (2) green transition as shared mission and moral leadership, (3) competitiveness through innovation, knowledge and digital integration and (4) social sustainability through welfare, equality, trust, culture and inclusive participation, the third chapter lays a solid ground for further analysis, which chapter four will focus on. Given the chosen focus areas, chapter four establishes different narratives which dominate and contribute to the Nordic Council's ontological security. Subsequently, by the analysis of integration, green transition, competitiveness and social sustainability narratives, the concluding chapter establishes key findings and answers the research question presented above.

2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This section will introduce the most prominent literature regarding the scope and theoretical framework of ontological security. Additionally, the level of examination is narrowed down and explained at the regional level of the Nordic Council. The literature reviewed in this section was gathered through academic databases. Given that the literature on Nordic identity and ontological security is limited, some aspects of the European Union's (EU) ontological security will be added in order to broaden the understanding of the self away from sovereign states. This will allow the thesis' further analysis to draw conclusions similar to the literature covering the EU.

2.1 Ontological Security and Narratives

Over the last two decades, Ontological Security Studies (OSS) have gained prominence in international relations, establishing an interpretative framework for understanding how actors seek to create and maintain a coherent sense of self (Colley and Van Noort 2022:1). The origins of ontological security theory lie in the work of sociologist Anthony Giddens, and in the works of psychiatrist Roland Laing, both who studied how identity and stability is dependent on one's security of being. By further expanding these foundations, OSS has adapted these ideas to understanding not only with individuals' but also states' and other regional actors' intentions to secure a stable sense of identity in their relation with others (Giddens, 1991:39). Within this perspective, sense of security is not limited to material threats but expands to existential needs, referring to continuity, stable sense of self and predictability within their area of influence. This indicates that insecurities and instabilities can be a product of ambiguity as much a product of danger.

A key contribution to the OSS comes from Brent J Steele's who argues that states may at times act in ways which risk their physical security. This drive, deriving from deeper self-identity needs, exemplifies more humanitarian, moral and value-based motives as strategies states use to maintain a coherent sense of self over time (Steele 2008:2-3). Through these arguments Steele integrates self-identity into broader security debates, revealing how identity preservation can steer state actions in ways which challenge traditional expectations of rational behaviour.

Other important contributions in the field of OSS emphasize anxiety by drawing on Kleinian psychoanalytical traditions in terms of how well subjects manage tensions and existential anxiety. Gellwitzki argues that thinking of ontological (in)security as a position highlights the unconscious process which influences whether anxiety makes people respond defensively and rigidly or constructively and ethically (Gellwitzki 2025:121). In other words, according to Gellwitzki, once being in a state of ontological security actors are able to act in constructive and fair ways, instead of assuming that security leads to aggressive politics (Ibid.).

Despite the various takeaways of the nature of the OSS, at the centre of the OSS approach lies the premise that the sense of self emerges and is shaped by narratives. Namely, one's self-perception is strongly shaped by social interactions and the interpretative stories which shape the understanding of self. Holm and Steele emphasize that narration of self is a crucial component of ontological security (Holm and Steele, 2020:322). Therefore, narratives provide meaning by framing experiences. Accordingly, this thesis focuses on how narratives are constructed and mobilized within Nordic Council's Our Vision 2030 policy context, where Nordic identity and mission intersects. In order to conceptualize narrative in the Nordic security environment, this thesis draws on Colley and Van Noort (2022):

"A narrative is temporally and casually connected sequence of events, selected and valued as meaningful for a particular audience. It is a mode of discourse which concerns how events play out of time." (Colley and Van Noort 2022:21).

This conceptualization enriches the analysis by introducing the temporal dimension of narratives and the notion of possibility to do better in the future. Seeing narratives as future-oriented, they can describe what could be based on what has happened or been in the past. Thus biographical narratives often use past as a source of justification (Colley and Van Noort 2022:1).

Despite narratives referencing the past as justification, the selection of past events and their value depends greatly on the audience's expectations. Therefore, it becomes relevant to research the Nordic Council's narrative, which bases their legitimacy on shared memories of war, peacebuilding and integration. Additionally, it is established that credible and engaging speakers play a significant role in a narrative's level of persuasion (Colley and Van Noort 2022:3-4). Their persuasive power also depends on coherent plotting, emotionally rich stories that connect with prior beliefs and overarching cultural myths that the audience already use to make sense of the world (Ibid.).

Building on this, the concept of strategic narratives shares a crucial assumption, namely, narratives succeed to persuade only when they resonate with the audience's interpretative framework (Colley and Van Noort 2022: 23). For the Nordic Council this means that the overarching institutional narratives must go hand in hand with widely held beliefs about the Nordic identity and its purpose.

2.2 Nordic Council and Ontological Security

The Nordic Council as a unit of analysis has been largely ignored. However, the EU has been one of the very few entities at the transnational level of analysis that the field of OSS has researched. Traditionally when examining agents' identity, sense of self and their insecurities, scholarly literature has been focusing on nation-states where the binding characteristics such as culture, language, geographical location and values are jointly recognized (see Cervi & Tejedor 2022, Hürsoy & Özün Çöllüglü 2022 and Gellwitzki and Houde 2023). However, deriving from various crises today's world can be seen as more split into regions and transnational alliances and thus the discussions of actors', such as the EU, physical and ontological security have increased. In addition, the complex forms of the EU, has gained further attention as a unit of analysis (see Johansson-Nogués 2018, Kaunert et al. 2022, Kinnvall 2018, Kinnvall et al. 2018). Today's complex security environment is the outcome of multiple components and various factors building on the environment are crucial in order to gain a realistic picture of an actor's sense of security. Kinnvall (2018) argues that the ontological security approach includes not only the psychological concept of studying of groups' or states' emotions but also the social and political aspects which function as a form of security (Kinnvall, 2018:537). Additionally, Gellwitzki and Houde (2023) argue that the EU provides the sense of stability, peace and certainty for its member states and that these notions can be considered as the social and political forms of security which political actors require in order to feel ontologically secure (Gellwitzki and Houde 2023:444). Similarly, the Nordic Council can be seen as a regional framework which offers continuity, predictability, and shared meaning through long-standing cooperation, institutionalized dialogue, and common policy routines. Although it lacks sovereign authority, the Nordic Council contributes to a stable sense of collective identity by reproducing shared values, norms, and expectations across the Nordic region.

In this sense, the Nordic Council functions as a provider of ontological security by maintaining established routines of cooperation and by articulating future-oriented narratives. Given this level of analysis and the background, the ontological security approach dissects biographical narratives and the power of routines as an underlying base for security. Consequently, the notions of routines, socially established procedures are to be taken into account when examining narrative's engagement with the sense of insecurity.

Della Sala's article 'Ontological security, crisis and political myth: the Ukraine war and the European Union' (2023) additionally provides key insights as to why examining ontological security beyond the nation-state is useful. He stresses that political communities, such as the EU, are highly dependent on narratives regarding routines in a sense that they generate a 'continued sense of self' which enables agency. (Della Sala, 2023:363). He argues that being able to generate routines, practices and coherent narratives, gives political authority to actors. This is useful for the analysis of the Nordic Council and the cooperation of Nordic countries given that it gives weight to regional institutions and how they

aim to perform as security-providing actors through routinised practices and identity narratives, even when they are lacking sovereign authority.

2.3 Nordic Identity and Narratives in International Relations

In order to understand how Nordic identity is constructed it is crucial to draw on narrative and discourse theory. These theoretical lenses will guide us in understanding of how identities are built through stories, shared values and ideologies. In this section crucial aspects of narrative and narrative formation will be covered. Narratives can be considered as future-oriented visions and thus they play a central role in how collective visions and identities are created, maintained and contested. Within the context of the Nordic region, such narratives tend to draw on themes such as the welfare state, equality, sustainability and consensus politics.

By focusing on these lenses, we can focus on what values are highlighted, which stories are invoked and how is the ‘other’ defined. This discursive approach offers a useful addition to more structural analysis and is especially useful when investigating how collective identity changes over time and in changing environment.

2.3.1 What is (known about) Nordic Identity

Scholarly work on Nordic identity is deeply connected with the welfare state model, equality and institutional stability which form a part of the region’s self-image. These factors contribute to the understanding of Nordic identity as a collective which reflects a sense of belonging to a group (Tuominen, Kronlund 2023:7).

Nordic Review of International Studies (NRIS) special issue titled ‘Identity and the Nordics’ investigates how Nordic states see themselves and how they perform their identity in international arenas. Tuominen and Kronlund exemplify how the Nordic region’s idea of peace-building, multilateralism and moral responsibility are heavily the cornerstones for Finland’s UN policy (Tuominen, Kronlund 2023:6-8). Their analysis highlights the view that the Nordic identity functions as an active political resource that states use in positioning themselves within global governance structures. This way identity is not merely seen as a cultural label, rather a political tool (Tuominen, Kronlund 2023:16-18). This view in turn supports a wider understanding that Nordic states continuously frame themselves through narratives of internationalism and ethical leadership in order to reinforce the label of the Nordic model such as ‘Nordic aid identity’ as a political legitimacy.

Beyond political positioning, other contributions in NRIS's issue illustrate the role of myths, common history and collective memory. For instance, Ketola demonstrates how narratives related to wartime are reproduced through political discourse, education and cultural diplomacy. These narratives show that the Nordic identity is not only rooted in myths but also provides ethical and moral frames that continue to shape today's understanding of self (Ketola, 2023:26-30). Importantly, these studies highlight that the Nordic identity is both unified and varied.

A parallel discussion is provided by the Nordic Council's report 'Identity Matching in the Nordic-Baltic Region', which explores how narratives of regional digital identity overlap and circulate within the Nordic and Baltic states. While focused on digital identity and cross-border digital mobility, the key takeaway from this report is that identity alignment operates through processes of selection where values such as digital innovation and security cooperation are highlighted while historical asymmetries are downplayed (TemaNord, 2024: 71-96). This strengthens the idea that regional identity is mediated through discourse meaning that it is constructed through what is said, highlighted and excluded.

Taking these studies together, it is revealed that the Nordic identity is dynamic, it is neither fixed nor purely descriptive. It is shaped by historical memories, political choices, institutional practices and global strategic positioning. Serving as a political instrument as well as a cultural symbol, Nordic identity illustrates a nuanced interaction between discourse, narrative and regional identity formation. This dynamic character also implies that the Nordic identity is not necessarily threatened by changes, rather identity can be narrated as renewal.

2.3.2 Narratives as Anchors of Existential Security

It is widely established that narratives and discourses play a critical role in creating and maintaining what is often called ontological security, especially the sense of continuity that it offers (Della Sala, 2018:273). Therefore, it is important to focus on narratives offering coherence, meaning and a frame of reference which help actors manage uncertainty and this way obtain the sense of ontological security: a stable sense of self, identity and existential continuity.

Carlà and Prina (2025) highlight the influence and the importance of narratives and discourses in the production of ontological security. They argue that even majorities, while being objectively dominant within a state, may experience ontological insecurity in different transnational or multiethnic contexts (Carlà, Prina 2025:788-789). While these insecurities are not necessarily linked to physical threats, rather they are linked to anxieties about identity and belonging and their continuity in a constantly changing environments, they are present and strongly influential in today's world.

The authors emphasize that the search for ontological security, referring to the anxieties of for instance belonging, derives from narratives which operate as anchors for these insecurities/anxieties (Carlà, Prina 2025:789). For instance

narratives of securitization, where political actors exploit majority insecurities through discourses of threat or securitization function to create a clear boundary between us and them. This way a clear sense of stability and collective coherence is maintained. Additionally narratives which highlight historical memory are also key mechanisms through which ontological security can be maintained. Carlà and Prina highlight that encounters with the 'others' and collective memories of cultural achievement continue to shape contemporary narratives. This way these narratives act as anchors, providing stability in times of social, political or demographic change (Carlà, Prina 2025:791). Lastly, the possibility of narratives creating zero-sum frameworks in which the majority's security is based on the insecurity of others is brought to the table. This highlights the importance of adaptability.

However, Freire argues that the form and nature of narrative can vary extensively depending on for instance the agent's history, territory and neighbours (Freire, 2020:5). Thus, the power of narratives by creating both normative and cognitive maps establishes the division between the inside identity definition of the self and the outside othering (Kinnvall et al. 2018: 252 and Freire, 2020:4). The combination of these various arguments is of importance for examining the Nordic Council's Agenda 2030's stabilizing aspects due to the fact that narratives are able to establish, reshape and obliterate differences between 'us' and the 'other'. Thus, the possible powers of narratives are to be examined in a broader context.

By focusing on narrative's construction aspects such as the confrontation of 'us' and 'other', routines, time and values, the existing form and underlying meanings of the narrative based on the Agenda 2030 context can be researched. Furthermore, the extent to which the Nordic Council is experiencing ontological (in)security and the means of alleviating it can be seen in their narrative discourses. Therefore, the form of discourse and discussion that the Nordic Council's narrative provides for the larger collective becomes relevant.

In addition to narratives functioning as representations of their sense of security their discourses and arguments are often referring to past practices and even memories and thus they also are seen as anchors into which political leaders can hold onto (Kinnvall et al. 2018:253). Due to the complex factors building the form of narrative, the whole narrative construction process and subsequently the level of legitimization which they provide can be under questioning and debate.

Della Sala's article (2023) contributes to these arguments by connecting ontological security explicitly to crisis. He argues that crises can disrupt existing routines and the sense and understanding one has of the surrounding social world, which gives political actors agency. Additionally, he argues that political narratives usually aim to narrate crisis and disruptions of routines by remaining the confidence of 'us' or 'we' and why this community exists (Della Sala, 2023:362). This means that crises create pressures for agents to reaffirm and reconstruct their normative maps through narrative explaining the surrounding happenings and consequential course of actions (Della Sala, 2023:362-363).

Another valuable contribution that Della Sala's analysis provides is the argument that political myths can be seen as narrative resources for ontological

security. According to him myths, through their narratives, provide political community with guidance and meaning for both everyday life and for times of crises (Della Sala, 2023:363). Thus, this argument implies that narratives' power to stabilise depends on the power to meaningfully provide maps that remain usable even during crisis.

The literature therefore implies that ontological security is something that is negotiated and maintained through continuous and repeating storytelling, routines and common practices. However, it also can be challenged and doubted if the audience stops seeing themselves in the narrated identities.

2.3.3 Gaps in the Nordic Council's Narrative Research

While ontological security theory and narrative approaches have gained significant traction within International Relations, their application has remained uneven across different types of political actors. A smaller but growing body of literature has extended this framework to supranational actors, most notably the European Union, demonstrating how institutional narratives and strategic visions function as mechanisms for managing collective anxiety and reinforcing a coherent sense of self (see Della Sala, 2017, 2018 and 2023). Given the limited amount of literature examining the Nordic Council's identity, ontological security, let alone the 2030 Agenda, some guiding references to international actors' identity are drawn through the existing analysis of the European Union.

Della Sala (2023) contributes with relevant EU-focused literature by showing how crises can expose limitations and tensions in a regional actor's identity narrative. He argues for instance that the Ukraine war challenges the European 'foundational myth' of political community, and that this war questions the EU's ability to function as an ontological security provider for its member states and citizens (Della Sala, 2023: 362-363). According to this when a crisis cannot be addressed without putting into question the narrative that previously provided continuity and stability, ontological insecurity emerges (Ibid.). He mentions how crises can also be seen as an opportunity for narratives. However, the Ukraine exposes some limits and shows some fragility of this narrative. Namely, by challenging the cognitive and normative map that has previously connected integration to peace and predictable order. Building on this crisis-focused understanding of how regional actors can both stabilise and destabilise the sense of self, Johansson-Nogués further explores how external policy discourse can affect internal anxieties.

In her article, Elisabeth Johansson-Nogués examines how the ENP and the existing insecurity within the European Union shape both the Union's understanding of its own identity and its relations with neighbouring states, framed here as the "other." She further argues that, while the ENP formally aims to strengthen relations with nearby countries, the initiative also works to ease internal EU anxieties triggered by external political and social shifts (Johansson-

Nogués 2018: 538). However, since the member states and the EU as a whole are subject to the same structural pressures, their both's resilience are tested in a similar way (Ibid.). Thus, the discourse that the EU uses in its ENP and Global Strategy agendas lets us understand is that these initiatives are designed to deal as much with the complex sense of self within the EU as well as with their neighbouring countries and the stabilizing developments with their partner countries (Johansson-Nogués 2018:538 and Della Sala, 2018:268). Johansson-Nogués' research specifically encapsulates the possible effects of the EU narrative. Building on Johansson-Nogués' insights into how EU narratives shape identity, this paper extends her line of thought by examining whether the narrative promoted by the Nordic Council in its 2030 Agenda likewise serves as a tool for reinforcing its own regional sense of self.

Despite these insights, no comparable analysis exists of the Nordic Council's *Our Vision 2030* as a narrative of ontological security. This represents a significant gap, given that the policy explicitly articulates a long-term collective vision grounded in shared Nordic values, cooperation, and resilience in the face of global challenges. Moreover, *Our Vision 2030* is forward-looking and aspirational, making it particularly well suited for narrative analysis focused on temporality, continuity, and future-oriented identity construction. This gap is not only about the lack of empirical examination but also conceptual. Without further examining how actors such as the Nordic Council construct their narrative of identity and security, it remains unclear how actors below the EU level seek to manage uncertainty and maintain ontological security. By focusing on *Our Vision 2030*, this thesis addresses this gap by analysing how Nordic identity is selected, framed, and mobilized through policy discourse, and how this narrative functions to reduce uncertainty and sustain a coherent sense of collective self.

3 Identifying the Key Narratives

This section will introduce the material's key findings which will further be examined and analysed in the following section. The aim of this chapter is to map what the chosen material repeatedly say, foreground and normalise. Across the material, a consistent story emerges: The Nordic Region is described as a coherent political community whose identity is sustained through cooperation, shared values and future oriented problem solving, especially under the current global conditions. This suggests that the documents provides a worldview in addition to all of their priorities. Identifying narratives is not only about listing different themes, rather it is also about tracing how they mutually contributing to each others. A coherent narrative implies different policy goals as complementary rather the competing, thus reducing the visibility of trade-offs. The Vision itself is divided into three strategic priorities: a green Nordic Region, a competitive Nordic Region and a socially sustainable Nordic Region (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021:6). However, key identities identified in this section consists of four in total, where are the previously mentioned ones are a significant part of one theme but not necessarily the most dominant parts and an additional identity of integration is identified. The division made in this section is similar to the one in the following analysis paragraph allowing a clear discussion theme by theme. The four narrative themes identified are (1) Nordic unity through integration and borderless everyday life, (2) green transition as shared mission and moral leadership, (3) competitiveness through innovation, knowledge and digital integration and (4) social sustainability through welfare, equality, trust, culture and inclusive participation. These narratives which appear in the chosen documents are now analysed and gathered into the following subchapters.

3.1 Nordic Identity Through Integration and Borderless Everyday life

A core narrative recurring across the Vision 2030 framework is that Nordic identity and Nordic capacity are constructed through cooperation and integration. The declaration frames the Nordic Region as a collective home and a shared political project where the starting point is not only a shared geography but a common "we" that acts together. It also repeatedly positions cooperation as the region's successful method of handling challenges, stating: "In the Nordic Region, we have shown time after time that we are stronger together" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019:2).

The Nordic Region's togetherness and unity is not only described as symbolic or historical rather it is meant to be operationalised through the recurring theme of mobility. The Nordic integration should be experienced as one to be able to easily move across the region in their everyday lives. The regional development and planning co-operation programme opens with noting this: "It should be an attractive prospect to live, study, work and run a business across the entire Nordic Region" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:3). A similar formulation is repeated again in the programme's political priorities section where the same focus on "live, study and run a business" ideas is framed as the goal of making the Nordic Region more attractive (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:7). Given the repeated slogan of "The Nordic Region will become the most sustainable and integrated region in the world" which additionally stressed the integrated nature of its functions. For instance a digital identity is lifted as a vision point for the region's future (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021:3). Thus, the "Nordic Region" is described as a functional living space rather than only a collection of states.

Simultaneously, the promise of borderless everyday life risks depoliticising the core functionality of borders. Borders reflect also different national legislation, welfare systems and political priorities and framing them only as obstacles can simplify the political work needed to reconcile competing interests. This framing also suggests that integration is universally experienced as beneficial, despite the possibilities of it producing uneven effects in terms of for instance mobility and educational possibilities where some might experience it more as a administrative change or even a burden. Thus, if the narrative assumes a uniform audience, it may risk producing silent exclusions of some in the audience.

The action plan even makes integration a strategic pillar and connects it to a concrete governance routine stating that the Nordic Council of Ministers will support development by "bringing together actors from across the Nordic Region in order to learn from each other and gain better understanding of each other" and by "implementing initiatives that specifically set out to make the day-to-day lives of those living in the Nordic Region easier" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:4). These narratives of integration implicate that integration is not just an abstract institutional goal but actually an everyday benefit and a proof of Nordic community.

Another factor which mirrors the importance of unity is the recurring idea of border obstacles. The regional development programme identifies border regions as a "collaborative hub" and ties it to "the identification and removal of border obstacles" and even to the building of "functional regions" which ought to strengthen integration (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:15). This fact that "it should be simple to live, study, work and run a business across the entire Nordic Region" reflects the region's normative guideline of which the obstacles are seen as fragmentation and lack of cohesion (Ibid.). This repeating formulation of border obstacles is framed as something that cooperation can, should and must fix.

Unity and integration are also emphasized in shared governance routines and cross-sector cooperation. The regional development programme highlights that the Nordic value comes from initiatives that "reduce obstacles and fragmentation,

bring together Nordic resources and competencies, leverage hitherto unused potential and/or create synergies.” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:5). This framing indicates that Nordic cooperation enables outcomes that are beyond what states could achieve alone. By highlighting the collective outcomes the language constructs integration as something meaningful and beneficial rather than only optional and nice-to-have.

Ultimately, the integration narrative is reinforced in the documents by repeated “we” voice. Additionally, another important portrayal of the Nordic Region is its unit which learns, adapts and coordinates in various levels due to more complex and transnational challenges (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:7). The integration narrative frames Nordic identity as a border-transcending community in which the success of cohesion is measured through mobility, shared solutions and minimised fragmentation.

3.2 Green Transition as Shared Mission and Moral Leadership

Besides integration, a dominant narrative that is highlighted across the documents is the Nordic Region’s purpose around the green transition which is presented not only as a necessity but an opportunity and moral responsibility. The Vision 2030 declaration expresses a call for action: “Climate change, pollution and threats to biodiversity call for our attention, our energy” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019:1). What becomes apparent in the declaration is that the green transition is not only introduced as one policy area but rather as a key driver of the vision itself (Ibid.). The goal of green transition is described as something that the Region will strive for together. Additionally, the linkage to the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) gives added greater weight and importance for the agenda’s objectives (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:4).

The urgency of green transition is further stressed by anchoring Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement stating that these frameworks “show the way” and that the Nordic Region must work “more ambitiously and quickly than the rest of the world” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:4). This narrative clearly wants to highlight not just the Nordic Region as a loyal follower of global governance but as a role model by raising the level of ambition.

The narrative of green transition is furthermore strengthened through strong knowledge-and-solution logic. This refers to the Nordic Council’s objective on bolstering research and development regarding combating climate change. Climate leadership is presented as achievable through strengthening research, increasing solutions for carbon neutrality and climate adaptation while simultaneously promoting Nordic green solutions internationally (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:7, Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021:10). Thus, the green

transition becomes a Nordic identity story about competence, responsibility and a clear sense of global purpose. This repeated prioritisation of knowledge and learnings support a broader identity narrative of the Nordic Region being not only ambitious but competent and having clear methods for how it pursues sustainability. While leadership narratives may be empowering they can also raise expectations that may be difficult to meet.

The green transition narrative as a whole is described as multi-sectoral and systemic. The Action Plan of 2021-2024 embeds climate neutrality in sectors that build up everyday Nordic societies by stating that the transition depends on the transformation of "the transport, energy, construction and financial sectors" and that this requires "strengthened co-operation between several policy areas" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:7). This way, the green transition can be seen as a whole-of-society project.

Broadening the scope of green transition furthermore, the documents state a clear international projection dimension, where Nordic climate action is framed as both contribution and example. The Action Plan refers to the intention to "promote Nordic green solutions in the rest of the world" and this way highlights the outward focus to contributing to the international environmental and climate cooperation and diplomacy (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:11). This narrative of an actor that transforms internal transition into external legitimacy is apparent in declarations that signal that "real and positive development is possible" and that the region is "turning words into action" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019:1-2).

Overall, the green transition narrative is framed as both an internal reform process as well as a leader position for the external world. This way, the sustainability narrative is tied strongly to the Nordic Region's legitimacy. However, there is a risk when leadership gets framed as a duty, possible failure becomes not only practical but ethical. This in turn can create pressure to perform ambition even though quick progress is made difficult due to existing policy constraints.

3.3 A Competitive Nordic Region: Innovation, Knowledge, Digital Integration and "Future Skills"

A third identified narrative frames the Nordic identity around competitiveness. Competitiveness is narrated as a product of innovation capacity, labour market adaptation, knowledge and digital integration, which is even linked to the narratives of unity/integration and green transition.

Starting already from the Vision 2030 declaration, the logic of competitiveness is present. Namely, "the green economy is based on innovation, creates jobs and ensures competitiveness." (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019:2). This combines climate transition with growth and prosperity. Therefore the

Nordic Region is narrated as being able to stand sustainably and economically strong simultaneously avoiding trade-offs.

A competitive Nordic Region is a recurring theme in the action plans. The way competitiveness is framed is to a large extent optimistic and far away from a restrictive nature. The Nordic Council doesn't frame competitiveness as deregulation or cost reduction, instead it focuses on capacity-building, research infrastructure, digital services of shared data systems and labour market skills (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:13, Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:10). The agenda's priority objectives emphasise the region being a "leader in knowledge and innovation" but also stress that this requires development especially within the areas of green and digital transformation (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:14). The way to successful implementation and support of competitiveness, is described to be strengthened efforts in education, research, business communities and digitalisation (Ibid.). This highlights the competitiveness narratives' adaptivity, meaning that the Nordics remain in the game due to its constant updates and developments in knowledge and innovation.

One means of competitiveness which becomes apparent is digitalisation. It is stated that the Nordics can "set the global agenda and promote core values such as trust, security, and user adaptation in digital development" and therefore support the safe use of for instance, artificial intelligence (AI) and data-based solutions (Ibid). Here, competitiveness, besides being narrated as technological changes, is framed as value-based digital governance including responsibility and trust. This digital-competitiveness is strongly linked to the ideal of integration. Namely, the plan refers to "cross-border digital services" which makes it easier to study, work and do business in another Nordic country (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:17). Additionally, this contributes to the broader goal of integration by bringing the Nordic countries even closer with each other (Ibid.). This connection with competitiveness, integration and everyday mobility continues to reinforce the broader identity that the Nordics are competitive thanks to its integration.

A subtheme of competitiveness is skills and labour market adaptation. Labour markets are described to in the middle of "constant and rapid change" which are shaped by green transition and digitalisation (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:16). Therefore, the Nordic cooperation must ensure "future skills" and enhance its efforts in lifelong learning in order to keep the region competitive (Ibid.). Additionally, the Regional Development and Planning Programme mirrors this competitiveness at a regional level, stressing that innovative regions and a competitive business environment are crucial for competitive Nordic Region (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:8). It is noted that rural and sparsely populated areas are often lagging behind in developments such as digitalisation, the use of new technologies or business-promoting initiatives (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:13). This stresses the shift in the narrative, reflecting the need of the region in ensuring competitiveness across the whole region and not only the metropolitan cities.

Ultimately, competitiveness and resilience are framed as inseparable. It is stated that:

“However, the worsening geopolitical situation and greater levels of global uncertainty have sharpened focus on the need to boost the Nordic Region’s resilience and adaptability, as well as our ability to resist and address different strains, disturbances and crises” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:3).

This reflects on the ontological-security approach clearly stressing that competitiveness becomes a crucial part of maintaining stability and adaptive capacity, rather than just focusing on growth.

Overall, the narrative of competitiveness is highly future-oriented, supports digitalization and innovation as well as focuses on supporting and establishing key future skills for the region.

3.4 A Socially Sustainable Nordic Region: Welfare, Equality, Trust, Culture and Participation as Cohesion

The last identified theme that the Nordic Council narrates is a socially sustainable Nordic Region due to the fact that it safeguards welfare, equality, inclusion, democracy and cultural cohesion. While none of these themes function solely as policy goals, they do contribute to a common identity which aims to represent the Nordic region as internally cohesive and stable. The Vision declaration frames the region as the following:

“Our peaceful, democratic and inclusive societies, where everybody participates and has rights and responsibilities, are strong societies that can cope with even the biggest of challenges” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019:2).

This story links cohesion to resilience by stating that inclusive practices and democratic participation are drivers of social strength and stability, instead of being merely moral values/ideals.

The 2021-2024 action plan lists priorities of good, equal, secure health and welfare for all through which it defines a socially sustainable region as “inclusive, equal and interconnected with shared values and strengthened cultural exchanges and welfare” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:19). In this context giving Nordic civil society a louder voice is mentioned (Ibid.). While the children and youth are specifically highlighted, the social sustainability is framed as both outcomes such as welfare and health as well as an identity narrative about shared values. Objective 9 of good, equal, and secure health and welfare for all, explicitly treats this welfare model as foundational and thus it needs to be “safeguarded and adapted” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:20). This narrative of continuity positions the Nordic welfare model as something central to identity and policies are described as preserving it through adaptation. This part also includes the

inclusion of vulnerable groups and highlights the use of preventive measures for both physical and mental health, thus reinforcing the idea of welfare as universal and something to be protected (Ibid.).

Objective 10 in turn frames equality as a prerequisite: “Equality is a prerequisite for an inclusive transformation of society,” and the Nordic cooperation’s task it is to make sure “no one is excluded” from sustainability developments (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:22). Given this prerequisite, social sustainability gets directly linked to digital and green transitions and gets highlighted as something necessary. The fact that demographic and socio-economic differences such as income, education and technical development are highlighted as shaping the gaps, furthermore adds on to the argument (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:9, 17). Based on the Nordic Council’s documents, social sustainability is described as something both territorial and relational, highlighting that cohesion is crucial across regions and population patterns.

A great mechanism used in these documents is culture and language. This tool is used as cohesion-building. The Vision 2030 declaration states:

“Culture and language underpin our values and the development of a joint Nordic identity.” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019:2).

Given that this is already pinpointed in the declaration, it continues to be repeated in Action Plans (see Action Plan for 2021 to 2024). Objective 11 of that action plan states the following:

“Language and culture initiatives are important tools for creating an integrated region and a cultural community.” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:23).

In addition to language and culture, participation as a cohesion-building mechanism is prominent in these documents. Civil society’s role is even elevated by creating a whole document of “Guidelines for involving civil society in work relating to Our Vision 2030”. This separate document formalizes the importance of this narrative and describes it as an institutional design. The fact that civil society organisations’ and other relevant stakeholders’ opinions are now more listened to the Nordic Council, expands the level of narrative to another level (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021:4). Additionally, the role of young people and children are explicitly mentioned as something that plays a crucial role in the Agenda’s implementation (Generation 2030 Programme Description 2017–2020, p.2). This group is specifically referred to as agents of change and especially important group to focus on when it comes to the Agenda’s implementation efforts (Ibid.).

Concluding this narrative, it is built of a welfare community where equality, inclusion, participation in democracy, culture and language are seen as crucial. It continuously stresses cohesion as something to be upheld at all times by the means of involvement and openness.

4 Narratives' Input on Ontological Security

This section will analyse the variety of narratives and their extent to which they function as alleviation means for the Nordic sense of ontological security and anxiety. As ontological security is referred to in this thesis: the need for a stable and continuous sense of self, thanks to predictable routines and suitable narratives which enable meaningful action despite uncertain times. An important analytical move in this chapter is to treat these narratives as instruments that continuously shape what is perceived as normal, possible or threatening. From this view the documents pre-structure insecurities by presenting specific forms of cooperation for certain issues. This way, narrative functions as a governance tool which guides attention and collective behaviour. By systematically analysing the material this analysis will be divided into four narratives, as identified and described in the findings chapter. By drawing on ontological security and analysing the findings introduced in the previous chapter, the underlying meanings and possible alleviation means of insecurity and instability will be exposed and stated.

4.1 Nordic Identity Through Integration and Borderless Everyday Life

This section of the analysis will focus on the narrative which highlights the Nordic Council as a promoter of integration which contributes to an easier borderless everyday life. Given the geopolitical uncertainties and the world being framed more and more as transnational and complex when it comes to power dynamics, the Nordic policymaking context has been explicitly situated as requiring coordination across "administrative and functional boundaries" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:7). This formulation is crucial for ontological security since insecurity is not only material dangers but also the uncertain, non-predictable sense of how societies function (Kinnvall, 2018:537; Gellwitzki and Houde, 2023:444). And once the external environment is narrated as complex, institutional fragmentation risks becoming a source of disorientation and this way threatening the stable sense of self which Mitzen highlights as crucial for actors to act meaningfully (Mitzen, 2006:344-346). This integration narrative also directly addresses this uncertainty by referring to the Nordic Region as a space where everyday life should be easy and manageable.

“It should be an attractive prospect to live, study, work and run a business across the entire Nordic Region” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:3).

This statement functions as a stabilising response to uncertainty given that it offers continuity and stability through routine practices of mobility, work, study and having a business across borders. Narrative’s stabilising influence is however dependent on whether the promised routines actually become materialised. This way, ontological security is even tied to the credibility of everyday deliveries and not only to the storytelling. This is important given that it ties ontological security to the narrative’s capacity to implement. Narratives can promise stability and predictability but ways in which these factors are felt are through functioning systems of access to services, interoperable digital tools for instance. So if these do not work, the pure promise of a coherent everyday life weakens the narrative’s credibility and makes it more fragile.

The emphasis on attractiveness is a strong stabiliser, given that it connects an abstract regional project to everyday experience and expectations. By doing this it also raises the stakes of implementation. Namely, if this narrative’s promises don’t match the everyday experience, it might become a source of frustration. From an ontological perspective this credibility gap can contribute to insecurities if they’re not able to show that routines and institutions will work as expected.

Additionally, the Nordic identity is constructed as “we” as a community. Ontological security stresses the narratives that produce and contribute to the concept of a collective “we”. The Vision 2030 declaration notes that “we have shown time after time that we are stronger together” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019:2). This constructs a common identity through repetition as well as connects it to a historical continuity. The declaration highlighted the wordings “time after time” which cannot be interpreted as something neutral. Given that continuity is stressed through this wording, the Nordic Council informs about an established pattern. The fact that the course of time is stated here, the narrative aims to stabilize the expectation about future by using past as evidence. This goes in line with Alkopher’s (2018) arguments on the importance of earlier collective routines as means for stability and continuity which show a degree of predictability and ability to carry out agreed procedures. The emphasis on time after time builds an established pattern and therefore contributes to the region’s future expectations. This continuity move where the past is used as evidence aims to reduce anxiety about whether the region’s cooperation will hold under pressure and uncertainties. While referencing historical continuity might be reassuring, it can also be constraining. Given that cooperation is framed as something successful, disagreements may be seen as abnormal instead of something legitimate political disagreements. This in turn raises the chances of contributing to instabilities and functioning as contrary to encouraging to open debates about competing interests.

A key ontological security function this narrative contributes to is the focus on border obstacles. Borders are described as disruption to coherence within the region (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:15). The areas by borders are even referred to as “collaborative hubs” and a goal of “identification and removal of border obstacles” is presented as a policy action (Ibid.). The removal of such

obstacles can be seen as a symbolic act of gaining predictability in the region's social world. This way actors within these border regions and in the Nordic Region as a whole can more easily seek and feel the sense of confidence. Therefore, along with Mitzen's arguments, the act of removing these border obstacles becomes a stabilising practice of the narrative's identity (Mitzen, 2006:344-346). This focus on border regions as a hub is interesting since it highlights the periphery as central in Nordic integration. This way border areas become proof of the region's coherence given that they demonstrate cooperation in action. While border areas are examples of Nordic cooperation they are yet at a risk of becoming areas where ontological security is also extremely tested and not just confirmed.

Additionally, this narrative's repeated focus on borderless everyday life constructs Nordic identity as practical and as something to be felt in the citizens' everyday lives. Making this practical focus and not only focusing on the symbolic meaning of things connects clearly to ontological security which emphasizes routines. As the Action Plan defines the initiative's intention to "make the day-to-day lives of those living in the Nordic Region easier" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:4). By presenting integration as day-to-day concept and facilitator, the documents normalise this identity in their repeated practices. This kind of repeated routines are associated with stable identities.

Both a more stable routines and border practices support the definition of "Nord added value" which is referred to as beyond national initiative which aims to reduce fragmentation and leveraging unused potential as well as creating synergies (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:5). The way in which the Nordic cooperation is justified by for instance bringing together Nordic resources, it highlights the value of the Nordic community's existence and even continuation.

The integration narrative of the Nordic identity is also about who the region is in its turbulent environment. The documents frame the core of Nordicism as an ability to function and coordinate across borders and different levels. Not only that the documents try to minimise the effects of border within the Nordic Region, it simultaneously signals and creates boundaries to its outside world, thus utilizing the we and other perspectives of ontological security. Aligning with Alkopher's (2018) and Della Sala's (2017) notions of territorial borders and their effects on ontological security in regards to othering, this differentiation can be utilized as a powerful means for one's image of self and other. Instead of clearly specifying "others", the documents contribute to the creation of internal threats of disconnection, which it succeeds without having the need to express aggressive external othering.

4.2 Green Transition as Shared Mission and Moral Leadership

This narrative connects directly to existential and political anxieties related to climate change. The Vision 2030 declaration mentions climate change and biodiversity threats as something urgently to be taken care of by a larger collective (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019:1). From an ontological security view this is important given the long-term predictability and stability that are lacking largely due to climate change. Therefore it can be argued that due to this instability the documents repeatedly frame the green transition as non-optional and consequently as time-sensitive. The Action Plan highlights the urgency by making a direct connection between the Nordic goals in its 2030 Agenda to the Paris Agreement and stating that "the Nordic Region must work more ambitiously and quickly than the rest of the world" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:4). The way in which this narrative simultaneously as it creates a crisis environment it also functions as a crisis manager when saying that the Nordics as actors respond fast and even more ambitiously than others. From an ontological security perspective this transforms the overwhelming global issue to a recognisable Nordic action of being a leader and solution-provider but most importantly a moral actor. This moral narrative's strength is giving meaning and direction but on the contrary its weakness lies in the possible simplification of the politics of the transition. Namely, the green shift involves conflicts such as who pays and who benefits. Thus a narrative that highlights shared missions can reduce open conflict but at the same time it can also underestimate necessary debates about possible consequences and their trade-offs.

By turning climate change from a global, diffuse threat into a structured storyline where roles are defined and responsibilities distributed, such as the Nordics as an agent, the transition as their mission and the year 2030 as a deadline. By giving the narrative a script in a way it contributes to ontological security by turning diffuse fears into structured action. This script in turn contributes by reducing uncertainty by implying that the future is under control and governable through these sequences of actions. On the other hand, scripting can create blind spots by underestimating disruption when merely focusing on control. If the actions following the script won't end up going as planned, these gaps and blind spots can undermine trust.

The declaration frames the Nordics as green leaders and this way connects this aspect to the Nordic self. The stability that the Nordic Council seeks is constructed by connecting responsibility with high Nordic competence. In the declaration the Nordics are described as able to change lifestyles, consumption, production and even states that "real and positive development is possible" given that the Nordic region does turn their words into actions (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019:1–2). Additionally, the fusion of sustainability and prosperity is in itself an important trait of the Nordic identity. Namely, the declaration states that "the green economy is based on innovation, creates jobs and ensures competitiveness" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019:2). This way the Nordics aims to combine to policy goals into a positive combination. Given that the climate change could threaten welfare and prosperity, similarly it could then affect the collective identity by generating anxiety. Thus, by narrating the green transition as an opportunity for innovation in the region, the Nordic Council's

statements aim to stabilise their identity by highlighting important values of welfare, competitiveness and moral responsibility rather than putting them in a conflict against each other.

In contrast to the earlier mentioned "time after time" reference, the green transition narrative repeats temporality in order to create a sense of urgency. However, this narrative doesn't leave the solution open, rather it offers directions for development. By framing "time has come" and "we start today" the narrative ties the identity to temporal anchors (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019:1–2). Despite the global insecurity and turmoil, this framing is giving hope in the terms of future being something which the Nordic region can collectively shape through their actions. This sense of continuity and control over one's future does contribute to stability. Given the various action plans, this declaration and the framings there don't just stay on that level, rather the action plans and follow-ups with their monitoring are tools that operationalise the continuity (see e.g. Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:4, 25).

When talking about green transition, the narrative is not only limited to environmental aspects. Namely, this narrative is framed as systemic transformation. The Action plan of 2021-2024 implicitly names that region's transition to carbon-neutrality "depends on the green transition of the transport, energy, construction and financial sectors." (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:7). Additionally, cooperation between several policy areas is highlighted. (Ibid.). The Regional Development and Planning Programme additionally expands this by creating development and opportunities across the whole region, including rural and remote areas (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:11-12). This is important from an ontological point of view since the narrative frames sustainability as compatible with regional cohesion thus contributing to an inclusive self-image. Within this inclusion, the use of land is highlighted. The programme's sub-goal 1.1. is the following:

"There shall exist a good knowledge basis on, and processes for, efficient land use and prioritisation in the Nordic countries." (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:11-12).

These planning routines can be interpreted as ontological security practices, given that they transform a bigger complexity to a governable procedure which in turn contributes to predictability.

Not only does the green narrative promote the internal transition, it also includes an external dimension. The Action Plan of 2021-2024 states: "Promoting Nordic green solutions in the rest of the world" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:11). Given this outward projection the narrative aims to stabilise its identity through broader recognition. In this case: being the leader of sustainable development and inventions. Additionally, this is tied to the Nordic identity's moral responsibility. It's crucial to note that here the rest of the world is not framed as an enemy, rather as an audience or even an inferior. Either which one wants to interpret it, it aligns and resonates with external interpretive frameworks by framing Nordic processes as an example and guidelines for others. This way,

the green narrative can be argued to shape both the region's own perception but also the external's as something good. In contrast to Della Sala's (2018) arguments highlighting the use of a us-other layout as a powerful tool for enhancing one's sense of self this document doesn't explicitly stress this distinction.

One possible tension that can be found in this narrative is of that the Nordic region's green transition aims to be faster and more ambitious than others (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:4). By stressing the Nordic capability and leadership, the discourse stabilises the Nordic self. Concluding this part, it is seen that the green narrative uses a combination of means from showing leadership but also acknowledging the internal challenges. Therefore, it can be argued that this narrative utilizes a broad range of discourse means in order to contribute to the identity's stability.

4.3 A Competitive Nordic Region: Innovation, Knowledge, Digital Integration and "Future Skills"

The competitiveness narrative, as the name indicates, responds to economic stability, digital change and labour market disruptions. For instance the Action Plan of 2021-2024 mentions the labour market facing rapid and continuous change mostly due to the green transition and digital developments (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:16). To this instability the Nordic Council responds by promising the region's stability will not be shaken, rather that the region must prepare for lifelong learning as a response to the mentioned challenges. Conveniently, as a coherence promoting aspect, one of the solutions mentioned is mobility. While the lifelong learning and mobility are mentioned as stabilisation measures, it can be disputed whether these contribute to crucial aspects of ontological security such as predictability and routines. The promises of future skills and learning can stabilise expectations but it also can generate pressures for the ones not adapting and making them feel guilt for failure. Thus, this narrative may reduce anxiety at the collective level while also increasing insecurity at the individual level. In other words, if certainty is managed through requiring flexibility and ability to adapt, the world around one may remain predictable only for those who are already positioned to navigate changes.

As a part of lifelong learning, the narrative frames competitiveness as capacity-building and adaptive skills. While the Action Plans continuously describe the region as a "leader in knowledge and innovation", it simultaneously stresses the need for continuous development and growth (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:12–14). This way the narrative shapes the Nordic identity and its values by giving the impression that they are future-oriented and adaptable.

Nordic values are also connected to technological competitiveness. The region is stated to "set the global agenda and promote core values such as trust, security,

and user adaptation in digital development” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:14). Given that digitalisation is framed as something that the region does in a different way, referring to a safe, responsible and trust-based way, this development is strongly connected to the narrative’s values. This value framing in turn enhances ontological security by underlining coherent values and beliefs. The way in which the narrative turns changes and challenges to be part of it and its core values, can be argued as a strong and ingenious way of developing ontological security.

Other ontological security mechanisms that the competitiveness narrative utilizes are building a sense of agency. Here the agency that is being built and restored is constructed through shared data, infrastructure and cross-border digital services. The use of digital services across borders in order to facilitate living, working and studying in another Nordic country builds one of the main agency pillars (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:17). Yet again, it can be argued that the narrative succeeds in tying competitiveness to day-to-day life and its predictability which in their turn affects the sense of stability. By twisting the angle of complex digital infrastructures to routine-enables, they can contribute to reducing uncertainty and friction.

In addition, the narrative frames open data, digital solutions and common infrastructures as mechanisms to improve welfare (Action Plan 2021–2024, p.22). Especially during the times of external turmoil and uncertainty, internal shared routines, infrastructures and institutional designs do matter more given that they can contribute to predictability. Lifelong learning has already been mentioned as a solution to it is education.

”Efforts will be focused on lifelong learning and future skills by helping to equip children, young people, and adults for living in and contributing to a changing society” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:16).

This reassures individuals that they are able to maintain coherent biographies as well as it stabilises the collective by maintaining a functioning Nordic labour market. The inclusion of vulnerable groups such as children and young people, the competitiveness narrative connects straight to social cohesion and inclusion. This in turn may reduce internal friction and contribute to egalitarian self-image.

The Regional Development and Planning Programme explicitly stresses the differences between cities and rural areas. It is stated that competitiveness must exist in ”all parts of the Nordic Region” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:8). This is crucial from an ontological point of view, since by continuously highlighting the condition of rural areas, the documents aim to protect the coherent identity. Additionally, the same document frames geopolitical tensions as something that requires resilience and adaptability to address crises and other disturbances (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:3). This way competitiveness gets tied with the region’s own security because it enables adaptive measures. Within the same lines with Johansson-Nogués (2018) conceptualisation of story-lines which are products of inter-group narratives, this particular narrative’s threat perception is established not only due to minor splits within the region but in

combination with the exogenous instabilities which further bolster the sense of insecurity.

While this narrative includes the rural areas and aims to shift challenges into wins, it also acknowledges the challenges that for instance the adoption of new digital technologies may require. The Action Plan states that preventive measures are needed in order to mitigate security risks (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:14). This tension of digitalisation being both risk and an opportunity, presents the Nordic Region as capable of modernising itself without offering safety nor cohesion.

4.4 A Socially Sustainable Nordic Region: Welfare, Equality, Trust, Culture and Participation as Cohesion

This narrative, which combines social sustainability focuses on broader anxieties under pressure: inequality, exclusion, demographic change, trust and threats to democracy. The Vision 2030 declaration clearly underlines that “democracy, integration and inclusion come under pressure” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). This line is a clear ontological security threat. Similarly as Della Sala (2017, 2018) and Johansson Nogués (2018) in consensus argue that the EU narrative’s basis lies on democracy, economic prosperity, rule of law and good governance, the documents examined from the Nordic Council support these arguments thus highlighting the narrative’s possibilities to influence the sense of security. Without an egalitarian, democratic and inclusive region, the Nordic region is under huge pressure. Therefore, by focusing on these areas, which are not optional ideals, rather crucial conditions for resilience and survival, this narrative aims to strengthen and stabilise these mechanisms. In this narrative a balance between confidence and concern is crucial. By acknowledging the pressures and threats to the common ‘we’ this narrative makes social sustainability into one of the most sensitive parts of the agenda.

The core of this narrative is good health and welfare, given that the Action Plan states that the Nordic welfare model “needs to be safeguarded and adapted” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:20). Most importantly, good health and welfare are described as the fundamental pillar for the regions’ people to even be able to contribute to the development of the society, let it be green transition, competitiveness or functional everyday life (Ibid.). This continuity narrative, which stresses the importance of the functioning welfare and the need for its adaptation, blends continuity and controlled change in a way which aims to keep the region’s identity protective and purposeful.

The Action Plan explicitly states in its objective 12 that shared values and culture create trust and democracy which ultimately contribute to the cohesion of the region. Similarly as the other narratives, this narrative also includes the notion of vulnerable groups as part of their identity reproduction, mirroring itself as caring and protective (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:20). The objective 12 states the following: "support democracy, trust, and thus the cohesion of the Nordic Region" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:24). This way of discourse implies a strong ontological security logic, namely that trust and democracy are actual stabilisers of society and not only ideal goals. This is furthermore reinforced in the agenda through various policy moves such as indicators for media literacy and ways of resisting disinformation (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:22). Given that disinformation can threaten the stable understanding of one's surroundings, these initiatives aim to protect the foundations of trust within the region.

Once the region's individuals are given the tools to safely interpret its identity, this narrative repeatedly works towards common values and Nordic identity and community (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019:2). The Action Plan aims to strengthen this sensation by highlighting the importance of cultural and language initiatives for creating a "cultural community" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:23). The linkage made here that identity is reproduced through shared symbols and values becomes a practical mechanism to sustain the feeling of belonging and feeling at home even across borders. Thus, it can be argued that especially language, value and cultural initiatives are strongly aiming to relieve stress.

However, while individuals across borders might feel that connection and common identity, without them being active and participating in the creation of it, the sense of contribution and meaningfulness might start to shatter. Therefore, the narrative and its identity needs to be credible and lived through individuals across the Nordic Region. This is especially important, given that the Nordic Region consists of several nations. This notion is something that the Action Plan acknowledges and states that "Residents of the Nordic Region must perceive Nordic co-operation as being for them and as being beneficial." (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:23). The clearest actions pursuing towards this are in the document of "Guidelines for involving civil society" which aims to cooperate with the civil society to a greater extent and being more open, transparent and relevant (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021:4). This document establishes networks for both a Nordic civil society and public consultation (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021:5). These are stabilizing routines aiming to embed the identity narrative into practices and processes which involve the region as a whole. This way inclusion turns into a lived process rather than only statements. This way the base on which the narrative is created upon is widened. These actions clearly resonate with the us-other layout which has been identified in the field of OSS by scholars such as Della Sala (2018) and Freire (2020). By noting that the inclusive and diverse community can be achieved by means such as activating civil society indicates that the division between us and other should be diminished or at least the tone on the differentiating aspects should be changed into a constructive one.

Moreover, the sense of familiarity deriving from shared cultural identity helps individuals to feel more empowered, mitigating feelings of anxiety and uncertainty.

While encouraging the whole region to participate in the creation, continuity and enhancement of the collective self, the Generation 2030 Programme Description 2017-2020 explicitly frames children and young people as “agents of change” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2017:1–2). This temporal move which introduces young people as a mechanisms of continuity aims to ensure that the created identity will extend in time through the young generation. This way, not only does the identity continue to live through institutions but rather through generations who live it. It can be argued that the stress on continuity strengthens the durability of the collective self.

In order to avoid the internal othering, the Regional Development and Planning Programme explains how socio-economic and demographic differences contribute to possible challenges of unity and resilience, especially in the rural areas (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:9, 17). The key of this social sustainability, which aims to prevent the split between cities and rural areas, contributes to the collective self by minimizing the risk of internal othering and instead enhancing the collective we. The way in which this narrative handles this becomes clear when continuously repeating “in times of peace and in times of crisis”, which links the change both to their moral responsibility as well as to the existing security threat (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2024:3, 5, 7, 10, 16, 17). Despite the fact that how the narrative stresses inclusion and openness, it also stresses the maintenance of trust and cohesion (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020:24). It can be argued whether this can be seen as a strength and method of continuity by stressing the current values or whether this implies that cohesion is something fragile which must be defended. This notion in turn goes in line with Alkopher’s (2018) discussion on the importance of earlier common practices which give this sort of predictability and transparency needed for a successful cooperation. Therefore, on the one hand one could also interpret this as an existing insecurity but also this pressure could just be stressed in order to justify further cooperation and participation.

5 Concluding Discussion

The aim of this thesis is to answer the research question: *How does the Nordic Council's Our Vision 2030 policy construct and communicate Nordic identity, and how does it support the Nordic Region's ontological security?* Drawing upon ontological security studies, the thesis explores and conceptualises the core of the Nordic Region's ontological security being the predictability, coherent sense of self and trust in continuity to name a few. The analysis identified four narratives that were repeated in the chosen material: (1) Nordic unity through integration and borderless everyday life, (2) green transition as shared mission and moral leadership, (3) competitiveness through innovation, knowledge and digital integration, and (4) social sustainability through welfare, equality, trust, culture and inclusive participation.

First, the integration narrative functions as a measure to stabilise the collective Nordic Region as a 'we'. In this view the ontological security strength lies in practical cooperation, cross-border mobility and predictable everyday routines. This routinisation resonates with Giddens' understanding of routines and stable practices as the foundation of ontological security (Giddens, 1991:39). Instead of aiming to draw a deeper distinction on we and others, this narrative stresses the existing threats as being the internal fragmentation and thus the inclusion of the region as a whole becomes vital. Additionally, the repeated discussion on 'time after time' signals temporal continuity which can result crucial in one's belief in the future.

Secondly, the green transition narrative aims to portray Nordic identity as something meaningful, morally right and exemplary. This narrative frames climate change as urgent and thus requires the Nordic region to act. This responsible and solution-producing actor that the Nordic identity aims to be can reduce anxiety by providing direction and superiority. In addition to the green narrative aiming to influence the internal of the region, it also seeks to affect the external. Namely, the fact that this identity is tied to global leadership within sustainability, it reflects the expectations of the audience which also contribute to one's sense of self.

Third, the competitiveness narrative responds to anxieties about societal change and economic stability. Structural pressures, such as technological change, digitalisation and labour market fluctuations can all affect stability and predictability. The documents adapt these as a Nordic strength by connecting change to internal processes of development and direction. This institutionalisation of changes is also connected to broader Nordic values such as security and trust. This way it can be argued that the competitiveness narrative does aim to support the region's ontological security.

Lastly, the social sustainability narrative anchors the region's identity with democracy and inclusion to name a few. These core values are extremely important when it comes to the feeling of security since they can make the collective feel stable and meaningful. The involvement of civil society and public consultation furthermore strengthens the weight of participatory routines and this way contributes to an identity that is collectively built and maintained.

Overall, this thesis shows how the Agenda 2030 and its different narratives contribute to enhancing ontological security all in different ways. One aims to provide continuity through patterns of cooperation, one predictability by routinized institutional practices whereas another emphasises the importance of agency through stressing the future-oriented practices and processes. Therefore, it is argued that instead of these documents just providing a list of policy priorities, they provide interpretations of the Nordic identity, the region's role and future trajectory. And they manage to do it in an anxiety-relieving way, thus contributing to the Nordic sense of ontological security.

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