UNITING COMPLEXITIES

The role of
visual communication design
in shaping the identity of
the Nordic Co-operation

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Abstract

Visual identity plays a crucial role in how organisations communicate their values, structure and operations to stakeholders. In complex political organisations in particular, visual communication can serve an important function in conveying clarity and cohesion. This thesis examines the role of visual communication design in constructing and communicating the identity of Nordic Co-operation. *Nordic Co-operation* is the umbrella term used for the organisational entity comprising the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Nordic Council, and the institutions operating under the Council of Ministers.

The aim of this study is to investigate how visual communication may be used for strengthening the identity of Nordic Co-operation and clarifying its structure, objectives and activities for target audiences. The research is informed by theories of organisational identity, reputation and semiotics, with an emphasis on the interaction between internal organisational culture and external image.

The study was conducted with a qualitative research approach. The data consisted of key documents guiding the visual communication of Nordic Co-operation, as well as semi-structured interviews with experts who had been involved in the development and management of the visual identity. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. On the basis of the findings, a design proposal was developed employing art-based methods, prototyping and toolbox-based ideation techniques.

The findings indicate that the current visual identity effectively communicates unity, continuity and neutrality. However, it also obscures the distinctive characteristics of the organisation's different institutions, thereby making it more difficult for audiences and stakeholders to identify the responsibilities of different actors. A visual language that prioritises standardisation and neutrality limits the visual identity's capacity to make the organisation's structure, hierarchy and concrete impacts visible. The proposed design solution demonstrates how visual communication can be applied flexibly within the framework of the existing visual identity without compromising the organisation's coherent visual expression.

This thesis contributes to research on visual communication within the context of the public sector and political organisations. It demonstrates how strategically employed graphic design can enhance the transparency and understandability of complex governance structures and support organisations in the management of their identity.

Keywords Visual communication design, visual identity, organisational identity, visual rhetoric, identity management, codesign

3

Tekijä Anni Alanen

Työn nimi Monimutkaisuutta selkeyttämässä: Visuaalisen viestinnän merkitys Pohjoismaisen yhteistyön identiteetin muovaajana.

Tiivistelmä

Visuaalisella identiteetillä on ratkaiseva merkitys siihen, miten organisaatiot viestivät arvoistaan, rakenteestaan ja toimintansa toiminnastaan sidosryhmilleen. Erityisesti monimutkaisissa poliittisissa organisaatioissa visuaalisella viestinnällä voi olla tärkeä rooli selkeyden ja yhtenäisyyden esittämisessä. Tämä opinnäytetyö tarkastelee visuaalisen viestinnän muotoilun osaa Pohjoismaisen yhteistyön identiteetin rakentajana ja sen välittäjänä. *Pohjoismainen yhteistyö* (Nordic Co-operation) on valittu nimi katto-organisaatiolle, johon kuuluvat Pohjoismaiden ministerineuvosto, Pohjoismaiden neuvosto sekä ministerineuvoston alaiset instituutiot.

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää, miten visuaalista viestintää voidaan hyödyntää Pohjoismaisen yhteistyön identiteetin vahvistamisessa ja sen rakenteen, tavoitteiden ja toiminnan selkeyttämisessä kohderyhmille. Tutkimus nojaa organisaatio- identiteetin, maineen ja semiotiikan teorioihin, ja se painottaa organisaation sisäisen kulttuurin ja ulkoisen imagon välistä vuorovaikutusta.

Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisena tutkimuksena. Aineistona käytettiin Pohjoismaisen yhteistyön visuaalista viestintää ohjaavia keskeisiä dokumentteja sekä puolistrukturoituja haastatteluja, jotka toteutettiin visuaalisen identiteetin kehittämiseen ja hallintaan osallistuneiden asiantuntijoiden kanssa. Aineisto analysoitiin temaattisen analyysin avulla. Sen pohjalta kehitettiin muotoiluehdotus, joka hyödyntää taidelähtöisiä menetelmiä, prototypointia ja toolbox- ideointimenetelmiä.

Tulokset osoittavat, että nykyinen visuaalinen identiteetti viestii tehokkaasti yhtenäisyyttä, jatkuvuutta ja neutraaliutta. Samalla se kuitenkin hämärtää organisaation laitosten ominaispiirteitä ja hankaloittaa siten eri toimijoiden vastuiden hahmottumista yleisöille ja sidosryhmille. Yhdenmukaistamiseen ja neutraaliuteen pyrkivä visuaalinen kieli rajoittaa identiteetin mahdollisuuksia tuoda näkyväksi organisaation rakennetta, hierarkiaa ja konkreettisia vaikutuksia. Kehitetty muotoiluehdotus havainnollistaa, kuinka visuaalista viestintää voidaan joustavasti soveltaa olemassa olevan visuaalisen identiteetin puitteissa ilman, että organisaation yhtenäinen ilme kärsii.

Opinnäytetyö tuo lisäarvoa visuaalista viestintää koskevaan tutkimukseen julkisen sektorin ja poliittisten organisaatioiden kontekstissa. Se osoittaa, miten graafinen suunnittelu voi strategisesti hyödynnettynä lisätä monimutkaisten hallintorakenteiden läpinäkyvyyttä ja ymmärrettävyyttä, sekä auttaa organisaatiota hallitsemaan identiteettiään.

Avainsanat Visuaalisen viestinnän suunnittelu, visuaalinen identiteetti, organisaatioidentiteetti, visuaalinen retoriikka, identiteetin hallinta, yhteisöllinen suunnittelu

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Visual communication design has a significant role in enabling organisations to make their structures, responsibilities, and values visible to the public. In complex political organisations visual identity can create recognition, projecting the characteristics of the identity of the organisation in the good and in the bad. Visual identity and the organisational identity are inherently intertwined. The managing of a visual identity in the visual communications thus plays a key role in the portraying of the organisation for its stakeholders and target groups.

This study originated during my internship at the Communications Department of the Nordic Council of Ministers in the autumn of 2024. In my work, I constantly used the visual identity of the Nordic Co-operation, which is shared by the Nordic Council of Ministers, its sub-organisations, and the Nordic Council. The use of this visual identity is limited to 20 of the organisation's key bodies. Certain projects, such as the Nordic Talks podcast series and the joint Nordic pavilion at Expo Osaka 2025 have their own separate identities.

At first, the organisational structure seemed unclear to me. Since all parts of the organisation use the same visual identity, it was difficult to visually distinguish which projects and sub-departments belonged to the Nordic Council of Ministers and which ones to the Nordic Council. At times, it also seemed that the term "Nordic Council of Ministers" was used interchangeably with the name of the head-organisation, "The Nordic Co-operation."

In an organisational analysis that I conducted as part of my internship, I interviewed Niina Aagaard, the Head of Communications at the Nordic Council of Ministers. According to her, studies that they have conducted show that even other Nordic actors or citizens in the Nordic countries often do not know the difference between the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, or do not consider the difference significant (Interview, Aagaard, Appendix 1).

Since the introduction of the current identity in 2014, efforts have been made to visually unify the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council as well as its institutions under the shared Nordic Co-operation brand. Recently, however, both the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic council have expressed a desire to return to separate visual identities

This according to Aagaard, is due to the Nordic Councils desire to distinguish itself from the Nordic Council of Ministers. (Interview, Aagaard, Appendix 1).

The fact that the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council wish to differentiate themselves from each other, while simultaneously following a visual identity that is specifically designed to merge them, felt contradictory. Based on my internship experience and the interviews I conducted during it, it also became clear that while the unique characteristics of different forums within the organisation are well known internally, they are not apparent to external audiences. I wanted to examine whether the current visual identity and its guidelines could be used to clarify this identity. I built my research around the following question:

How can visual communication be used to strengthen the Nordic Co-operation's identity and clarify its mission and activities?

With this framing, I seek to understand the limits and possibilities of visual communication design within an organisational visual identity. By examining the potential ways how visual communication can function as a tool for finding answers how to create distinct institution profiles within the same shared organisational visual identity.

The thesis aims to explore how visual communication design can be used more effectively to represent the structure and operations of the Nordic Co-operation and make it easier to understand. It seeks solutions for how visual communication design could be applied within the organisation in ways that clarify its identity and activities also for external audiences.

In the following two subchapters 1.1. and 1.2, I briefly present the Nordic Co-operation as an organisation and introduce the two documents that guide its current approach to visual communication design: the Design Manual and the Nordic Council of Ministers' communication strategy. In Chapter 2, I review the theoretical and conceptual framework of my research. Following that, in Chapter 3, I introduce the qualitative methods I used: document analysis, semi-structured interviews and the toolbox methods, the prototyping method and the arts-informed research methods that I applied for developing a design proposal. In Chapter 4, I present my findings from the thematic analysis of the

documents and the interviews as well as presents the process of developing the design proposal that draws from the collected data. I finish the chapter by discussing the analysis, my design interpretation of the data and through glancing on further research possibilities. The thesis ends with a conclusion where I summarise the results of my research.

Deyan Sudjic, the Director of the Design Museum in London and renowned author of the Language of Things described design's ability to reveal power structures: (Sudjic, 2008) Van den Bosch et al. (2005) point out that transparency increases organisational credibility. (Van den Bosch et al., 2005, p. 111).

On its website norden.org, The Nordic Co-operation states that it "seeks a strong Nordic voice in the world and an in European and international forums." (The Nordic Co-operation, 2018), In addition to finding potential solutions to strengthen the organisation's distinct voice and highlight its power structures through visual communication, this reflects on how visual communication is perceived in the organisation. Ideally, this thesis can serve as inspiration for further research on visual communication as an engaging and informing and change-generating tool in complex political organisations and forums.

1.1. The Nordic Co-operation

The Nordic Co-operation is an umbrella term for the organisation, that comprises the Nordic Council of Ministers, its 15 institutions, and the Nordic Council. The Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council are the official forums for Nordic cooperation. The Nordic Council of Ministers is the official body for intergovernmental cooperation that comprises five member nations Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland, as well as three autonomous territories Åland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. The Nordic Council coordinates cooperation between the parliaments of the member states. The activities of both focus on promoting collaboration and finding solutions to issues such as climate change, the economy, education, and cross-border barriers. (Interview, Aagaard, Appendix 1; Nordic Council of Ministers & Nordic Council, 2018)

The member states of Nordic Co-operation

together form the Nordic region, also referred to as Norden, "the North." The profiling of the Nordic region as a unified area is closely tied to the creation and development of the Nordic Co-operation organisation. The term Nordic countries was coined by the association Föreningen Norden, which was founded to promote cooperation among the Nordic countries and is considered the pioneer of Nordic co-operation. The association gave rise to the Nordic Council in 1952, around which the Nordic Cooperation organisation was later built. (Nordic Co-operation, n.d.)

Cooperation and the pursuit of unity have been the foundation of Nordic Co-operation since the organisation's inception. Both the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council base their operations on the Helsinki Treaty signed in 1963, a document that acts as a constitution, providing the legal framework for official Nordic cooperation (Valtioneuvosto, 2025). As Communications Manager Niina Aagaard (2024) described in my interview with her in December 2024, the identities of the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council are strongly influenced by the spirit of the Helsinki Treaty: the idea of a shared Nordic region (Interview, Aagaard, Appendix 1)

The key goal of Nordic Co-operation is to make the Nordic region the most sustainable and integrated region in the world (Nordic Co-operation, 2025). The action plan for achieving this goal is outlined in the Vision 2030 program created by the Nordic Council of Ministers, which guides all intergovernmental cooperation and the activities of the Council of Ministers until 2030 (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020).

THE NORDIC CO-OPERATION

NORDIC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

NORDIC COUNCIL

NORDGEN

NIVA (THE NORDIC INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED TRAINING IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH)

NORDIC CULTURE POINT

NORDIC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OFFICE IN ESTONIA

NORDIC WELFARE CENTRE)

NORDIC INNOVATION

NORDIC HOUSE ON FAROE ISLANDS (NLH)

NORDIC HOUSE IN REYKJAVIK (NOREY)

NORDIC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OFFICE IN LATVIA

NORDREGIO

NORDFORSK

NORDIC ENERGY RESEARCH

NORDIC INSTITUTE ON ÅLAND (NIPA)

NORDIC INSTITUTE IN GREENLAND (NAPA)

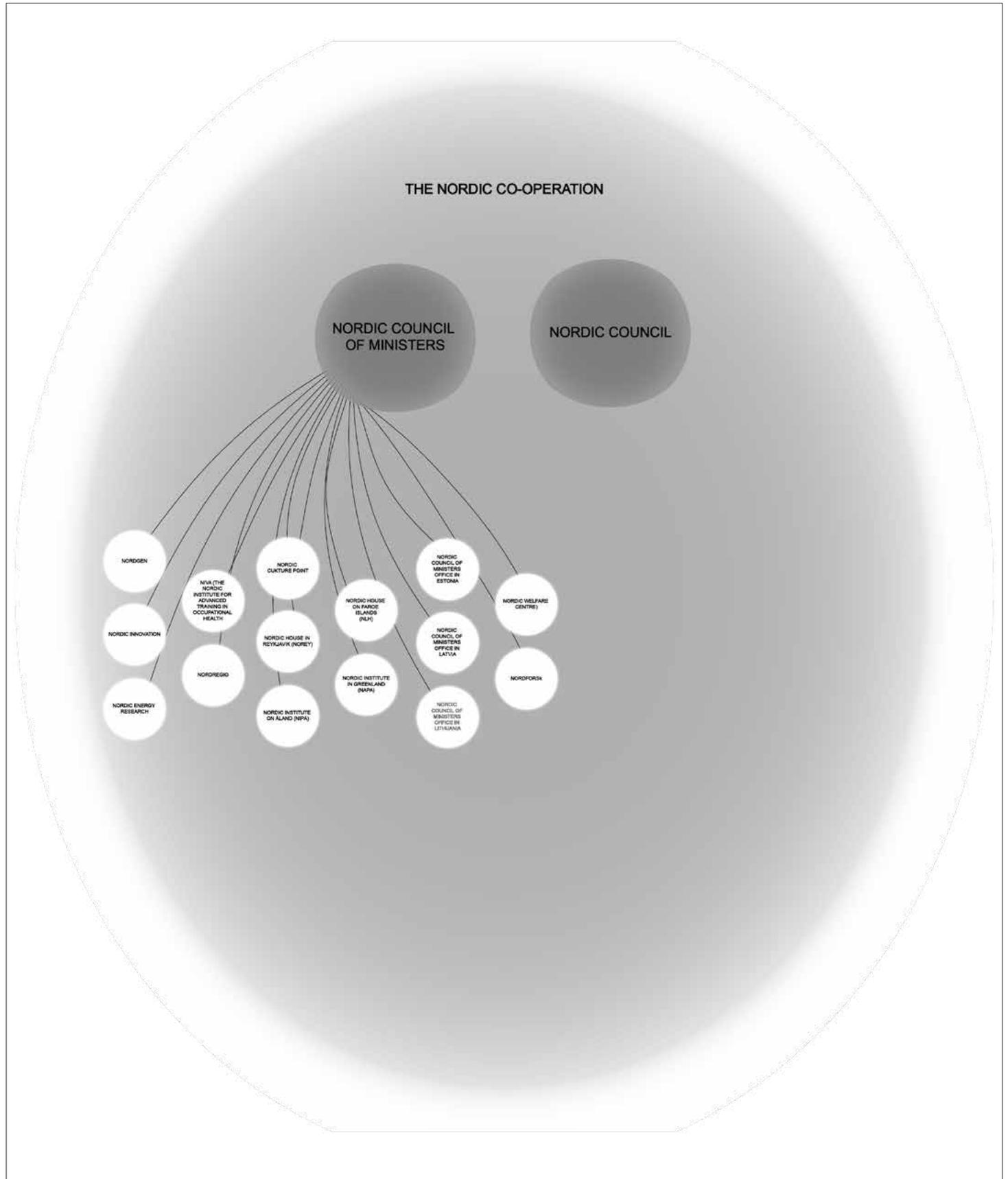NORDIC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OFFICE IN LITHUANIA

Figure 1. The Nordic Co-operation and its institutions

1.2. The Visual Identity, Image Policy, and Communication Strategy of the Nordic Co-operation

Two documents that guide The Nordic Co-operations approach to visual communication are the Nordic Co-operation Design manual, describing the guidelines of the visual identity, as well as the communication strategy by the Nordic Council of Ministers, overviewing the goals and target audiences for all communication.

The Design manual was created by the Danish design agency Kontrapunkt that developed the visual identity in collaboration with the Communications Department of The Nordic Council of Ministers. It sets the foundation for Nordic Cooperation's visual communication, and it is publicly available on the website norden.org. The design manual provides explanations on how to use the different master brands and secondary brands, colours, images and gives brief introduction in designing layouts and specifications for print products.

The key components of this identity include logos, a colour palette, typographic choices, and guidelines for photography. In addition, the Design Manual document provides concise guidance on the use of other graphic elements such as illustrations and infographics (Nordic Council of Ministers & Nordic Council, 2016).

Each body that uses the shared identity possesses its own logo. The logo consists of a swan icon accompanied by the name of the specific body, placed to the right and written in the organisation's primary typeface, Mark Pro. The logos are divided into two categories: master brands and master brand variants. (Nordic Council of Ministers & Nordic Council, 2016).

The three master brands are:
Nordic Council of Ministers + Swan logo
Nordic Council + Swan logo
Nordic Co-operation + Swan logo (used when the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council communicate jointly)

There are 15 master brand variants, which include the following organisations and programs:

Nordic Council of Ministers' Baltic Offices, NordGen, Nordic Institute on Åland, Nordic Institute in Greenland, Nordic House in the Faroe Islands, Nordic House in Reykjavik, Nordic Culture Point, Nordregio, Nordic Welfare Centre, Nordic Innovation, Nordic Energy Research, NordForsk, NIVA (The Nordic Institute for Advanced Training in Occupational Health), NORA (Nordic Atlantic Co-operation), Nordic Project Fund (NOPEF), Nordic Youth Council (UNR), Nordplus Programme, Nordic Master Programme, and Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL). (Nordic Council of Ministers & Nordic Council, 2016).

The colour palette comprises six primary colours and six accent colours. The primary colours are derived from the member states' flag colours, while the accent colours are inspired by the Northern Lights. Adapted versions of the accent colours are provided for use in print materials. (Nordic Council of Ministers & Nordic Council, 2016).

The primary typeface, Mark Pro, is described as a geometric font embodying the Nordic Cooperation's core values of simplicity, openness, and accessibility. The Mark Pro type family was designed in 2014 by Hannes von Döhren and Christoph Koeberlin at the FontFont Type Department studio, and licenses for its use are publicly available. (the Nordic Council of Ministers & the Nordic Council, 2016)

Photography is described as central to the visual identity. The design manual provides comprehensive guidance on the lighting and editing of photos as well as on ways to combine them into collages. (Nordic Council of Ministers & Nordic Council, 2024).

The Nordic Council does not publish a separate communication strategy. The Nordic Council of Ministers updates its strategy every five years, with the current version covering the period 2025–2030. (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2025)

The strategy is implemented by the Communications Department of the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers, under the responsibility of the organisation's Communications Director. According to the strategy, the Nordic Council of Ministers aims to reach as broad an audience as possible through its communication activities. The primary target groups are described as actors close to citizens that is, not citizens directly. The listed target audiences include political leaders and civil servants, key public stakeholders, decision-makers, international actors, the Nordic and international press and media, and the Nordic Council of Ministers itself. (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2025 p.4)

The strategy also specifies that separate documents exist for language policy, international profiling, and digital communication. The concluding line of the strategy once again emphasises the unity of the organisation:

"A common voice in the Nordic Region." (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2025)
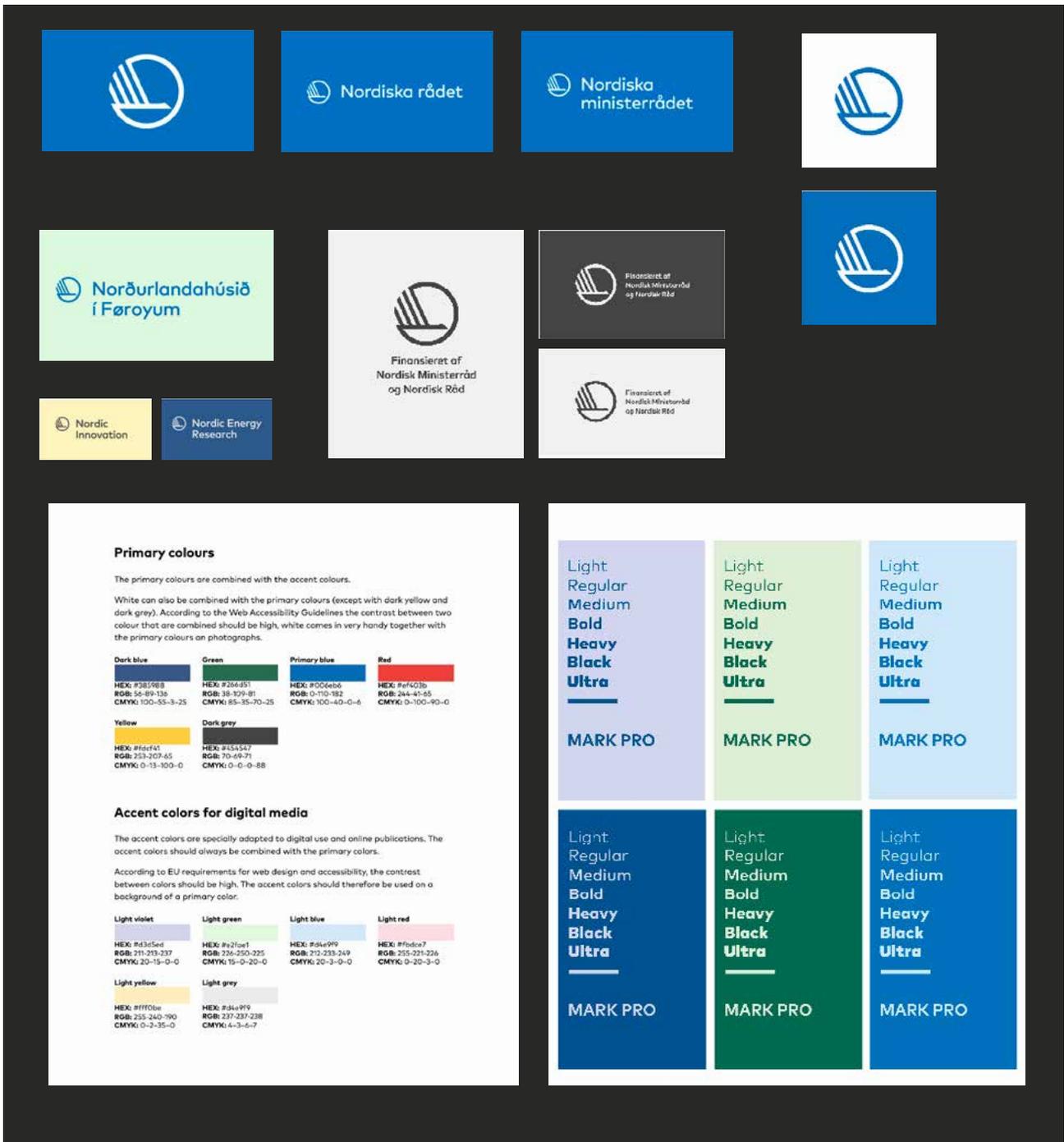

Figure 2. Master brand variants, endorsed brands, logo variations, colour palette and typeface. Note. Adapted from Nordic Council of Ministers, & Nordic Council. (2016). Design manual. Nordic Council of Ministers and Nordic Council.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As stated in the introduction, visual identity both reflects and helps shape an organisation's identity. To understand visual identity and its role, it is useful to examine the elements that constitute an organisation's visual identity.

In this chapter, I explore the concept of organisational identity and the role of visual identity in shaping it, drawing on previous research on the subject.

At the beginning of this chapter, I will present the visual identity of Nordic Co-operation and the communication strategy of the Council of Ministers. After that, I explain how the identity of an organisation is formed and the role of visual identity as part of it. Then, through looking into semiotics and communication theory I provide examples on the methods how visual identity actively contributes to shaping the organisational image and reputation.

2.1. The interrelation between a visual identity and the organisational identity

Visual identity is a symbolic element within the larger whole that constitutes organisational identity that informs and guides the organisation's visual communication. It is a collection of symbols and graphic elements through which an organisation expresses itself and distinguishes itself from others. An organisation's visual identity typically consists of a logo or symbol, typography, colour palette, and often other graphic elements as well (Van den Bosch et al., 2005, p. 108–116). The visual identity is the most outwardly visible part of an organisation and can therefore be seen as a kind of mirror image: it reflects the organisation's essence and creates a first impression for outsiders.

At best, a visual identity communicates the organisation's operations, values, and objectives. According to Van den Bosch et al. (2005), Corporate Visual Identity (CVI) is the most visible and concrete tool through which an organisation interacts with the outside world. It communicates what the organisation is and what it aspires to be: its current situation, its goals, what it represents, and what it wishes to become (Van den Bosch et al., 2005, p. 108).

Organisational identity is a dynamic and continuously evolving entity. In their article The Dynamics of Organizational Identity (2002), Hatch and Schultz argue that organisational identity is formed through the interaction of two interrelated components. They examine the formation of organisational identity through Mead's theory of the social self, which describes individual identity as a social process emerging from the continuous interaction between the inner "I" and the external "me." (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p. 129).

In organisational terms, Hatch and Schultz suggest that the "I" can be understood as the organisation's internal culture: how the organisation perceives itself. The "me" refers to its external image, which arises from the reactions the organisation provokes in its surrounding environment (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p. 129).

Visual identity is part of an organisation's internal culture. According to Schein & Schein (2016), organisational culture can be divided into three levels, based on how observable its elements are to outsiders. These levels are artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions (Schein & Schein, 2016, p. 28).

Artifacts refer to visible and tangible structures, developments, and activities within a culture, such as architecture and behaviour. Espoused beliefs and values describe the ideals, aspirations, and goals that an organisation expresses through its actions, for example its articulated ideologies. Basic underlying assumptions represent unconscious, internalised, and unquestioned beliefs and values that guide the organisations behaviour and operations. (Schein & Schein, 2016, pp. 28–30).

Like artifacts, visual identity is a visible aspect of organisational culture, something that is easily perceived even by those unfamiliar with the organisation (Schein & Schein, 2016, pp. 28–30). However, its formation is certainly influenced by both the organisation's espoused values and beliefs as well as its underlying assumptions.

Understanding how organisational culture develops and where it stems from makes it easier to understand how it shapes

organisational behaviour. Schein & Schein (2016) describe organizational culture as the set of things an organisation has learned through survival, growth, structuring, and cooperation with others. Although part of it is expressed and intentionally and easily recognisable, there is a layer to it that remains partly subconscious and internalised. To bring change within an organisation's culture, these subconscious assumptions must be surfaced (Schein & Schein, 2016, p. 26).

An organisation's internal culture gives rise to its external image. This external image shapes the internal culture and the organisation's perception of itself. The process between these two identity components can be divided into four cyclical phases: mirroring, reflecting, expressing, and impressing (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p. 116-117).

Mirroring refers to the organisation observing and evaluating the external perceptions formed about it by its stakeholders. Reflecting occurs as a result of mirroring, when the organisation relates these external perceptions to its internal self-understanding. This process either reinforces or reshapes organisational identity. Expressing refers to the ways in which the organisation's cultural self-understanding is expressed through formal communication and symbols. Impressing describes how the expressed identity generates new perceptions among external audiences (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p.117).

When an organisation has a strong identity, these two aspects, internal culture and external image remain in balance, constantly influencing one another through the four processes mentioned above. Identity gets weakened when contradictions emerge between the internal culture and the external image. If any of the four processes are disrupted, the balance between the identity components becomes unstable. (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p.128)

When an organisation neglects to consider external reactions, its outward image is based solely on internal assumptions about how others perceive it. This phenomenon is referred to as organizational narcissism. It can manifest, for example, in an assumption that outsiders consider the organisation's work as important or self-evident as the organisation itself does (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, pp. 130–133).

Another common threat to organisational identity is loss of culture. When an organisation excessively adapts its identity to what it imagines the outside world expects, it risks losing its authenticity (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, pp. 130–133).
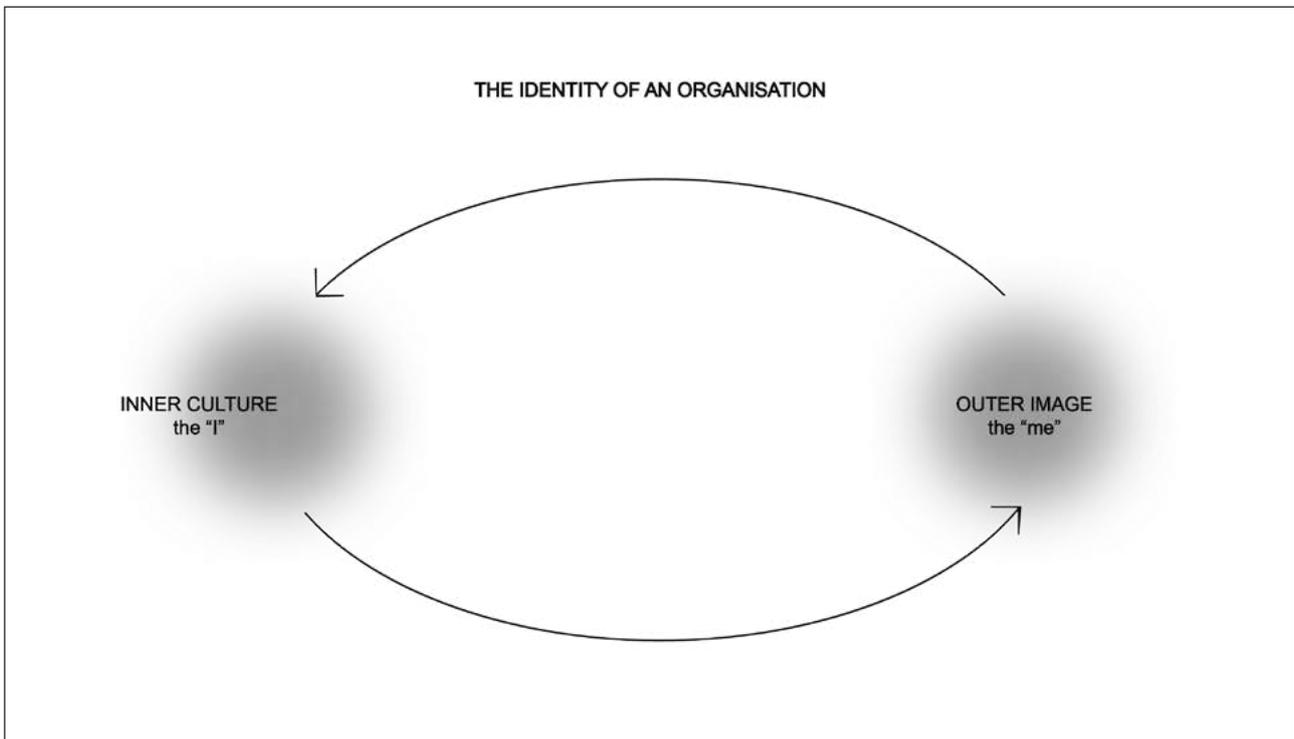

THE IDENTITY OF AN ORGANISATION

INNER CULTURE
the "I"

OUTER IMAGE
the "me"

Figure 3. The elements of an organisational identity.

2.2. Visual Identity as a shaper of reputation and image

"Assessing the visual identity can be useful in attempts to identify organisational weaknesses, and a weak visual identity may be a symptom of corporate malaise (Baker and Balmer, 1997). A new corporate visual identity, however powerful, should be part of an integrated approach to repositioning an organisation." (Baker and Balmer (1997, Cited in Van der Bosch et al. 2005, p.114)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, visual identity can serve as a strategic tool for the organisation through which it seeks to profile itself and distinguish itself from others. Van den Bosch et al. (2005) suggest that visual identity design increase the organisations credibility through creating a sense of continuity and authenticity. (Van den Bosch et al., 2005, p.111).

As part of my early background research for this thesis, I had a brief interview with Pietke Visser, art director and winner of the most significant design competition in Finland Vuoden Huiput ("The Best of the Year") price on the role of visual identity in organisations. She described the importance of visual identity as follows:

"Visual identities capture a key attribute of the company, product or service. Graphic elements should be carefully selected and informed by the message you wish to communicate. When it's done well, the solution seems obvious but identifying that visual cue and presenting it in a visually appealing and impactful way is where the real challenge lies." (Interview, Visser, Appendix 2)

Since visual identity communicates the organisation's identity, it is important that it is based on a strong understanding of the organisation's nature (Van den Bosch et al., 2005, p.109). The starting point for a visual identity must be a clear understanding of the organisation's history, values, and goals. Dialogue between the designer and the organisation during the design phase is essential to ensure that the designer has a profound understanding of the organisation. (Van den Bosch et al., 2005, p.111).

Visual identity not only communicates the organisation's identity but is also becomes an essential part of it (Van den Bosch et al., 2005, p.109). A high-quality, consistently used, and transparent visual identity can strengthen and enhance an organisation's positive reputation,

which in turn increases its value. A low-quality or unclear visual identity, on the other hand, can damage the organisation's reputation (Van den Bosch et al., 2005, p.112).

Reputation is an added value for an organisation, something that cannot be measured in numbers. Reputation is built on the recognisable characteristics of the organisation, its actions, communication, and symbols. Visual identity can be used to reinforce these features. A clear and distinguishable identity has a direct effect on the organisation's reputation in the eyes of its stakeholders and target audiences, helping the organisation in profiling itself in a recognisable way (Van den Bosch et al., 2005).

According to Van den Bosch et al. (2005), the role of visual identity in the formation of organisational reputation can be examined using the model created by Forbrum and Van Riel, which helps assess organisational reputation. The model presents five areas that affect reputation and are interrelated: visibility, distinctiveness, authenticity, transparency, and consistency (Van den Bosch et al., 2005).

The influence of visual identity extends to all five areas. Elements of visual identity such as the logo and other design components give the organisation a physical form, thereby increasing its visibility. The logo offers an opportunity to express some of the organisation's key characteristics, and it often becomes a symbol of the organisation's reputation and status. Striking design and communication help the organisation stand out from the crowd and distinguish itself from its competitors. A visual identity that reflects the organisation's aspirations and operations enhances its authenticity and thus its credibility and reliability. A consistent visual identity that helps understand the organisation's structure increases its transparency. (Van den Bosch et al., 2005). Sudjic (2008) agrees with this view, stating that design is one of the ways in which power can be made visible (Sudjic, 2008, p.100-104)

As previously mentioned, an organisation's internal culture and external image are in constant interaction, continuously shaping each other. The development and transformation of organisational identity is an ongoing process. Visual identity is typically updated gradually and as a result of careful consideration. Major identity changes are usually deemed necessary in connection with significant transformative events in the organisation's operations, such as organisational reforms, privatisation, or mergers (Van den Bosch et al., 2005, p 108.).

The management of the visual identity is an often-overlooked part in visual communication, although it has a significant impact on the consistency and strength of the organisation's visual expression. According to Van der Bosch et Al, usually, once a visual identity has been designed and a strategy developed, the visual identity is taken for granted. Examining and evaluating how the visual identity is applied is important because it helps to maintain consistency in the visual communications. (Van den Bosch et al., 2005, p.109)

The visual identity acts as a glue in an organisation's communications, but how it is used depends on how it is managed. Once the identity is designed, it is up to the organisations communication professionals to manage its use. They have to also look not only externally but internally for developments and changes within the organisation and adjust the ways of managing the identity according to them. (Van den Bosch et al., 2006, p.880)

According to Van der Bosch et al. (2006) there are three main levels how the identity can be managed: The knowledge of strategy, socialisation processes and tools and support. The knowledge of strategy and the reasons behind the design choices in the visual identity helps the employees to comply with the identity guidelines. Socialisation processes such as introduction programmes to new staff as well and explaining how to use and not use the visual identity, helps the employees to internalise the visual identity. Tools and support available to use, such as a design manual that explains the elements and dos and don'ts help to maintain consistency when there is a large team using the same identity. (Van den Bosch et al., 2006, p.880)

2.3. The role of graphic design in the managing of the (visual) identity of an organisation

Design is inherently linked with the visual identity. As Van den Bosch et al. (2005) state, creating a visual identity is a result of a design process (Van den Bosch et al., 2005, p.108). However, simply having a visual identity is not enough. As discussed in the previous chapter, the management of the visual identity, meaning how the visual identity is applied, interpreted and developed over time plays a key role in forming an image of an organisation. Communication professionals within organisations have a significant power and freedom in determining

how to use the visual identity in practice on different platforms. (Van den Bosch et al., 2005, p.880)

Graphic design is involved in not only creating the visual identity but also in applying it in practice on an everyday basis. As a form of visual communication, graphic design is an inherent part of making the organisations values, structure and messages visible. Hollis (1994, cited in Barnard, 2005) defines graphic design as a form of visual communication, the conveying of ideas through making or choosing marks and arranging them on a surface. (Barnard, 2005, p.11). The word "graphic" originates from the ancient Greek word "graphein," which means expression by means of marks or signs. The English word "design" refers to the process of thinking and planning. (Merriam-Webster's 1993:343; Friedman 2002; SOED 193:645, cited in Friedman, 2004, p.3). Thus, graphic design can be considered as an expressive and strategic practice.

The role of graphic design is debated within design theory. Barnard (2005) distinguishes two perspectives on how graphic design can be viewed: on the one hand, from the linear perspective of message transmission, and on the other, from the semiotic perspective, which emphasises the role of design as a constructor of codes and meanings. The latter perspective perceives graphic design not merely as linear transmission of information, but as operating on rhetorical, cultural, and social levels. (Barnard, 2005, p.9). This aligns with Deyan Sudjic's view of design as a language, a cultural code that reveals what we think about beauty, status, and identity . Sudjic further emphasises the emotional value that design implies. He argues that a coherence similar to that found in organisms in nature is expected in design. (Sudjic, 2008, p.13–15). Int this sense, design serves like the DNA of the modern world, a carrier of symbolic, emotional and cultural meanings. (Sudjic, 2008, p.40–51).

At the same time, graphic design is purposeful. Renown designer Milton Glaser described the primary objective of graphic design as follows: "In design, there is a given body of information that must be conveyed if the audience is to experience that information. That objective is primary in most activities" (Glaser, M. 1973, p.15). Barnard (2005) distinguishes graphic design from art noting is that works of graphic design are usually commissioned and intended to be reproduced in large quantities, often serving organisational or commercial purposes. The functional character does not diminish the power

of graphic design in communication. To the contrary, it underlines the role that design has in shaping our understanding and views.

Sudjic (2008) emphasises that of should not be reduced to only aesthetics or decoration. Beauty is one function of design, but the greater significance lies in the meanings that the design produces and the values that it signals. Design choices communicate ideals, pririties and goals, consciously or unconsciously (Sudjic, 2008, p.21). This is especially relevant in the context of organisational visual identity, where design decisions affect the authority, legitimacy and credibility of the organisation in the eyes of its audiences.

Barnard (2005) identifies six overlapping mechanisms through which graphic design operates:

1. I nformation: Design that generates, identifies, or presents information. For example, logos, infographics, or signposts.

2. Persuasion (Rhetoric): Visual communication evokes thoughts in the audience, persuades them of something, or changes their behaviour. Some argue that all visual communication contains an element of persuasion.

3. Decoration: Visual communication can bring joy and please the eye.

4. Magic: Visual communication can either preserve things that no longer exist or change the meaning of things.

5. Phatic: Graphic design includes elements that guide the viewer or reader.

6. Metalinguistic: Signs that evaluate other signs in relation to one another, for example, quotation marks, circles, or underlines.

The mechanisms highlight that graphic design serves more than one function, also in organisational contexts. Instead, the elements in the visual identity simultaneously inform, persuade, guide and construct meanings.

Understanding design as a process rather than just the outcome helps in understanding its role as a strategic tool. Originally, the word design referred to the act of making itself, not to the final result. Over time, however, its use to refer specifically to product design has become common. Friedman (2004) returns to the original meaning of the word and emphasises that design is fundamentally about intentional actions

and decision-making. In this regard, all design is strategic, seeking to change an existing situation or contribute to a desired goal. Herbert Simon defines design in a similar way, as the changing and transforming existing conditions into preferred ones. (Simon, 1982, cited in Friedman, 2004)

Design scholars, such as Valtonen (2020) argue that design comes with an inherent pursuit towards change. In an organisational context, this means that visual identity and graphic design are active agents in shaping organisational narratives, rather than just neutral tools. Over the years, different designers and movements have emphasised different aspects of this role of an active agent. From Raymond Loewy's focus on beauty and appeal, to Dieter Ram's ideal of functional minimalism, to the socially critical stance expressed in Ken Garland's First Things First manifesto, which called for graphic design to shift its focus from serving commercial interests to serving the society. Poynor, 2021; Sudjic, 2008)

By constructing meanings, design also actively prompts change. Anna Valtonen (2020) writes that design is the pursuit of change. Friedman (2004) emphasises that all design is strategic, because all design aims to change the present or contribute to the achievement of a goal. Friedman (2004) describes design as a dynamic process that can be used to create systems and strategies. Strategic design requires that an organisation define where its activities are focused and what it aims for (Friedman, 2004, p.5). The Nobel Price nominee Herbert Simon (1982) described design as a set of forces that are the products of thought and that aim to transform the existing situation into the desired one (Friedman, 2004, p.3; Simon, 1982, p.129, cited in Friedman, 2004, p.3).

Sudjic (2008) noted that somewhere between the persuasive and aesthetic functions graphic design lies an understanding of it as a servant for the public sector. In this function, design can provide clarity, responsibility and societal value, serving as a means of supporting democratic and inclusive communication.

Finally, it is important to understand that visual communication is not neutral but interpretative. Scholars in visual culture studies such as Rogoff (1998) and Mirzoeff (1999) emphasise the role that visuality has in how meanings are created socially and culturally. From a semiotic perspective, the interpretations of visual communication are shaped by individual backgrounds and contexts. As Barnard (2005)

notes, no visual communication is ever entirely neutral. Visual identity elements functions as signifiers that prompt associations and meanings. Considering the interpretative nature of design is utterly important in the management of a visual identity.

3 METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will begin by introducing my research approach and the two rounds of thematic analysis that I have conducted in the process of gathering and examining data: firstly through document analysis of the design manual of the Nordic Co-operation and the Communication Strategy of the Nordic Council of Ministers, and secondly through conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with professionals who have worked with the current visual identity. After analysing the data derived from the two first phases I explain the art-informed research and the prototyping methods as well as the toolbox-based ideation techniques that I have used in developing a design proposal.

3.1. Overall approach

The nature of my research is qualitative. I am approaching the research question via thematic analysis of the Nordic Cooperation design manual and communication strategy and interviews with professionals that have worked in developing the current visual identity of the organisation.

The two public documents express the general vision that guides Nordic Co-operation's approach to expressing itself visually. The communication strategy provides a broader view of what values drive the overall communication, visual communication included.

The analysis of these documents will be serving as a resource when formulating the research questions for the interviewees. The interviews will help in generating a picture of how visual communication is seen and used in the Nordic Co-operation, and how dysfunctions in the organisational identity manifest in the current visual identity and visual communication policies.

The data gathered from both the documents and the interviews will be examined using thematic analysis. After that, I will use the data gathered to develop a piece using toolbox-methods for ideation and after that developing a design-proposal using an art-informed research process with the help of prototyping.

3.2. Data collection method

Prior to conducting interviews, to better understand the framework that the visual communication at the Nordic Co-operation bases on, I will conduct a document analysis of the following two documents:

Document title: Design manual
Date of Publication: 2016 (Last updated 28.1.2025)
Number of Pages: 72

Document title: BRINGING THE NORDIC REGION TOGETHER:
The Nordic Council of Ministers Communication Strategy 2025–2030
Date of Publication: 09. April 2025
Number of Pages: 16

The interview phase of this research process includes three interviews with professional creatives who have contributed in the developing of the current visual identity of the Nordic Cooperation. To gain further insight to the development of the visual identity, as well as potential challenges or points of discussion that emerged, I have chosen interviewees, who all have had different roles in the process and thus can bring in different perspective. One of the interviewees is currently working at the Nordic Co-operation, one is a former employee, and one is the designer and founder of the agency that was commissioned to create the current visual identity.

Birkmann and Kvale (2018) identify interviews as a useful research method in qualitative studies. Semi-structured interviews aim to gather real-life experiences from the interviewee and seek to understand and interpret them. (Birkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 2)

Interviewees:

Name: Bo Linnemann
Title: Founding partner at Kontrapunkt design agency
Role: Assigned Graphic Designer in the development of the Nordic cooperation visual identity

Name: Ida-Lina Strang
Title: Photography Advisor, Publications Department, Nordic Council of Ministers (PUB)
Role: Image editor for the entire Nordic Cooperation, responsible for implementing image policy and for the NordPub research report series.

Name: Mette Agger Tang
Title: Former Graphic Designer, Publications

Department, Nordic Council of Ministers (PUB) Role: As a graphic designer at the Nordic Council of Ministers, she was involved in the design process of the visual identity. She was also responsible for image policy, for developing the identity to meet changing needs, and for presenting it to staff.

The interviewees were selected on the basis that each represents a distinct perspective on the identity. Linnemann was an external designer and consultant hired for the project, without prior knowledge of the organisation's internal culture. He together with his colleagues at Kontrapunkt design agency were responsible for creating the design elements that constitute the visual identity. Agger Tang, in contrast, had an insider's perspective on the design process as she was working at the time as a graphic designer in the Nordic Council of Ministers communication department. Strang, meanwhile, is familiar with the image policy embedded in the visual identity and with the established practices of visualising research data within the organisation.

A semi-structured interview begins with an introduction of themes and then moves on to questions. The structure allows for flexibility, and the interviewee's responses can lead to follow-up questions. The goal is to learn from the interviewee and understand their perspective and worldview. (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p.3) Nonverbal cues such as body language and facial expressions may convey things during the interview that are not visible in transcripts. (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p.7) I have chosen to conduct all the interviews as video calls for flexibility.

The interview setting should encourage interviewees to openly share their perspectives on the subject matter and the world in general. The first minutes of an interview are crucial: it is the interviewer's responsibility to show interest in the interviewee and create a safe space for them to share their experiences and views with a stranger. The interviewer should also briefly explain the purpose of the interview and whether it will be recorded. (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p.3)

Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) point out that discussing one's life openly in interviews can also offer the interviewee new insights and perspectives. A good way to conclude an interview is to summarise key points and ask the interviewee if they have anything to add or questions. At this stage, the interviewer can also provide more information about the use of the interview and the research. (Brinkmann & Kvale,

2018, p.7) I have concluded interviews by telling participants when my thesis will be completed and how the interview data will be used.

3.3. Data analysing method : Thematic analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis s an often-overlooked method in qualitative research. Still, it is a flexible and powerful approach when analysing qualitative data. Braun and Clarke. (2006) It is about creating a narrative by deriving themes from the set of data being analysed with the help of creating codes. (Braun &Clarke, 2006, p.86-87)

Thematic analysis does not require technical knowledge such as for example discourse analysis, which makes it accessible. The broad range of analytical pathways to choose from when conducting a thematic analysis is an advantage, but the flexibility of the method can make the researcher overwhelmed about where to start and what to focus on. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.100)

The iterative process of the thematic analysis can be broken down into 6 phases:

1. Familiarising yourself with the data. Generating transcripts of interviews makes it easier to find meanings and patterns in the large set of data.

2. Creating an initial set of codes that represent meanings and patterns. Going through the text and labelling excepts using the created set of codes. Creating additional codes if necessary.

3. Bringing together all the coded excerpts and grouping the codes under overarching themes. This requires analysing all the themes and gathering all relevant coded data under them.

4. Reviewing the identified themes to see if they are relevant in regards the research question.

5. Analysing the themes and giving them explanatory, adequate names.

6. Final, concluding analysis of the themes found and analysing them in relation to the literature and research question.

(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.86)

3.3.1. Organising research data using Toolbox-methods

The toolbox is a digital asset created in the University of Copenhagen as part of the Next Generation project in 2012–13 and updated in 2018. It was originally meant for the planning of entrepreneurship teaching. (University of Copenhagen, no date) It combines principles and perspectives from innovation theory and can be used as a tool in a broad range of design-based research projects. (Workz A/S, 2012)

The methods in the toolbox are divided to 8 categories according to purpose: Team dynamic, Field work, Problem definition, Idea generation, Idea selection, Concept development, Test & Prototyping and Realization. (University of Copenhagen, n. d.)

I will be combining three methods from the toolbox as part of the ideation of the design proposal that I am developing. The first method that I have chosen is the 'Cluster Analysis', meant for organising the data derived from qualitative analysis. After that, I will use the 'How might we…?' and Classic brainstorming methods for idea generation.

3.4. Developing a design proposal: Designing for and with using prototyping

Sanders & Stappers, (2014) suggest that in the world of design, the perception of prototypes and prototyping has shifted. Instead of just seeing prototypes as a way to test a more or less finished design, prototyping is now applied as a tool throughout a design process from start to end.

The role of the user is important. The approach of the research is also significant, the process can either be conducted by experts for the users or it can be conducted together with the participants. The designing for is when the user is a subject, and the process is led by experts. Designing with means that the user is a partner, and the research is participatory. In that case, designers, researchers and everyone also non-designers are seen as co-designers.

A fundamental part of designing together is the process of making, not just the objects being made. Still, making is just one piece in the cycle of designing together, the process also includes telling and enacting. Simply making, without including the two other components, creates a result that is ambiguous. The real meaning of the design is obtained through storytelling, or demonstrating how the design could be used and what it is about. Meaning comes from a
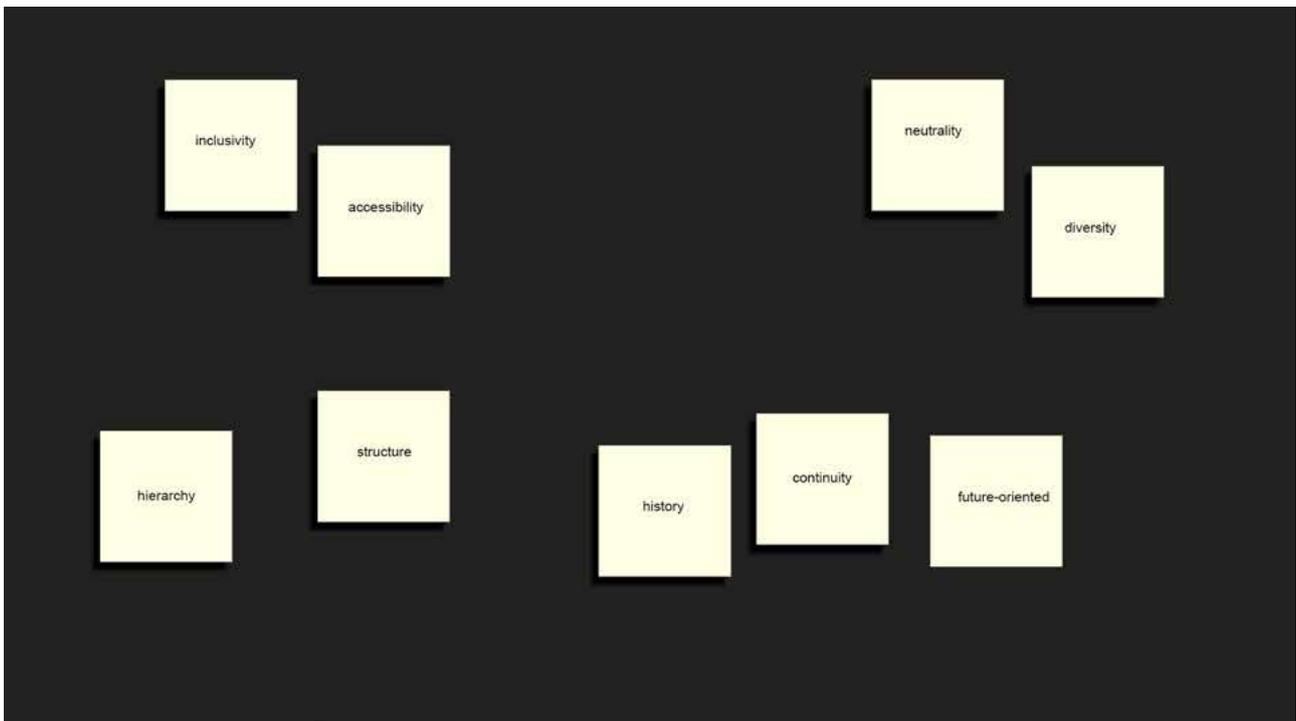

Figure 4. The Cluster Analysis

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context and the story that the people taking part in the design process entangle it in. The making in turn, becomes a creative act for everyone involved (Sanders & Stappers, 2014, p.6-8).

There are three core approaches to codesigning: probes, prototypes and toolkits. The goal of these approaches is not to validate a ready design, it is about looking for answers and investigating the future. Probes, prototypes and toolkits provides an approach to designing that expands beyond the product (Sanders & Stappers, 2014, p.7-8).

The probes are a set of materials that are designed to provoke a response. They can be abstract and artistic and sent to a test audience with very little guidance. The aim with probes is to give the designer inspiration. The designer then interprets the users' responses (Sanders & Stappers, 2014, p.7-8).

Prototypes are the physical form of an idea, a mock-up that gives a feel of a product. The purpose of a protype is to assess the technical and social feasibility of an idea. They help to grow the idea by helping the designer evaluate how the audience finds it (Sanders & Stappers, 2014, p.7-8).

Toolkits are a move towards designing with instead of designing for. The goal with toolkits is to make artefacts about or for the future. Toolkits are perfect for codesigning with non-designers as they guide the participants with clear instructions and by providing a path of expression. A significant element of toolkits is that the users of it are considered as true partners in the design process (Sanders & Stappers, 2014, p.7-8).

3.4.1. Arts -informed research as a method in developing a design proposal

In developing the design proposal, I have used elements from Art-informed research (AIR). Art-informed research is a qualitative research method where artistic methods are used to interpret research data. It is an approach that is not grounded in arts like Art-based research (ABR), where all methodologies and the inquiry of the study are derived from the researcher's art practice. (Rolling, 2010, p. 106, Knowles & Cole, 2012, p.3)

A central aspect of Arts-informed research is that its representations are either situated or informed by arts. Arts-informed research can be used as a tool to represent and discuss academic work in forms that are accessible to a broader audience.

(Knowles & Cole, 2012, p.3) AIR can also provide new perspectives on data, exploring how giving a new form to data can shape meanings and create new ones. (Rolling, 2010, p. 106)

AIR particularly aims to bridge the gap between Academia and communities. AIR challenges the dominant positivist paradigm that has governed research, meaning that it questions not only the ways how knowledge is generated but also how it is defined. It considers all individuals as knowledge makers, not only researchers within the academia. (Knowles & Cole, 2012, p.4)

The defining elements of AIR are:

1. It usually commits to a particular artform (In the case of my research Graphic Design)

2. The chosen artform is justified and serves the nature of the enquiry

3. A creative research process that is open for imagination, and informed by art making processes

4. The researcher-as-artist is an instrument of research.

5. Strong reflexive elements informed by the presence of the researcher, while the researcher not necessarily is the focus or the subject of the study.

6. Relation to an audience. The artform chosen is justified through an intention to reach communities beyond the academia with the research.

7. Audience engagement as a central part of the research: AIR is not conducted for art's sake but to involve the reader/ audience in the meaning making.

Every decision a designer makes each form or colour used in visualising data and thus affects the outcome. As researchers and interpreters, we decide from whom to collect data, what to present, what to leave out, and how to show it. Thorp (2016) stresses the importance of collecting feedback from those whose data is used. (Thorp, 2016, p.19–21)

Thorp (2016) writes that data collected from large populations rarely becomes accessible to those same people. Most of the data is not public, even if the term "public" is often associated with big data. Tools like academic articles and books are exclusive by nature. To truly make data public, it should be displayed in public spaces, making it

visible and accessible to everyone. (Thorp, 2016, p.19–21)

3.4.2. Collecting feedback from the interviewees

As said in the previous chapter, an important characteristic of Arts-informed research is its relation to audience as well as audience engagement.

Thorp (2016) highlights how data typically flows in one direction: it is collected in large quantities from individuals who never benefit from it.

According to Thorp, one way to include those whose data is collected is to bring the systems and mechanisms built on their data into their reach. We must ask if these structures are accessible to the people they are based on. (Thorp, 2016, p.14–15)

Data processing mechanisms that do not involve the data sources directly may develop in harmful ways. Who has agency in the systems we design? Simply asking for feedback is not enough: it must also be considered in the process. Participatory mechanisms can give individuals decision-making power, creating a sense of active societal engagement. (Thorp, 2016, p.16–17)

3.5. Ethical considerations and limitations

Using personal accounts as part of my methods brings risks of subjectivity and therefore validity. Due to this subjective element of the methodology, generalisations of findings should not be made. This is why this paper should not be considered as positivist research, but rather an interpretivist discussion.

Another limitation closely linked to the subjectivity of the personal accounts is the number of interviewees. The aim with the interviews is to serve both as background research and as providers of different viewpoints, not as a source of factual or quantitative data.

The different positions and perspectives that the interviewees carry a risk of bias. The interviewee who still works at the organisation might not speak with the same freedom as the interviewees who are not working in the organisation.

The positionality of the researcher is also a significant factor in this study. Adler & Adler (1987) define three roles in field research, the Active Membership Role (AMR), the Peripheral Membership Role (PMR) and the Complete Membership role (Adler & Adler, 1987). As previously mentioned, I did an internship at the Nordic Council of Ministers in autumn 2024. This research was inspired by my time in the organisation, during which I participated in the day to day work of the communications team and off work activities such as staff parties and after works organised by the department. During my internship, I developed an understanding of the organisation as well as personal relationships with many of my coworkers, which allowed me to gain insights of the organisation that I would not have gotten without being an active member of the team.

Having had an AMR perspective into the research subject comes with a risk of losing professional scrutiny as a researcher. When the researcher quit the settings, they might obtain a non-member role and consult their informants in their further research in follow-up interviews or by asking individual questions. The researcher might also ask the informants to give feedback of their work. (Adler & Adler, 1987, p.17)

The process of decoding and analysing the research findings might be difficult to the researcher, as it requires a level of criticality and a multiperspectival lens. After shifting from an active member to a non-member, the researcher might still get a feeling of disloyalty to their former team by raising critical points in their analysis. (Adler & Adler, 1987, p.17)

During my internship, I did not have access to sensitive documents. My time at the organisation was also relatively short, only four months. I do not consider my previous AMR role in the organisation problematic, but I acknowledge the impacts that it might have on my interpretations. With this paper, I am not aiming for strict objectivity but instead embracing a reflective perspective that I have been able to draw due to my previous involvement in the organisation.

Another ethical consideration comes with the visualisation of data. The way that the researcher interprets the data in a visualisation must be intellectually and morally justified. The result cannot be solely a "good image" or design, the form of the visualisations should have a purpose. The AIR approach seeks to challenge the paradigmatic view of knowledge generating as something that belongs to the academia solely and instead considering all audiences as potential knowledge-makers. (Knowles & Cole,

2008, p.4) The aim for transforming research into an accessible form involves the artistry of the researcher. At the same time, the research is not about making art as such, but the artistic qualities of the work are evaluated based on how well the artistic choices serve the goals of the research (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p.7).

Thorp (2016) adds that a designer should always consider how their work may help or harm those from whom the data was collected. The researcher should carefully consider how to use and present the data collected. The social impacts of visualisations of data must be taken into account as they may portray individuals or groups unfavourably or reduce human experience into points or vectors. (Thorp, 2016, p.14–15)

With the interviews that I have conducted, there are no other considerable ethical considerations. I informed the interviewees about their rights and informed them how the interview data would be used. During the interviews, no sensitive issues emerged. As this paper will be available for the public, I have chosen to give the interviewees a chance to give feedback of the design proposal anonymously. This is to protect them in case their statements would conflict with the organisation's codes of ethics.

4 ANALYSIS

ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I start by identifying the key findings from my document analysis. Drawing from Barnard's mechanisms of graphic design presented in Chapter 2, I analysed the two main documents that guide the visual communication in the Nordic Co-operation and grouped the findings under themes using thematic analysis. After that, I move on to analysing the data from the three interviews that I conducted. Following that, I summarise the key findings from both analysis phases and explain how those informed the development of the design proposal, drawing from the prototyping method and using art-informed research methods. After that I introduce the design proposal as well as the feedback that I have gathered on it from the interviews.

I finish by analysing the potential of the design in addressing the research problem and by drawing some possible options on directions in which the design could be further developed.

4.1. Analysis of the documents

The Nordic Council of Ministers Communication Strategy 2025-2030, published in April 2025 as well as The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council Design manual, originally published in 2016 and updated in January 2025 set the guidelines for the visual communication in the Nordic cooperation.

In The Nordic Council of Ministers Communication Strategy (2025), it is stated that the main objective of the communication is "To convey the potential, results and impact of the Nordic Cooperation." (Nordic Council of Ministers, p.6) The idea of communication as a tool for raising the profile of the organisation is communicated throughout both the communication strategy and the design manual. The thematic analysis of the documents was conducted through first identifying codes in both documents and after that drawing overarching themes based on the codes found.

Longevity, continuity and strength:

Longevity, the long history of the Nordic Co-operation and its future ambitions are stressed in both documents, potentially as an effort to raise the profile of the organisation. History, unitedness and future orientedness are all said to combine in the Swan Logo that was updated in the new visual identity established in 2016:

"The Swan represents trust, integrity and freedom. It has served as a symbol for over three decades. The new Swan is a simple, strong and open image of a swan in flight." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.10)

History, consistency and a gaze into the future is underlined in both documents:

"Vision 2030 is the basis for all communication by the Nordic Council of Ministers" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2025 p.4)

"They (Images) are used to highlight the strength of Nordic Cooperation, emphasise its achievements and showcase an innovative-outward-looking and visible region without borders." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.22)

"Blue and white are consistently used as main colours that provide a contrast to the bold flag colours." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.15)

Images should also "focus on the potential and results already achieved". (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.24)

An emphasis is also in the formality and institutionalised nature of the organisation, both in the logo and in colours:

…"the Swan signifies formal Nordic co-operation, and so is white on a primary blue background." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.10)

"These primary and accent colours, combined with a scale of neutral grey tones, make up the colour universe for the official Nordic co-operation." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.15)

Hierarchy & structure

The design manual suggests a strong brand hierarchy, with the Nordic Council of Ministers at the top. The Nordic Council of Ministers decides over where other institutions are placed in the hierarchy. (Nordic Council of Ministers & The Nordic Council, p.9) Hierarchy is also present in The Nordic Council of Ministers Communication Strategy, where the term cooperation and sometimes even the tem Nordic Co-operation seems to be used interchangeably with the term Nordic Council of Ministers.

The structured approach to communication is expressed in the design manual in efforts of maintaining consistency and the standardisation of even small details so that everything looks the same. The design manual has very specific instruction on how the logo variants should be composed and what type weight to use in different contexts. Many of the design choices are justified by official regulations:

"According to the Web Accessibility Guidelines the contrast between two colours that are combined should be very high, white comes in very handy together with the primary colours on photographs." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.16)

"The publications comply with the EU accessibility directive." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.29)

Neutrality & Diversity

The words "soft "and "subtle" are used repetitively throughout the design manual. Softness can be a visual effort to express the democratic values that the Nordic Cooperation vouches for.

"Grey tones can also be used in typography, if you wish a softer expression" (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.17)

"Indirect light with soft shadows is preferable to bright sunlight with harsh shadows." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.23)

Skin tones should be soft and natural, i. e. as they would appear in indirect and natural light." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.23)

"The accent palette is inspired by Nordic Light. These are subtle colours that provide a contrast to the bold flag colours." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.15)

"The Swan can also be used as a more subtle signifier of identity, e.g. as an imprint on folders, notebooks or other merchandise." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.10)

The neutrality is expressed in the colour palette, that is derived from the flags of the member nations of the Nordic Co-operation. Meanwhile the Design Manual also suggest an aim to enhance diversity and prompt dialogue with images:

"The people in the Nordic region vary in gender, age, religion and sexual orientation. It is essential that the images used mirror this diversity." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.24)

"Placing pictures edge to edge creates a narrative, visual interaction and dialogue between politics and society." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.27)

"Openness to new thoughts, ideas, and partnerships is one of the fundamental principles of Nordic co-operation." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.10)

The Nordic Council of Ministers Communication Strategy similarly stresses the importance of openness for new thoughts and dialogue:

"We will set the agenda by initiating and participating in dialogue based on our perspectives, with a focus on innovative, evidence-based messaging. (The Nordic Council of Ministers, 2025, p.7)

"We will position the Nordic Council of Ministers as a collaborative organisation by communicating reflectively and inclusively, both in the region and beyond." (The Nordic Council of Ministers, 2025, p.7)

Inclusivity & Accessibility

Both documents express an aim for transparency and accessibility in the communications. Accessibility is demonstrated as straight-forwardness in the typeface and image policy.

"It (The primary typeface Mark Pro) is a geometric typeface, which conveys a straightforward, open and accessible idiom that reflects the values of the Nordic co-operation." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.19)

"Their (The images) composition should be straightforward and the focus clear." (The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic Council, 2016, p.23)

While it is said that the communication should be accessible, transparent and open, it is seemingly not aimed for everyone, but specific target groups:

"Mark Pro is available in many different styles, from thin to bold. This allows the typography to

vary according to content and target audience."
(The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic
Council, 2016, p.19)

"To imbue the composition with an air of variety
and movement, it is important to select images
that differ in scale, as shown in the examples:
one shot in close-up, the next from a distance."
(The Nordic Council of Ministers and The Nordic
Council, 2016, p.27)

"All of our communication is based on openness
and transparency and is aimed at promoting
democratic participation in Nordic co-operation."
(The Nordic Council of Ministers, 2025, p.8)

"To reach the target groups on their own turf,
we must continuously evaluate and adapt our
communication channels and tools." (The Nordic
Council of Ministers, 2025, p.10)

Summary

The document analysis showed that the visual
identity, as well as communications in general are
seen as a kind of multiuse tool that should fit all
contexts and audiences. The communications
are described with many contradicting elements:
open and inclusive but customised to specific
target groups, formal and official but soft and
subtle, strong but neutral, standardised but
open to new. The impression from both the
documents is that the Nordic cooperation tries to
please everyone, which can be the reason why
the audience do not necessarily know what the
organisation stands for.

4.2. Analysis of the interviews

As part of my research, I conducted three
semi-structured interviews via zoom, recorded
them and transcribed them afterwards. When
formulating the questions, I was inspired by the
themes that I raised in the document analysis.
I chose to have a particular focus on the
ideas behind the visual identity, as well as the
development process and the inauguration of
it to get further insights into the organisation's
view on visual communication. After coding
the interviews, I mapped the found codes
under themes that spanned over all the three
interviews.

The Name Issue: One Swan Icon, Multiple
Names

According to Agger Tang, the primary aims of the
new visual identity were to update the logo and
to change the name. Prior to the redesign, the

logo of the Nordic Cooperation included only the
term "Norden", the geographical designation for
the Nordic countries. The word was considered
misleading, since it was never the organisation's
actual name. (Interview, Agger Tang, Appendix 5)

"It was a bit confusing. People said to me at the
beginning, "Have you been hired by Norden?"
No, I haven't, it just says that on the logo."
(Interview, Agger Tang, Appendix 5)

Agger Tang explained that, before the redesign,
the use of the logo and visual identity had
been fragmented and poorly controlled by the
management. The Norden logo was used
by a vast number of actors, many of whose
connections to the Nordic Council of Ministers
were somewhat weak. Furthermore, different
organisational units applied the identity in varying
ways. At the start of the redesign process, the
Secretary General of the Council assembled a
working group to determine which organisations
would continue to use the logo. Their number
was significantly reduced to 20. (Interview, Agger
Tang, Appendix 5)

"…there were so many people using that logo. It
was totally unmanageable. And it was, you know,
it was a swan with the word Norden next to it, but
there wasn't really anything actually called that.
I mean, of course Norden exists, but Norden
isn't the name of the organisation…." (Interview,
Agger Tang, Appendix 5)

Both Agger Tang and Linnemann argued that
the best solution during the redesign would have
been a monolithic brand architecture, where
all organisational brands fall under a single
master brand, in this case, Nordic Co-operation.
However, the organisation was unwilling to adopt
this structure. Instead, a more complex solution
was chosen: three master brands and 20 master
brand variants. (Interview, Agger Tang, Appendix
5; Interview, Linnemann, Appendix 4)

The Nordic Cooperation brand is thus rarely
visible to the public, appearing primarily in the
website title and in some social media channels,
such as the Council of Ministers' Instagram
account.

The Swan Logo

Another central element of the visual identity
is the swan logo. Agger Tang recalled that
the previous logo was nearly identical to the
Nordic Swan Ecolabel, as the ecolabel had
originally been an initiative of the Nordic Council
of Ministers. For this reason, the ecolabel was

deliberately designed to resemble the Nordic Council of Minister's logo. (Interview, Agger Tang, Appendix 5) Today, however, the ecolabel is managed by national companies specialising in environmental labelling and no longer has any connection to the Nordic Council of Ministers or the Nordic Co-operation. According to the research institute Nordregio, the Nordic Swan Ecolabel is recognised by 95 % of Nordic resident. It is also widely known internationally.

Figure 5. The old Norden logo. Note. Image of the Norden logo (archived) from the Web Archive: http://www.norden.org (archived snapshot from March 8, 2014, by Internet Archive, n.d.), retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20140308204757im_/http://www.norden.org/++theme++nordic.theme/++theme++nordic.theme/img/logo.jpeg.

Figure 6. The Nordic Swan Ecolabel. Note. Image of the Nordic Swan Ecolabel from Briefly in English by Ecolabelling Finland & Nordic Swan Ecolabel (n.d.), retrieved from https://joutsenmerkki.fi/briefly-in-english/.

There is every reason to suggest that the Ecolabel is more widely recognised than the Nordic Cooperation's swan logo. (Nordregio 2023; see also Salo, Suikkanen & Nissinen 2019)

Linnemann felt that the old logo was poorly suited to contemporary digital communication. He therefore redesigned the swan into a simpler, four-winged version. This decision sparked debate with the Council, since the old logo's wing count corresponded to the number of member states. The dispute was eventually resolved, and Linnemann also changed the bird's flight direction from left to right, symbolising a movement from past to future.(Interview, Linnemann, Appendix 4)

"…I remember I proposed to turn it so it pointed to the right. Because, I mean, that's the reading, you can say, momentum you have in your eyes, you know, that you go from left to right. And also you'll see the right as, you can say, the future and the left as the past…" (Interview, Linnemann, Appendix 4)

Neutrality and Inclusivity

Linnemann described the new identity as "a stylistic exercise rather than a conceptual exercise." (Interview, Lindemann, Appendix 4). Typically, in Kontrapunkt projects, consultants first conduct an audit to identify the brand's foundation and purpose, after which designers and consultants explore how best to communicate these elements. Such a conceptual mapping was not part of the Nordic Cooperation's identity redesign. Instead, the process focused primarily on styling the existing identity (Interview, Linnemann, Appendix 4).

Strang explained that images are used to communicate cooperation and connections between member states while deliberately avoiding the reinforcement of stereotypes. Preferred qualities in imagery include vitality, optimism, and groundedness. (Interview, Strang, Appendix 3)

"But still, we try to take a positive perspective as our starting point, an optimistic view of the Nordic region as a whole. So that may be more important in some contexts and less important in others. It depends a bit on whether we are communicating about the Nordic region from a Nordic perspective, or whether we are communicating something very small within the Nordic region. In those cases, you can think about it in slightly different ways. But that's one of the things we think about. And the other thing I think a lot about is not reinforcing stereotypes." (Interview, Strang, Appendix 3)

Both Agger Tang (2005) and Strang (2025) observed that landscape and nature photography continue to be overused, even when the subject matter of news items or publications is unrelated to nature. Strang further noted that the Nordic countries are not global leaders in environmental issues, making the heavy reliance on nature imagery problematic. (Interview, Agger Tang, Appendix 5; Interview, Strang, Appendix 3) Nordic countries often appear as leaders in climate-sustainability but the estimations of the consumption-based carbon footprint tell another story about the Nordic lifestyle. (Maczionsek, 2023)

"We're not particularly good at environmental issues in the Nordic region. So quite a lot of things are about something that's problematic. That can create a bit of a clash with our desire to present a positive image of the Nordic region." (Interview, Strang, Appendix 3)

Another issue raised by both Agger Tang and Strang in their interviews concerns the imbalance in the design manual: while the photographic guidelines are extensive, the graphic guidelines are comparatively limited. The fonts and colors used in the identity are neither distinctive nor memorable enough to evoke an immediate association with Nordic Cooperation. According to Strang, the organisation's image policy followed principles similar to those of photojournalism: images should be minimally edited, authentic, and "down-to-earth."(Interview, Agger Tang, Appendix 5 Interview, Strang, Appendix 3) It seems that the co-operation sees photography as a form of documentation, rather than expression.

Especially Agger Tang and Linnemann expressed criticism towards the complex brand architecture with three master brands and numerous endorsed brands.

" is it really reasonable to have 20 different senders?" (Interview, Agger Tang, Appendix 5)

Strang describes how all of the organisation's communication strives for uniformity. (Interview, Strang, Appendix 3) The Nordic Council's aim of creating a distinct identity contrasts highly with the extreme unity and cohesion that the visual identity promotes. Strang highlighted that communication within the Nordic Cooperation is often hindered by the tendency of sub-units to emphasise their own identities, even when unnecessary. (Interview, Strang, Appendix 3)

Summary

Although the interviewees have all been working closely with the visual identity, their views on it were mostly aligned. The thorough thematic analysis of the interviews highlighted five key findings:

1. The three master brand system is very complex. Because of that, the sender of the communication is not always clear. Two of the interviewees who had taken part in the development process of the identity argued that a monolithic brand architecture with just one sender would have been clearer.

2. A significant part of what the Nordic Council of Ministers does is generating knowledge through commissioning and publishing reports. This has been found difficult to be translated in the external communications.

3. The organisation thrives for neutrality and accessibility in its visual communication to a point where it is challenging to make it stand out and grab attention.

4. Images are being used extensively, even on occasions when another type of visual would have been more relevant. An unnecessarily strong emphasis is on imagery of nature.

5. Most of the people inside the organisation who apply the visual identity in their daily work are not professional graphic designers. The design manual does not provide in depth guidelines for the use of graphic elements as it does for the images.

4.3. The developing of the design proposal

I started the design process by listing the key findings derived from my document and interview analysis, using the Cluster Analysis approach by Copenhagen university.

I first gathered all findings from my thematic analysis on separate post it -notes and then categorised them.

I then turned the list into questions using the How might we…? -method:

How might we make it clearer to the audience who the sender is?

How might we better communicate the role of knowledge generation in the operations of The Nordic cooperation / The Nordic Council of Ministers?

How might we create accessible visual communication that still stands out and has a distinct character?

How might we raise the profile of the Nordic Cooperations otherwise than with images?

How might we provide tips for non-designer employees about the possibilities of expression in graphic design communication?

I then used the How might we…? -questions as a starting point for the generation of ideas, using the Classical Brainstorming -method.

The design proposal: A workshop card deck titled Limited options, endless possibilities. (Appendix 6)

4.4. Final design

Based on the document and interview analysis, followed by an idea generation phase I chose to develop a deck of cards for the staff working with the visual identity in the Nordic Cooperation. The idea was that the card deck could be used as an inspiration to test alternative approaches to graphic design in their communications, still within the framework of the visual identity. This could then create more recognisability and then help clarifying the identity of the organisation and its different institutions, not only for the target audiences but also to the wider public.

The design is inspired by the idea of emotional infographics, visualisations of information that communicate using the informative, decorative and metalinguistic mechanisms of visual communication introduced by Barnard (2005). The card deck examines the role of graphic design in making the multilayered nature of the Nordic cooperation visible. Through visual storytelling and aesthetic means it explores how the co-operation whose communications are mainly based on conveying factual information could through graphic design express itself in an even more accessible and emotionally engaging way. The ideas generated through using the card deck could ideally even prompt new perspectives for the Nordic Co-operation in communicating its goals of democratic, and sustainable development and help it in the process of reaching them.

The card deck is titled "Limited options, Endless possibilities". It approaches the subject of organisational communication narratively, emphasising both visual clarity and aesthetic values. Through seven prompt cards it paves a pathway to quick generation of multiply ideas. The cards are meant to be used in a group in a workshop setting, but they can also be used by individuals who want to reflect on their approach to visual communication. The cards are designed to be used linearly, starting from card 1 and finishing with card 7. Each card has an exercise that builds on the work prompted by the previous card. This helps the user to step by step build a visual from initial ideation to an actualisable idea.

The card deck is primarily intended for internal use within the Nordic cooperation organisation. Its aim is to inspire those working within the organisation and to offer new ideas for communicating complex processes clearly and engagingly across different platforms. Although it is created with the Nordic co-operation in mind, it is designed to be used in any bigger political organisation. I have kept the design of the set of cards very simple and the colour palette grayscale for this reason.

As the cards are meant for in-house design use in an organisation, the users are expected to follow their organisation's visual identity in the process of using the cards. The design identity of the organisations functions as a toolkit for the exercises and the aim with the card decks is to prompt reflection on the many design possibilities within the existing identity, as well as its limitations. This serves both as way to generate innovation and also consistency as the users must be familiar with the visual identity that they are working it in order to use the cards. The design is also kept minimal so that it would not influence the users to pursue any particular visual style, but to rather prompt reflection of the design choices.

The artistic significance of the project lies in its combination of infographics with a conceptual and emotionally resonant visual expression. Still, the design choices in the card deck are informed by its functions, and its main purpose is to generate ideas. The core aim of the card deck is to help in-house teams find ways of managing and implementing the existing visual identity in different ways that allows the different departments in the organisation. To portray themselves visually, while still signalling that they are all part of the same head organisation.

4.5. Feedback from the interviewees

I gathered feedback of the design proposal through sending it by email to the three interviewees who I had earlier interviewed. I asked them to express their thoughts of design freely with a couple of sentences. Due to one of them still working at the organisation, I gave all the interviewees a chance to express themselves anonymously.

Two of the interviewees sent very detailed and comprehensive feedback and one of them even sent a list of suggestions for improvement. The third interviewee wrote that due to their busy schedule, they did not have time to send proper feedback, but they described the proposal as "beautifully designed". (Interview, C, Appendix 9) For the sake of anonymity, I have chosen to refer to the two other interviewees by A and B.

Interviewees A and B also described the design as visually pleasing: Interviewee A found the proposal "visually attractive". Interviewee B described the cards as "a result of a thorough and well considered design process". (Interview, A, Appendix 7; Interview, B, Appendix 8)

The concept

The card deck was seen as an interesting a tool for visual communication, particularly for explaining the role of visuals in conveying messages. However, both interviewees suggested that the prompts should be less abstract and conceptual and more tied to the users' day-to-day work in order to be more effective. Interviewee B pointed out that often the main challenge for non-designers is not idea generation but sticking to the visual identity. They found that employees benefit more from clear boundaries, concrete examples, and explicit "dos and don'ts" than from open-ended prompts. (Interview, A, Appendix 7; Interview, B, Appendix 8)

Interviewee A said that a universally applicable resource is understandably challenging, but stronger user relevance would be essential. Interviewee B also found that the cards would be even more powerful if they were connected to the case study organisation's visual identity and would include examples using that specific identity. (Interview, A, Appendix 7; Interview, B, Appendix 8)

Target groups

Interviewee A) found the card deck abstract and too intellectualised to be directly useful for people without prior knowledge of visual communication. They suggested that it would be more beneficial for professionals such as graphic designers or others with visual responsibility. (Interview, A, Appendix 7)

Interviewee B thought that the idea of making the design process more accessible to non-designers was highly relevant and valuable. However, they considered the approach more tailored for design-professionals. (Interview, B, Appendix 8)

Interviewee A also thought that the tasks or content could be difficult to understand for non-experts, limiting their immediate practical value. However, it could function as a foundation for visually responsible professionals to develop more concrete, everyday-based exercises. (Interview, A, Appendix 7)

Could work well in workshops

Interviewee B found that a more realistic use for the cards would be to use them as a workshop tool, rather than a daily working method. Interviewee A found that the card deck could work well as a conceptual tool, e.g. a mind map or preparatory material for workshops with communicators or designers. Interviewee B said that the process that the card deck involves, could work well in education or in workshops. (Interview, B, Appendix 8; Interview, A, Appendix 7)

Interviewee B suggested that in the case of the Nordic Co-operation, the cards could be used in optional workshop sessions at internal communication seminars. In the workshops, participants would have time to immerse themselves in the design process and get guidance throughout it. This would help the participants to gain more inspiration and a better understanding of idea development when designing, (Interview, B, Appendix 8)

Time

Interviewee A considered the card deck as a functional tool for visual professionals in creating everyday-based exercises. Interviewee B found the process of using the cards time-consuming, resembling a classic design process. They suggested that the cards could involve more simple workflows or tools that could be used in five minutes. (Interview, B, Appendix 8)

4.6. Discussion

I have reflected on the visual communication of the Nordic Co-operation through a document analysis, an interview analysis and an arts-informed research process of making a design proposal, drawing on the prototyping method of designing toolkits and codesigning presented by Sanders & Stappers (2014). To summarise, the findings have revealed that the visual identity reflects a set of contradictions that lies in the Nordic Co-operation's organisational identity.

The contradictions are not necessarily related to the design. They seem to be embedded in the structure, hierarchy and governance within the organisation have therefore also been unconsciously mirrored in the visual identity. A significant element that challenges the use of visual communication is also the organisation's aim to address multiple different target groups at the same time, as well as its aspiration of neutrality in its communications. This discussion maps the most important findings and reflects on the potential and the functionality of the developed design proposal in the context of the findings.

Both the document analyses and the interviews revealed that the Nordic Co-operation sets

immense, sometimes even contradictory expectations on its visual communication. The document analysis showed that the visual identity is expected to be simultaneously standardised and open to dialogue, inclusive and targeted and strong and neutral. In the documents, the aspirations for visual communication are also described to be openness, innovation and diversity alongside with formality, standardisation and strict regulation. Contradictions are clearly present in the visual communication guidelines introduced in the design manual. The use of soft, neutral colours and news-style photographs is reasoned with signalling inclusiveness. The over emphasis on neutrality brings a risk of being indistinct.

While the organisation strives for a strong collective tone of voice in the visual communication, some of its institutions want to profile themselves in a more distinct way. This results in an unclarity of who actually the sender is, as the visual identity has been to a great extent built on the idea of one collective voice.

When analysing through the lens of Barnard's mechanisms on graphic design, it seems that the Nordic Co-operation's visual communication is mostly limited to informing and documenting. It appears that visuals tend to be used to simply illustrate or legitimise content. The meaning-making potential and the expressive, metalinguistic and interpretative possibilities of graphic design seem to be overlooked and forgotten about. Considering the variety of functions that graphic design implies could help the organisation in communicating its knowledge generating activities such as the publishing of scientific reports in a more engaging and distinct way. It could also allow the organisation to find alternatives to photography, especially I contexts where it's not necessarily relevant.

The card deck Limited Options, Endless possibilities was developed as an example of how the organisation could collectively seek to tackle the above-mentioned issues. Changing the visual identity can be a very long and extensive process. Instead of making changes to the visual identity itself the cards aimed to intervene in how it is used, inviting everyone using the visual identity in their work to reflect on alternative uses for it when designing. By emphasising on the design process, the cards underlined the importance of conscious design choices. This in turn could prompt ideas on how the layers and the different institutions of the Nordic Co-operation could be highlighted and still reach consistency and coherence in the entire organisation.

The feedback on the proposal was mainly positive, but the conceptual openness and usability of the cards received some criticism from the respondents. The card deck was perceived strong both visually and conceptually by them, but they were concerned by the abstractness of the design, the time that using the cards would require and the suitability of the cards for everyday communication tasks. The comments aligned with the findings in the analysis section: a somewhat limited design literacy and the internalised spirit of clear rules and concrete examples in the organisation. The feedback reflected the conditions in the organisation that shape the approach to visual communication in the organisation. Respondents suggested that the best use for the cards could be in a workshop session for the staff, where there would be time for experimentation and reflection.

To conclude, the contradictions and limitations in the visual expression of the Nordic Co-operation cannot entirely be fixed through shifts the visual communication. The issues are rooted in the structure of the organisation, its working practices and values. The design proposal serves as an intervention that exposes these conditions. It initiates a dialogue on how the expressive and strategic nature of graphic design could be embraced and made use of as a helpful tool in the context of a large political organisation's communications.

5 CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to examine how visual communication design can be used to strengthen the identity of the Nordic Co-operation and clarify its mission, structure, and activities, particularly for external audiences. The study was grounded in organisational identity theory and visual communication research. It approached the topic through a qualitative methodology combining a document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and arts informed research process informed by codesigning methods.

The findings indicate that the current visual identity of the Nordic Co-operation is characterised by a strong emphasis on unity, continuity, neutrality, institutional stability and strong hierarchy. These qualities are part of the organisation's history, values, and political nature, and constantly expressed throughout the design manual and communication strategy. At the same time, the analysis revealed inherent contradictions and tensions within the approach to visual communication. The aim to be simultaneously unified and differentiated, neutral and engaging, and formal and accessible results in the visual identity being conceptually coherent but communicatively ambiguous. The common identity succeeds in symbolising the Nordic Co-operation at an abstract level, but it fails in making the organisation's structure and distinct forums easily understandable to external audiences.

The interviews supported this interpretation by highlighting that the visual identity was intentionally designed as a unifying framework rather than a differentiating tool. From the perspective of both designers and in-house communication professionals, the identity's strength lies in its adaptability and symbolic neutrality. However the adaptability places a significant challenge on visual communication practices, demanding it to compensate for structural complexity without sufficient mechanisms for creating distinction. This results in the meaning-making being to a great extent left to prior knowledge or textual explanation, which limits the accessibility for those unfamiliar with the organisation.

The development of the design proposal was informed by thematic analysis and the arts-informed, prototyping and toolbox methods used. With that I sought to demonstrate how visual communication design can function as an interpretative and sense-making vessel, not only as an aesthetic or branding tool. The design proposal explored ways of visualising relationships, hierarchies, and functions within an organisation while remaining within the boundaries of the existing visual identity. Rather than proposing a new visual identity, the work focused on highlighting understated communicative potential within the current one. This approach illustrates how visual communication can shed light on organisational structures and make political cooperation more tangible and comprehensible.

This paper contributes to design research by reinforcing the view of graphic design as an active constructor of meaning rather than a neutral carrier of information. It also indicates the potential that embracing participation can have in the designing of public-sector communication. In complex political organisations the role of visual identity should be to reflecting values and aspirations and also support transparency, understanding, and democratic accessibility.

The limitations of this study include its qualitative nature and the limited number of interviewees. This limits the generalisability of findings. In addition to that, my prior involvement with the organisation has played a role in accessing information and the interpretation of findings, which is why I have taken a reflective rather than an objective stance. However, this positionality has also enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the internal practices and tensions within the Nordic Co-operation, something I otherwise would not necessarily have had access to.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that visual communication design has a significant and often underexplored potential to clarify organisational identity in complex political contexts. The Nordic Co-operation does not necessarily need to change its visual identity to reinforce unification rebranding. Instead, it could articulate the distinctiveness within unity through a more context-sensitive and explorative use of visual communication. A few examples how this work could be expanded in future research are involving a larger stakeholder group or testing visual interventions in real-life communicative contexts. An interesting point for future research could also be to test the design proposal in another similar organisation. Ultimately, visual communication design can have a powerful role in making political cooperation more visible, understandable, and relevant to the communities and audiences that it seeks to engage.

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APPENDICES

14.12.2024

Kysymykset:

1. Miten kuvailisit Pohjoismaiden ministerineuvoston ja Pohjoismaiden neuvoston omia identiteettejä? Mitkä ovat identiteettien kulmakivet?

Ymmärrän tässä yhteydessä identiteetillä tarkoitettavan arvoja, tavoitteita, retoriikkaa ja strategioita, joiden kautta organisaatiot pyrkivät profiloitumaan ulospäin ja samalla erottumaan toisistaan.

En ole löytänyt kovinkaan paljon kirjallista dokumentaatiota organisaatioiden identiteeteistä, (Louise Jeppesen ja Tedin Lindroos tekivät brändiesityksen, joka antaa hyviä johtolankoja visuaalisen viestinnän taustalla vaikuttavaan identiteettiin.) Vastaukseni perustuvat siten pääasiallisesti kokemukselliseen ymmärrykseen, ja käytännön työhön organisaatioiden kanssa, joka minulle on kertynyt koulutuksen ja työn kautta Pohjoisesta yhteistyöstä vuodesta 1996 alkaen, ja eritysesti vuodesta 2017 alkaen. Pohjoismaiden neuvoston ja Pohjoismaiden ministerineuvoston erilliset identiteetit eivät ole olleet keskiössä moneen vuoteen, vaan keskiössä on ollut yhteinen pohjoismaisen yhteistyönbrändi (luulen, että vuodesta 2013), mutta nyt poliittiset tahot ovat toivoneet palaamista organisaatioiden erillisiin identiteetteihin ja siten aihe on erittäin ajankohtainen.

Molempien organisaatioiden brändin taustalla voi katsoa vaikuttavan vahvasti Helsingin-sopimuksen henki. Tavoite yhteisestä Pohjolasta, jossa luottamus naapurimaiden välillä on vahva. Molempien organisaatioiden identiteetti rakentuu yhteiselle pohjoismaiselle näkökulmalle, jonka elementit yhdessä toistuvat molempien organisaatioiden narratiivissa kulmakivenä:

• Avoimuus ja usko jokaisen oikeuteen tuoda näkemyksensä julki

• Ihmisten välinen luottamus ja vallan läheisyyden ansiosta luottamus myös yhteiskunnan johtoon

• Kestävä luonnon hallinnointi ja luonnonvarojen kehittäminen

• Uudenlainen luovuuteen ja innovaatioihin panostava ajattelu

• Lähimmäisen huomiointi, suvaitsevaisuus ja usko ihmisten yhtäläiseen arvoon

Näitä arvoja pidetään erityisinä Pohjoismaille, ja niitä edistetään myös kansainvälisesti.

Erillisyys näkyy tehtävissä ja alleviivattaessa organisaatioiden rooleja PN: parlamentaarinen yhteistyö ja PMN: hallitusten välinen yhteistyö. Pohjoismaiden neuvosto:
PN ei ole ylikansallinen päätöksentekoelin, kuten EU, vaan neuvoa-antava yhteistyöfoorumi. Tämä antaa sille identiteetin "pehmeän vallan" ja dialogin edistäjänä. Pohjoismaisen neuvoston oma kokemus identiteetistä on käsitykseni mukaan olla yhteistyön symboli.
Pohjoismaisen poliittisen yhteistyön foorumina PN edustaa maiden (kaikki 8) yhteistä tahtoa tehdä yhteistyötä yli kansallisten rajojen. Tavoitteena on lisätä maiden välistä integraatiota ja yhteisiä ratkaisuja.
PN korostaa narratiivissaan rooliaan yhtenäisyyden ja yhteistyön ylläpitäjänä Pohjoismaiden välillä. Toimijana, joka vahvistaa alueen kansainvälistä vaikutusvaltaa ja tarjoaa mahdollisuuden kokea yhteisöllisyyttä pohjoismaisessa kontekstissa.
Pohjoismaisen neuvoston toiminnan tavoitteisiin kuuluu muun muassa rajaesteiden poistaminen Pohjoismaiden välillä, jotta ihmiset, tavarat ja palvelut voivat liikkua vapaasti. Tämä vahvistaa kansalaisten yhteenkuuluvuuden tunnetta ja alueen taloudellista yhteistyötä. Tämä sama tavoite toistuu ministerineuvoston keskeisissä olemassaolon oikeutusta kuvaavassa narratiivissa ja heijastelee siten molempien identiteettiä.
Viime vuosina Pohjoismaisen neuvosto on korostanut kestävää kehitystä ja ilmastonmuutoksen vastaista toimintaa. Neuvosto pyrkii olemaan kansainvälinen esikuva vihreässä siirtymässä ja ympäristökysymysten edistämisessä. Toinen keskeinen esimerkki on nuorten äänen vahvistaminen poliittisissa keskusteluissa. Nämä teemat nousevat vahvasti esille myös suhteessa PN:n kansainväliseen viestintään.

Pohjoismaiden ministerineuvosto:
Identiteetti rakentuu sen tehtävästä olla Pohjoismaiden hallitusten virallinen

yhteistyöelin. Se edustaa käytännönläheistä, hallitusten välistä yhteistyötä ja keskittyy päätöksenteon toimeenpanoon, mikä erottaa sen Pohjoismaisesta neuvostosta, joka on poliittinen keskustelufoorumi. Ministeri neuvoston identiteetti on olla toimija, joka luo pohjan pohjoismaisen yhteistyön toimivuudelle ja tuloksellisuudelle.

Pohjoismaiden ministerineuvostontarkoituksena on tehdä päätöksiä ja toteuttaa yhteisiä tavoitteita. Identiteetti liittyy tiiviisti ratkaisujen löytämiseen yhteisten haasteiden, kuten ilmastonmuutoksen, talouden, koulutuksen ja rajaesteiden, osalta. Aktiiviseen rooliin. Taustalla on sama usko tasa-arvoon, demokratiaan, oikeusvaltioon ja hyvinvointivaltioon, kuin PN:llä. Tavoitteena niin ikään edistää yhtenäistä Pohjolaa, jossa yhteistyö parantaa alueen kokonaisvaltaista hyvinvointia.

Ministerineuvoston identiteetin keskeinen elementti on eri sektorien välinen yhteistyö. Organisaation tavoite on olla käytännönläheinen ja monipuolinen toimija, jolla on aktiivinen rooli ajankohtaisten haasteiden ratkaisemisessa. Käytännön tavoitteena on saavuttaa Vision 2030 tavoitteet. Pysyvä alueellinen tavoite on poistaa rajaesteitä, jotta pohjoismaalaiset voivat liikkua, opiskella, tehdä töitä ja harjoittaa liiketoimintaa yli rajojen ilman esteitä. Tämä antaa ministerineuvoston identiteetille ulottuvuuden kansalaisten arjen konkreettisena helpottajana. Ministerineuvoston tehtävä ei rajoitu vain Pohjoismaihin, vaan se pyrkii vahvistamaan alueen kansainvälistä asemaa tekemällä yhteistyötä EU:n, Itämeren alueen ja muiden kansainvälisten toimijoiden kanssa edistääkseen pohjoismaisia arvoja ja tavoitteita maailmalla.

2. Miten seuraatte/kartoitatte Pohjoismaiden ministerineuvoston ja Pohjoismaiden neuvoston julkisuuskuvaa? Ovatko havaintonne olleet linjassa organisaation omakuvan kanssa vai onko julkisen imagon ja organisaation sisäisen omakuvan välillä ilmennyt ristiriitoja? Millä toimilla koet olevan suurin vaikutus ulospäin välittyvään kuvaan Pohjoismaiden ministerineuvostosta ja Pohjoismaiden neuvostosta?

Kartoitamme ulkopuolisten toimijoiden avulla kuvaa pohjoismaisesta yhteistyöstä sekä Pohjoismaiden kansalaisten, että kansainvälisten toimijoiden keskuudessa muutaman vuoden välein. Yleensä ei ole suuria yllätyksiä, ristiriita liittyy tunnettavuuteen ja merkityksellisyyteen, joka korostuu erityisesti pohjoismaiden neuvoston omakuvan suhteen. Tärkein huomio on, että ulkopuoliset toimijat (jopa pohjoismaiset)

eivät tunne organisaatioiden eroa, eivätkä koe eroja välttämättä merkityksellisiksi.

Omasta mielestäni suurin vaikutus on erilaisilla fyysiusillä areenoilla ja kanavilla (kokoukset), joissa tavoitetaan suoraan keskeisten kohderyhmien edustajia.

Appendix 2. Interview with Piëtke Visser, Art Director, Kuudes

9.4.2025

1. In an interview with Institut finlandais, you told that the visual identity is inspired by the structure and the colours of the institute itself and that the custom typeface created together with Helsinki Type Studio symbolises the role of the institute in creating cultural exchange. How was the process of designing the identity? Did the institute have some specific requirements or wishes regarding the new identity?

The institute was undergoing a significant renovation at the time, making it an ideal moment to refresh its visual identity as well. The brief was clear: create a new identity that would be dynamic, contemporary, and representative of the Finnish cultural landscape in the broadest sense.

2. In your career you have designed identities for many different organisations and brands based in Finland. Was it different to design an identity for an organisation that represents Finnish culture but is based abroad, and if so, how?

I don't think the fact that the organization operates abroad, specifically in Paris, had a significant impact on the design work. Despite its location, it remains deeply rooted in Finnish culture. The concept behind the identity was to convey grounded sophistication, ensuring it resonated both in Finland and internationally.

3. In your view, what makes a successful visual identity for an organisation?

The most successful visual identities capture a key attribute of the company, product, or service. Graphic elements should be carefully selected and informed by the message you wish to communicate. When it's done well, the solution seems obvious, but identifying that visual cue and presenting it in a visually appealing and impactful way is where the real challenge lies.

Appendix 3. Interview with Ida-Lina Strang, Photography Advisor, Publications Department, Nordic Council of Ministers (PUB)

Ja, så jag tänkte först om du skulle kunna berätta lite om ditt arbete på ministern på PUB. Bara en kort beskrivning, en eller två meningar.

Jag är huvudsakligen ansvarig för våra publikationer och speciellt en serie med forskningsbaserade publikationer som heter TemaNord och de kan handla om, det är egentligen olika organisationer som har fått bidrag från Nordiska ministerrådet för forskning. Och så är resultatet en publikation. Då har jag hand om det och så är jag också vår bildredaktör så jag har lite huvudansvar för bildarbete inom koncernen och kan hjälpa andra som jobbar i huset med bildarbete, vara kommunikatörer och så.

Var det, var bildpolitiken, var den skriven av samma designer som skissade hela visuella identiteten och skapade bildpolitiken?

Ja, jag tror att det delvis har varit det. Jag är lite osäker på om det har funnits en bildpolitik innan den design vi har nu. Det är en extern firma som har gjort vår designmanual som den är nu. Och den gjordes före min tid så det vet jag faktiskt inte så jättemycket mer om än att det är en extern firma som har gjort det och de har utgått väldigt mycket från de nordiska flaggorna. Och från Svanen som ju också finns i Svanemärke som nordiska ministerråd. Det är en av de mest lyckade grejerna som vi har lyckats med. Så den finns ju också med i designmanualen.

Och jag antar att de lite har skrivit den där bildpolitiken också men det kan hända att den baserar sig på någonting som har funnits tidigare. Det vet jag tyvärr inte.

Jag ska faktiskt intervjua han som designat den. Det var meningen att vi skulle ha haft intervjun redan men han blev också sjuk. Så vi fick boka om den. Men ja, så.

Men Mette Agger Tang, som har arbetat hos oss tidigare, som är Teds föregångare. Så hon har tror jag varit med när den har utvecklats. Så henne kan du prata med, hon kanske är ännu bättre att prata med än Ted eventuellt. Jag kan kanske ge henne adress till dig om du vill. Så kan du säkert skriva till henne.

Jättegärna.

Ja, absolut. Hon har också varit bildredaktör tidigare, före mig.

Okej, just det. Ja, det skulle vara jättebra att höra henne.

Hon har ju allt mera att säga än jag också. Hon har jobbat så länge med den. Hon är frilansare fortfarande för oss och jobbar väldigt mycket med vår identitet för hela koncernen fortfarande. Hon är grafisk Designer.

Okej. Perfekt. Jag tänkte när jag skrev rapporten om min praktik då intervjuade jag det var mer kanske generellt. Då frågade jag intervjuade Rebecka och Nina. Nu tänkte jag i och med att justificera på den. Bäst att höra er.

Men ja, så jag börjar med första frågan: Kapitlet Bildpolitik i designmanualen beskriver Villnös syfte ärat stärka och understryka det nordiska samarbetet, dess prestationer och ambitioner och på ett dokumentärt sätt spegla ett gränslöst, innovativt, utåtriktat och synligt Norden. Mycket av det nordiska samarbetet handlar om att förstärka, förnya och utveckla Norden som region. På vilket sätt speglar det i hur man använder bild som medie?

Ja, egentligen beskriver jag det där väl ganska bra. Men jag tänker att det som jag försöker tänka på och som jag försöker säga till människor när de använder det är att det finns en viss motsägelse i det där. Att man ska vara sanningsenlig och man ska vara naturlig och man ska vara nära vi vill ha bilder som är från Norden och som är väldigt liksom ja, åtminstone så ska de se ut som att de är från Norden så de ska åtminstone vara från en miljö som påminner väldigt mycket om Norden. Någon gång kanske man går lite utanför någon gräns och har någon bild från norra Tyskland eller så, men i princip så ska det vara liksom Norden. Och också när det kommer till till exempel forskning och sånt och ganska många av våra resultat så kan det ibland vara ganska problematiska saker.

Vi är inte speciellt bra på miljö i Norden. Så ganska många grejer handlar om något som är problematiskt. Då blir det kanske en liten krock med att vi vill ha en positiv bild av Norden. Det står i vår manual att vi ska ha det. Där försöker man kanske lite tänka på att utgå från ett slags hopp eller enslags framtidstro, hur man vill att det ska vara. Så att man snarare tar det från en mer positiv sida. Och någon gång behöver man förstås slänga in någontingsom är en massa skräp eller en skogsbrand eller någonting sånt.

Men att man ändå försöker ha som utgångspunkt att ha en positiv synvinkel. En optimistisk syn på Norden som helhet. Så det kanske är mer viktigt i vissa sammanhang och mindre viktigt i vissa.

Det beror lite på om vi kommunicerar Norden utifrån Norden. Eller om vi kommunicerar något väldigt litet inom Norden. Så kan man ju tänka på lite olika sätt. Men det är väl den ena saken som man tänker på. Och det andra som jag tänker mycket på är att inte befästa fördomar. Så att man försöker, om vi till exempel ska visa bilder av Grönland, att man inte tar en bild av ett isberg nödvändigtvis, utan att man kanske tar en bild från en stad i Grönland, av människor som gör någonting, som är aktiva.

Generellt försöker vi väl alltid så långt det går att använda människor, djur, aktivitet i bilderna, att det ska se levande ut. Och i högre grad försöka visa ett samhälle än kanske vackra naturbilder. Den ganska klassiska synen på Norden är väl isberg och norrsken. Och så kanske visa något annat. Försöka ha mer en samhällelig syn på det. Och kanske också att försöka tänka om man ska representera Sverige så måste det inte alltid vara en bild av Gamla stan i Stockholm.

Eller om man ska visa Danmark så behöver det inte alltid vara Ny bild av gamla stan i Stockholm eller om man ska visa Danmark så behöver det inte alltid vara Nyhavn utan man kanske försöker visa Århus eller man försöker visa Göteborg eller Örebro eller någonting annat alltså att man försöker liksom lite visa på en bredd vara lite mer inkluderande på det sättet. Och sen tänker jag till och med att det är också några saker som vi är väldigt bra på och det har att göra med jämställdhet och social liksom sådana olika sociala saker. Vi har bra sjukvård och vi har bra skola och sånt.

Så det kan man ju också, det vill man ju gärna visa. Och där också att det inte ska vara fördomar utan att man försöker visa lite kvinnor i traditionella mansyrken eller män i traditionella kvinnopositioner.

Kanske lite personer som inte är helt självklart vilket kön de tillhör. Och också försöka visa lite olika etnisk tillhörighet. Alla i Norden är inte blonda. Men så finns det ju några situationer där man också måste vara väldigt försiktig till exempel.

Till exempel när det kommer till Grönland och Sapmi så är det ju svårt. Där måste man vara väldigt mycket försiktigare för att man inte ska förstärka fördomar men ändå ha respekt för det man avbildar. Där får man ofta tänka lite extra och fråga någon som är insatt och kunnig.

Ja exakt. Tänker ni mycket på fönstren som bilderna förmedlar och sånt? När ändå arbetet för Nordiska samarbetet har så många framtidsmål och mycket av arbetets sikt är på en bättre framtid. Är det också speglat i sätt att man använder bild på så sätt att man perspektivvinklar? Det sägs ju i designmanualen beskrivsganska tydligt att det är vilket typ av ljus man ska använda och sånt. Har ni tänkt er på man ska visa det?

Ja, delvis kanske. Vi försöker ha naturligt perspektiv på saker. Vi kör inte så mycket på fågelperspektiv och grodperspektiv. Kanske inte så mycket värdering. Att man försöker hållavika överdramatiska bilder och typiska kvällspressdramatik. Man försöker hålla det mer på en medborgarnivå där det ska vara ganska jordnära. Det att man ändå försöker hålla en positiv ton innebär att man försöker göra det, men på samma sätt får man sätt försiktigt så att man inte romantiserar. Det försöker vi också undvika, att det inte ska vara så mycket fejdat och romantiskt ljus. Utan försöka vara ganska verklighets...

Jag menar du kan ju ta en verklighetstrogen bild men kanske inte ha så himla mycket solnedgångar helt enkelt. Ibland så gör man det ändå, speciellt när det handlar om internationell profilering så använder vi det mycket, mycket mer. För då är det ofta ett mål från beställaren att de vill ha det här lite mer romantiska och dramatiska. Men vi försöker i princip så långt det går att hålla det till mer vardagsnära. Och att autenticitet är det viktigaste. Och vi försöker också ganska långt undvika väldigt starka skuggor och sånt.

Ifall det inte är uttryckligare så att vi behöver ha en väldigt... Någon gång behöver man ha ett fotografi som kanske är mer symboliskt än föreställande. Då kanske man måste använda silhuetter av människor till exempel. Du vet att man mer använder skuggorna av människor eller människor i motljus om man inte ser exakt vem det är och sådär. I sådana fall kanske man... Eller gör vi det någon gång. Men vi försöker ganska långt när det är möjligt att vara vardagsnära. Just det. Ja, det var precis det med symbolik. På princip att det inte ska vara klische. Det tror jag är vårt huvudsak. Och det kan man tolka på väldigt många sätt. Men både att bilderna inte ska vara sådana klischébilder. Som är väldigt abstrakta och generiska. Men också att

vi inte ska gå på fördomar. Det är väl ett ganska bra huvudregel egentligen. Och kanske att försöka undvika den här typen av stockbilder. som är väldigt så liksom överdrivet positiva och liksom tillagda och mejslar så långt det går. Och vi använder inga filmer vi använder inga liksom åtminstone så långt det går att det inte ska synas att det är hemskt mycket bearbetade bilder utan vi försöker ha dem. Inga liksom sepiatonade bilder eller sådana här desaturerade bilder utan vi försöker ha dem. Värtlighetstro.

Ja, just det. Så att det ska vara så naturligt som möjligt.

Ja, precis. Ganska nära någon slags journalistregler är det ju egentligen. Så om man vill ha den typen av uttryck som är lite mer symboliskt så kanske vi använder.

Hur balanserar ni mellan att förmedla en enig bild av Norden och samtidigt undvika stereotypisering? Vi försöker vara ganska medvetna om det. Det är något som vi försöker ha i bakhuvudet hela tiden. Att fundera efter vad man väljer att förmedla. I vissa situationer är det väldigt så uttänkt. Det är ganska många bilder som vi inte tänker på. Människor har ganska mycket fördomar i att se på bilder. Man måste påminna sig och vi påminner också varandra. Tack och lov har vi väldigt många experter här i huset som kan kommentera om det är något som de hellre hade velat ha.

Vi har också organisationer som arbetar med just de här frågorna som kan vara ganska uppmärksamma på hur olika saker förmedlas. Men det är ju en balansgång. Det får inte heller bli så att allting blir normkritiskt. Det ska ju finnas av båda två. Vi jobbar ganska mycket med bildcollage och sånt. Där man kan visa saker från många olika håll. Det är ju en fördel. Så man kan visa det hela spektrumet. Så att det blir en helhet som skapar mening. Ja, precis. Det är också viktigt att man inte... Jag vet inte vad jag ska ta som exempel. Men om det handlar om gamlingar på ett hem så kan det ju hända att ifall man lägger en bild av ett samkönat åldringspar på en publikation som absolut inte handlar om det eller i ett sammanhang som inte absolut inte handlar om det så kanske det tar fokus från det som det handlar om. Så man måste också kanske lite hitta de där balanserna så att det liksom att man kan vara normkritisk på ett sätt hela tiden men man ska också det får ju bli en grej när det inte är en grej.

Så då kanske man väljer en annan typ av bild ifall det inte är just det som det handlar om så att man inte sätter fokus på fel sak. Om du förstår

vad jag menar.

Ja, exakt. Min sista fråga var att enligt dig, vilka slags bilder kan bäst bidra till att hjälpa nordiska samarbetet sticka ut från mängden som organisation och göra dess arbete mer känt?

Ja, den är ju svår men jag tänker att det som är unikt för oss är förstås alla de här politikamötena och de olika evenemangen som vi har. Det är kanske det som bäst beskriver vår verksamhet som är ganska flummig. Det är inte så självklart vad det är vi sysslar med för allihopa.

Så det är kanske egentligen de bästa bilderna för att beskriva är ju de här mötena mellan olika människor och mellan politikerna. Och sen de facto, alltså det som folk ju jätteofta vill ha av oss är ju bilder från gränser. Alltså olika typer av broar mellan Sverige och Norge och Danmark och Sverige och Finland. Alltså den typen av gräns beskriver ju oss jättebra och där får vi också jobba en del med att det inte ska bli så att samma Öresundsbro liksom visas igen och igen och igen och igen. Utan att försöka hitta lite olika sätt hur man kan visa gränser på till exempel. För det är klart att det är någonting som beskriver vårt jobb jättebra. Men man kan beskriva det på olika sätt. Och så blir det andra saker som är klångliga som till exempel i något kedja så var det en av våra grönfiskardesigner som hade satt en färja. Alltså en Sverigebåt.

Som ett bild på en gräns. Och det är det ju. Men samtidigt är det jättemiljöovänligt. Eller ett flygplan kan man också tänka. Som en slags gräns. Men det är också jättemiljöovänligt. Så det finns många saker där som är krångliga. Om man vill liksom. Det kanske är det svåra att vi jobbar med så jättemånga saker. Det är så jättebrett det är att jobba med. Så man ska vara lite medveten om alla trådar samtidigt. Så man inte visar någon sak som går helt emot vad vi står för i övrigt.

Det där är faktiskt någonting som jag är så nyfiken på att höra från han som designat identiteten. Bron och möten mellan olika människor. De beskriver så tydligt, hela organisationen och dess syfte. För mig kändes det lite att jag i typsnitten och i färgerna, att man inte... Jag hade lite svårt att se hur de förmedlade den tanken eller vad som var tanken bakom dem. Det är något som jag tänkte fråga honom.

Ja, jag tror att den här grejen hade varit superkritisk om man hade satt Öresundsbron som var symbol. Då hade det blivit politisk kris i Norden. Ja, nej. Nej, inte en specifik bro men det här med att prata. Jag tror

att det är därför man har använt flaggorna för att vi har också lite speciella nordiska flaggor och vi har kors på de flesta och sånt. Så jag tror att det här är det som har varit utgångspunkten för dem. Och så finns det ju någonting där med det nordiska ljuset och sådär som man har tänkt på. Men det är ju jättesvårt när man är en politisk organisation också. För man ska verkligen inte trampa på någons tår liksom.

Jag tror att Svanen är alla är mest stolta över. Så det är väl därför man har erat sånt. Och om den har blivit redan en så stark symbol för organisationen. För jag tror att Svanen var redan med i den förra... Det kommer ju från Svanen-märket, miljömärket som ju är det finska ministerrådet. Så det är därför man har förstås, man rider lite på den vågen att man har fått igenom ett sånt fint grej som är världskänd. Så jag antar att det är därför som man gärna vill identifiera sig med det förstås. Det är något som människor känner.

Ja, absolut. Jag tänkte, vi har gått ganska mycket över tid. Men jag tänkte fråga snabbt om det är okej med en extra fråga. Tycker du, som du sa så används illustrationer och sånt ibland när det behövs lite mer symboliskt bildinnehåll. Men tycker du att det skulle finnas rum för... Man fattar ju att det behövs dokumentation från arbetet i bildform. Men tycker du att det skulle finnas rum för andra typer av bilder som inte har det dokumentära? Det kanske är en jättestor fråga, men som politisk organisation behöver det alltid vara dokumentära fotografier?

Menar du nu andra typer av fotografier eller tänker du på andra typer av bilder? Kanske andra typer av bilder. Vi använder rätt mycket illustrationer och vi har faktiskt ganska brett vad man kan använda. Vi använder jättemycket infografik. Super mycket av det egentligen. Och vi pratar ibland om att man kanske ska fundera lite mer på. Vi försöker lite tajta till vad man kan använda för typ av illustrationer. Det som man kanske ska tänka på med vår organisation som gör den också krånglig. Är att vi har 13 eller 14 institutioner som alla ska använda samma design. Och vi vill liksom ha ett enhetligt uttryck. Och vi har märkt att ju mer tillåtande vi är desto spretigare blir det. Så vi försöker snarare tvärtom dra ihop det ännu mer. Ha lite mera struktur och mera regler för hur det egentligen får se ut.

För att risken med att bara om vi här i vårt lilla team gör någonting utanför gränserna. Så kan vi inte motivera varför ingen annan ska få göra det heller. Då man är så många så måste man ha ganska tydliga regler för att alla ska kunna passa

under samma tak. Vi ska alla känna igen. Och då är det vettigt att gå på den här dokumentära grejen. För att när det kommer till en viss annan typ av bilder så är det så mycket fast det tycker och smak. Att det är svårt att kontrollera det sen. Och vi märker det här bara med våra kommunikatörer. Vissa kommunikatörer älskar verkligen romantiska bilder. Och vi får verkligen slåss alltid för att inte använda dem. Så jag tror det skulle bli ännu värre om vi skulle gå ännu mer, vara ännu mer tillåtande. Vi har haft mycket diskussioner till exempel om använda bilder och hur får man använda dem och i vilka sammanhang och det är väldigt kontinuerligt hur mycket vi diskuterar väldigt kontinuerligt det här och också om vi säger något som någon annan institution har gjort och funderar på att är det en typ av uttryck som vi tycker passar i vår identitet? Kan jag använda det här? Kan vi använda det här? Ibland säger vi ja, ibland säger vi nej. Ja, absolut. Att det är på grund av storleken på organisationen. Ja, och kanske också att det är politiskt som till exempel det med AI så är vi ganska restriktiva, ganska försiktiga. För vi vet fortfarande inte riktigt exakt var det är på väg och det är så problematiskt med all copyright och sånt. Eftersom vi annars är noga med det så försöker vi vara ganska försiktiga med den saken. Vi är en organisation som potentiellt granskas. Ja, just det. Det är ett viktigt poäng. Och det är inte bara skämma. Det finns sådana aspekter av det också. Man kanske ska vara lite försiktigare.

Tack så mycket för din tid. Det var jätteintressant att höra.

Jag ska skriva in Mettes kontakt där i chatten så får du den. Okej, yes. Ifall du vill skriva till henne, för som sagt hon är den av oss som har bäst koll egentligen på hur den gjordes den där. Och eftersom hon är fortfarande på ett sätt jobbar med oss så är hon ännu aktuell. Och hon heter alltså Mette Agger Tang och hon har jobbat här före Ted för typ två år sedan. Så hon är ganska nyligen slut.
Yes, Mette Agertang.
Ja, tack så mycket. Och ja, jag ska försöka få tag på Ted så att jag kan intervjua honom också.

Lycka till, hoppas det blir bra.

Tack så mycket, det hoppas jag med.

Appendix 4. Interview with Bo Linnemann, Founding partner at Kontrapunkt design agency

28.4. 2025.

Hi, so should we go directly to the questions? Sure, sure. Yeah,
so my first question was,
[03:50] what were your main sources of inspiration when creating the visual identity for the Nordic Co-operation?

Well, now it's quite some time ago, but as I recall it, itwas a redesign. It was not a new development of a new design concept as such. It was morean update of the existing visual identity as I remember it. But you know they use this one logo or how was it called? Is it called the swan logo? I think so, yeah, they call it the swan logo. And the way this logo was before and I believe it's still used sometimes in some sub-brands, hierarchy of some kind. But it was a bit too complicated to be sort of used in, you could say, in modern digital communication and so me and what have you. So I was more looking into how we could simplify that swan logo so it would be more more suitable for these applications you know but also making it a bit more you can say modern and stylistic and now you when i speak here i remember also that that i thought it was sort of pointing the It was pointing towards left.Yeah, that's true. And I remember I proposed to turn it so it pointed to the right. Because, I mean, that's the reading, you can say, momentum you have in your yes, you know, that you go from left to right.And also you'll see the right as, you can say, the future and the left as the past past.

Yeah as they are so like i felt like um in every project and everything i worked with the goals that they have for the for expanding the collaboration and becoming the most sustainable and um and integrated reason like it's a lot about forward thinking so that's uh yeah it's interesting that previously it was pointing like backwards

Yeah i mean they might have some reasons for doing that at the time it was designed but but i think at least for now it would be more appropriate to have it pointing to the right so that was what i suggested to the board, as I remember it. And also, you know, they had, there was a quite, you could say, tense discussion on the stripes in the wings, you know, the feathers in the wings, because it corresponded to the number of member countries in the Nordic regions. And by simplifying it, they said, well, now it doesn't we we couldn't really um we

couldn't really hustify that each country had a presence in the logo you know i think it was it was originally it was eight countries as i remember it and so there were eight stripes in the in the wing So I proposed to simplify it to four, because then we could make them bolder and more, you can say, it will be a bit more durable logo, having only four stripes instead of eight.

And then I argued that the blue stripes and the white stripes, they both represented a country membership. So in that way, you could still argue there were eight stripes, four blue and four white, if you understand.

Yeah, absolutely. Makes sense. Very interesting.

Then I somehow persuaded them to do that, so they could still, you could say, justify it to the membership member's states.But that was how I remember it. But then there was a lot of also discussion on the name, as I remember it. I can't quite recall what the issue was, but I remember we tested different namings and how is it the is it called the Nordic collaboration or something?

Yeah it is, actually I had an interview with the inhouse graphic designer who used to work at the time Mette Agger Tang who was involved in the project and she told me about the name discussions as well because apparently before the name was just Norden yeah, Norden and then yeah, it's the name kind of of the region but it didn't really communicate the organization so then they went with Nordic Co-operation but during my time there it was also a little bit complicated to work with that hierarchy with the names because the organization like the Nordic Co-operation it's very abstract in a way. It is. Yeah, you're quite right. They have, like, now I think they have, this year they have made a decision to more separate the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, so that they would have a little bit, like, distinguished somehow within still using the samedesign system and identity, that they would somehow be profiled a little bit different. But I think at the time, at least what the head of the communications told me, they wanted to really unify the two under this abstract name. So it's been an ongoing discussion there as well, I think, ever since. But I think Mette told me that it was already a great update that the name changed from just Norden to Nordic Co-operation, that it already clarified it a little bit.

I believe it's quite complicated to make and to implement a name change, I believe, quite radical and it's quite you know something that

should be taking in the in the board and maybe there are some i don't know some legal stuff also to consider about this so it's not just to pick the name you believe is best but maybe pick companies is really complicated, you know, to clear all the legal stuff around it.

Yeah, and to some end, the name that somehow works as an umbrella for both the parliamentary Nordic Council and the governmental cooperation, which is the Nordic Council of Ministers and all the institutions but Mette actually in the interviews uh she told me an interesting thing about the process that apparently some time very early in the process when you had the first initial like meetings discussing the logo and the logo updates that you presented some alternative to the swan is that right?

Yeah, I might have done. I would say it would be most likely that I had pitched in some other proposals. Okay. But for now, I cannot really remember that. But I can go back in my files and check what I have.I haven't done that until this meeting. I'm sorry for that. But I could look into my files and see whether I could find some documents, some old documents.

Well, if you have the time, that would be really helpful.

I think it's an interesting thing if that was something you considered as well as part of the process.

Yeah, there's also with the logo, there is the connection to the climate certificate, which no longer has anything to do with the organization, but which was made initially by the same graphic designer, apparently.

Yeah, but isn't that where they use the old logo?and they refuse to...

Apparently the Nordic Council of Ministers asked them if they would...Because it's now a completely different organization of its own that has no connection with the Nordic Corporation. But as the history of the logo was the same, The Nordic Council of Ministers had asked the ones who managed the climate certificate logo if they would like to update it to a similar logo as well, but they refused, apparently, for some reason.

Yeah, that's really... I mean, it sounds like a real conflict, because it doesn't make sense that you have the same logo in two different executions. So if I were the councillor, I would definitely do something about having their own logo,

so it doesn't interfere with the climate logo. Yeah, and I've been very, like, I haven't, that's still something to maybe look more into, but I haven't really found the initial reasoning why the swan, because, I mean, for the climate certificate, it makes, like, mean the wings as you now told like that if that symbolizes the nordic the member countries that makes sense but um but yeah i was curious about that and that's why i i was wondering if if you still have the files it would be really interesting to to hear what was the other option you and presented as an alternative to this one?

Yeah, but let me check that. I had to go back in my old hard disk to find that. Yeah. Because I don't have it right here.

Sure, absolutely. If you have the time, amazing. But I also understand that you're very busy.

No, no, but I would be happy to try to find something you could use for that. But I believe, yeah, maybe if I don't really recall how it was other, you know, after so long. But I believe that I must have some kind of a presentation from that time. Yeah. Or maybe even some work files. I don't know. I might have some illustrator, old illustrator files, Adobe illustrator files.

That works. Yeah, I have illustrator so I can open them with okay yeah that would be amazing, thank you! I was just curious in in general do you as a like um founder and partner of kontrapunkt do you still are you still very much involved in the daily day-to-day identity design processes in general?And are these kind of updates, like this process was very much an update to the existing identity... Are these more common or would you say with Kontrapunkt, do you more work on complete redesigns?

We normally work with i would say a more you can say a more a bigger change than this one for the Nordic Co-operation i think this was quite a stylistic exercise rather than a conceptual exercise. Normally when we work with brand identities, it's more on the conceptual part also, with the whole purpose and developing the purpose and getting all the messaging right and you know so and for this project there was no nothing about that it was more a pure you can say design or stylistic exercise. So in that way it's quite... it's an easier task if then if you should you should create a new brand from scratch, or change an old brand with a more fundamental story in the new brand.

Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Yeah, it was not about completely re-imagining the brand or rethinking it. It was more just updating it and making it look modern and more attractive. Yeah, exactly. But I would say in Kontrapunk today, we are, you know, actually half consultancy, half design agency. So, you know, our consultants, they normally start these processes with defining the whole fundamental for the brand, with what we call a brand platform. And then from that, we start designing. So that would be the most usual or normal exercise to do it like that. So this one was quite simple, I would say. Yeah. I mean, though simple, having said that, but still with a lot of discussions, more about the visual part and not about the, you can say, the whole platform part.

Yeah, I see. Yeah. Yeah, so more about the visual kind of details rather than the concept.

Yes.

Yeah. Okay. And then the second question, I mean, I think you partly answered to that already, because of the wings of the swan, but I was wondering about whether you somehow, as the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council. Did you, apart from the wings of the swan, did you like, did you approach the aspect of cooperation when you were thinking about the visual identity? And yeah, well, what aspects about the organization did you choose to emphasize in the identity and how?

I must say my memory from that process is not that sharp anymore. So I can't really remember that to answer that question. Yeah. But I remember I met with the, what do you call it, not the managing director, top the top political guy of

Yeah,the secretary general.

Yeah the secretary general ,that's what he was called yeah. I met with him a few times and and discuss the also the design with him and he was he was quite, I would say he was leaning into the process to my big surprise. But he was quite engaged in the whole process. And I think, I mean, how he used this afterwards as, you can say, I'm not quite sure how he would tell the story of the new design.I believe he had his own version of the story, you know, why to change the logo and, you know, why to make this update at all. Because normally there, especially in political organizations, there are very much big resistance for making any changes, you know.

So there should be a very good reason to do it. Also in order to spend tax money on on design and branding i mean this you have to justify it

somehow in a very clear and logical way yeah although it's so important. Yeah it is, but you know most people most people they think it's just cosmetics you know yeah or...

Yeah, or decoration.

Or decoration, yeah. So, often we also experience that people can get quite, you can say, almost offended or intimidated by, you know, when we change things. People react very strongly to that. Even though sometimes they wouldn't like it in the beginning, but then when it changes suddenly, it is like a superhuman. Yeah, and if you ask them 10 years later, it would be the same reaction. So it's not because of the design itself. It's more about the change. The change factor is what they react to and not the design.

I think at least my experience from my time at the Nordic Council of Ministers, everyone was very happy with that the brand identity got unified. Because before, if I understood correctly, all the different institutions had different logos and it was very confusing and not visually obvious that they were part of thesame. And then when the identity got changed and all of the institutions that are part of the organization started to use the same visual identity, it became much more clearer.

Yeah. And then my third question was more open question. What does Nordicness mean to you in terms of visual identity design?

Ah, that's a hard question. Tough question. And could you put the question again? What does the Nordicness mean? Or what does Nordicness mean to you when it comes to design?

Yeah, yeah, visual identity design. Okay, that's really a nice, I like that question because you could answer that in many different ways. But I would say, first of all, I think the Nordic region has, I mean, in the times we are living in right now, the Nordic region seems to have a more, you can say, central role to play. And I think that what we see of the geopolitical situation, I believe that we in the Nordic region will sort of get together more in the future i hope than we have done until now it seems as if there's a new you could say meaning with with within the nordic within the nordic region.

Appendix 5. Interview with Mette Agger Tang, Former Graphic Designer, Publications Department, Nordic Council of Ministers (PUB)

Yes, okay. Så jeg tænkte, at om du kan børje med at med et eller to meninger at beskrive, hvad du jobbede med under din tid på Nordisk Ministerrådet.

Ja, altså jeg blev ansat i 2016, hvor vi skulle til at begynde med udviklingen af den her visuelle identitet. Og der havde vi et halvt år fra jeg startede, til vi skulle have premiere på det. Så det første halve år, der arbejdede jeg udelukkende med udvikling af den visuelle identitet. Og da den ligesom så var offentliggjort, så begyndte jeg jo op at implementere, og der var måske to år, hvor vi fik implementeret alt det, vi ikke lige havde nået til den første dato, og vi tog hver gang, der kom et nyt projekt eller et nyt spørgsmål op, så udviklede vi og udbyggede og udbyggede og udbyggede identiteten, der var måske ikke så stor fra starten, men hver gang vi så et behov, så byggede vi noget mere på. Og jeg lavede jo helt konkrete løsninger selv, hvor jeg nogle gange var grafikeren, men jeg udviklede hele tiden på identiteten, og jeg var også rådgiver for alle dem, der skulle bruge identiteten.

Så det var sådan et mix af et spor med identitet, og så et spor, hvor jeg ligesom selv brugte identiteten, og opdagede, hvad den kunne, og hvad den ikke kunne. Og nogle gange havde vi jo også, hvad skal man sige, så hyrede vi jo grafikere ind til at hjælpe os, fordi der var så mange opgaver, vi ikke altid selv, vi var jo to grafikere dengang i Norge's ministerråd, så vi kunne ikke løse det hele selv. Så det var også en del ligesom at være projektleder for nogle andre, der skulle bruge den visuelle identitet. Og det gav jo også nogle erfaringer i, hvad det var, identiteten kunne og hvad den ikke kunne, og hvor den var forståelig, og hvor den måske var svær at forstå for andre. Så jeg synes, det var sådan et godt mix. Altså, det passede faktisk ret godt til at udvikle sådan en identitet, som den skulle bruges i, altså der var måske 20 forskellige institutioner, programmer og projekter, der skulle bruge den her visuelle identitet, og de var i mere end 10 forskellige lande, så det var rigtig godt at få den her erfaring af, hvordan forstår man det her, vi prøver at kommunikere, når man sidder et helt andet sted.

Nogle gange kunne man godt føle, at der var langt imellem, hvor jeg sad, eller hvis man sad på et kontor i det baltiske lande.Der var mange også ikke-grafikere, der skulle bruge det her. Sådan er

det jo i det nordiske samarbejde. Der er mange, som egentlig arbejder med kommunikation, men som også er sådan en lille daglig grafiker, dermløser en masse grafiske opgaver selv.

Så det var sådan det, jeg lavede, mens jeg var der. Og man kan sige, det fortsatte, synes jeg, at der hele tiden var, altså hvad skal man sige, der kommer jo hele tiden nye ønsker og nye behov. Da vi udviklede identiteten, havde vi meget fokus på det fysiske,altså på print og på events og på den slags. Dengang var tingene ikke så digitalt, som det er nu. Men i takt med, at det blev mere og mere digitalt, så måtte vi jo også udvikle identiteten, og vi måtte skrue lidt på knapperne. Der kom alle de her, hvad skal man sige, Nordisk Ministerråd har været langt fremme med det her, med tilgængelighed for mennesker med synshandikap. Det har de været i lang tid, men der kom jo skrabere og skrabere krav, så der var vi også inde og måtte udvikle på farver og kontraster og typografi, størrelser. Især det digitale, det er noget, der er kommet til senere.

Det var ikke med fra starten. Det fyldte en del de sidste år, jeg var på Nordiska Ministerrådet.

Ja, just det.

Det her med kontraster for at personer, som har problemer med syvende, skulle kunne...Og ting skal kunne læses op med en skærmelig, altså det bliver jo meget, altså det bliver måske mere teknisk nogle gange, end det bliver visuelt, at man skal som grafiker prøve at lave noget, der stadigvæk ser fint ud, inden og opfylder alle de her regler om størrelser og kontraster, og det skal være responsivt, og det skal kunne læses op, og der får man nogle mere tekniske udfordringer, end vi i hvert fald havde i starten.

Absolut.

Det er alt det, du sendte sig altid. Lidt af et dilemma, at hvordan man skal. Allerede et krav på, at det skal fortfarande også være ytrykket. Kænsler og en stemning. Ja, og finde nogle løsninger, som også er nemmere at forklare for andre, der skal gøre det samme, fordi det nytter jo ikke, at der sidder to eller tre mennesker, der kan finde ud af at gøre, altså man skal jo stadigvæk lave noget, der er enkelt, når man skal sidde og producere de grafiske løsninger. Det kan jo ikke nytte, at der skal tre ugers kursus til for at kunne gøre de ting, vi forestiller os. Man skal blive ved at tænke i, at det skal kunne være enkelt, når man gør de ting, og det så stadigvæk opfylder alle de her krav. Fordi det er jo sådan noget, det er noget, at det skal samarbejde. Det er jo en af værdierne, at man skal være

inkluderende. Man skal ikke bare opfylde alle kravene. Man skal også gøre det, fordi det er den rigtige ting.Det er ikke kun, at man skal sige, nu har vi opfyldt noget videre. Man skal virkelig gøre det på en god måde, man skal ikke bare gøre det på en teknisk måde, man skal stadigvæk gøre det, så det giver mening. Så det har også fyldt en del, synes jeg, det her med tilgængelighed og inkludering, at alle skal kunne være med i de grafiske ting, der bliver lavet i det nordiske samarbejde. Ja, absolut. Og det er også, jeg tænker meget på, at jeg så under min praktik, så så jeg, at der var mange på afdelingen, som til eksempel skapede grafisk indhold med Canva, og det er også et, altså det anvender man jo veldig sælland som grafisk designer, men at det skal også ligesom, at identiteten, det var også et, at det er et enkelt og ligesom set at skabe saker fort i det daglige arbejde, og identiteten må også fungere på, at den skal også kunne redigeres på Canva. Ja, det er det her med, at når der er så mange, der skal bruge det, og man ikke altid ved, man ved jo ikke som grafiker altid, hvem der bruger det, og hvad de bruger det til, så det skal være meget enkelt og meget fleksibelt. Og ligesom have nogle grundelementer som man insisterer på bliver brugt igen og igen og igen men at det så skal være ret frit om man laver den ene typografi eller den anden typografi og det ene billede eller det andet billede men ligesom holde fast i de her grundhjørneste ene og sige at det er billedpolitikken der gælder og vi skal bruge, altså farverne skal være til stede.

Det nytter ikke noget, at produkterne bliver lidt kulturelt smarte, og alle sammen er sorte og hvide, fordi det er ligesom grundstenene, det er det her med billedpolitikken og farverne, altså at holde fast i de der få ting, der er det fælles,og så sige, at der indenfor, der kan man lave mange forskellige ting, men at man ikke giver køb på de få regler, som skal holdes, det har jeg jo syntes var det vigtige.Og så se, hvor er det folk. I lang tid havde vi ikke grøn, for eksempel, som en del af designmanualen, fordi vi havde de nordiske flagets farver. Og så kunne jeg jo se, at der var så mange, der brugte grøn alligevel. Og så tænker jeg, så bliver man nødt til at nyde komme det, at sige, hvordan kan vi få grønt ind, fordi det nytter ikke noget, at alle synes, de mangler grønt, og så opfinder deres egen grønne farve. Så det her med at ligesom kigge på, hvor er det, at nogen, de går ud over designmanualen, og så prøve ligesom at få det med alligevel. Der var også i lang tid, at mange, de brugte transparens, som jo heller ikke er en del af designmanualen, hvor vi sådan, nu kører vi en kampagne, og så forklarer vi dem, hvordan man godt kan løse de ting, de løser med transparens på nogle andre områder, fordi vi synes bare ikke, det skulle med.

Så det der med at prøve at se, hvad er det for nogle behov, der er, og hvordan kan man så hjælpe til, at de bliver løst,menten ved at tilføje noget til manualen, eller ved at vise brugerne, hvordan de kan gøre det på nogle andre måder, end de gør. Så det synes jeg har været en stor del af arbejdet. Se, hvad det er for nogle behov, der er, og hvordan kan man så hjælpe med, at det bliver løst på en god måde, så alle ikke løber deres egen vej og opfinder deres egne måder at gøre det.

Ja, absolut.

Og det er vigtigt, når det er en så stor organisation, som er så mange personer. Ja, du spørger mig. Nej, ursæk dig. Jeg tænker faktisk, at der ikke står så meget i designmanualen. Jeg synes faktisk, at hvis man læser billedpolitikken, det er næsten den, der udtrykker bedst, hvad det er. Hele identiteten kan det her med, hvad er det, vi skal fagne, altså det her med forskelligheden, og sådan det dokumentariske, og hverdagen, men at tingene aldrig sådan skal blive, altså vi skal ikke forstønde billedet, men vi skal heller ikke udstille nogen, og jeg synes, hvis man læser billedpolitikken, så får man faktisk en ret god forståelse af, hvad det er, sådan de grafiske løsninger skal kunne. Ja, det synes jeg bare giver et ret godt billede, hvis man ikke har lyst til at læse hele designmanualen, men gerne vil have en forståelse for, hvad det er, vi vil med designet, hvad det er for en følelse, man skal få, når man ser de grafiske løsninger inden for det nordiske samarbejde. Jeg mærkte exakt samme sak, for jeg var jo sugen at anvende designmanualen hver dag. Det var også noget, jeg lavede mærke på, at den beskrivning i bildpolitik var meget mere detaljeret end i de kapitlerne om de grafiske valg. Jeg har det jo sådan, hvis jeg laver grafisk løsning, jeg kan rigtig godt lide billeder. Men jeg lægger altid rigtig mange timer på at finde billederne. Og så synes jeg nogle gange, at resten af designet kommer af sig selv. Hvis man har fundet de gode billeder, så kommer resten af tingene af sig selv.

Hvis man lægger noget ekstra tid på det, så løser det mange ting, synes jeg. Og det er måske også der, fordi jeg lavede på en tidspunkt en undersøgelse, de farver der er i den nordiske design manuelt de er jo også i mange andre det er jo ikke sådan at man ser farven og så tænker man det er kun det nordiske der har den farve det er jo nogle farver mange kan have, og skriften typografien er jo heller ikke sådan meget specielt, så jeg synes det er at når man gør sig umage med billederne og finder de der nordiske billeder, som ikke bare er naturbilleder, så er det der, at man kan se, hvor tingene kommer fra.

Det synes jeg, at det er der, man skal gøre sig umage og finde de her hverdagssituationer fra det nordiske, der hvor det ikke bare bliver billeder, man ser alle mulige andre steder.

Ja, absolut. Ja, det er værdligt interessant. Og man kan sige, den skal jo kunne meget i identiteten, fordi den bliver jo brugt af alt. Fra børn og kultur til forskning og regional ud. Altså, den spænder jo over utrolig meget. Og den skal ligesom kunne bruges til det hele.Og nu sagde du, at du havde arbejdet meget med kultur. Og i starten var dem, der beskæftigede sig med kultur, de var meget negative. De syntes, det var meget pænt, og det var meget blåt. Og de kunne ikke rigtig se sig selv i det.Men så lavede jeg simpelthen nogle eksempler, hvor jeg viste dem, at fordi man brugte det samme designmanual, behøvede tingene jo ikke at blive ens. Man kan jo godt kombinere farverne på nogle andre måder, så det får et helt andet udtryk. Altså man kan jo selvfølgelig godt tage blå og hvid og pænt, men man kan jo også tage nogle helt andre farver og bruge det på nogle helt andre måder, så man får et helt andet udtryk. Men det var i hvert fald en, at det var dem, der havde sværest ved at se sig selv i det,det var dem, der beskæftigede sig med kultur, de syntes, det var lidt svært, når de bare så på designmanualen. Ja, jeg kan forstå det på et sæt, at det er det der med typsnittet, at det er der sammen.

Jeg tænkte, at du nu havde sendt mig de der spørgsmål, og jeg tænkte især det der spørgsmål 1, jeg kunne godt lige fortælle dig lidt om, hvordan det foregik samarbejdet med Kontropunkt,, hvordan det ligesom spændte af. Det var jo sådan, at før var der en visuel identitet, og den bestod af logoet, typografien og farverne, og så var der ikke mere. Der var en meget lille designmanual. Der var de her rapporter, der hed Tima Nord, de så altid ud på en bestemt måde, det var også besluttet, og så var, så opfandt man ellers alting, for hver gang man skulle lave noget nyt, et nyt projekt, et nyt program, et nyt event, så opfandt man noget nyt, så alting så forskelligt ud, bortset fra, altså, og man kunne ikke genkende via hverken farverne eller skriften,for der var mange farver, og det var heller ikke, det var den skrift, der hedder Meta, det var ikke sådan særligt, så alting så forskelligt ud, og alle, snart der var noget nordisk, der havde fået nogle penge fra Nordisk Ministerråd, så fik de lov at bruge logoet med deres eget navn. Så tog man svanen, og så tog man sit eget navn, og skrev det ved siden af. Så altså, der var, det kunne du også se i den der, dit film med brandarkitekturen, der var så mange, der brugte det der logo. Det var helt, altså det var helt uoverskueligt. Og så hed det jo, altså det var en svane, og så stod der

Norden, men der var jo ikke noget, der hed, altså selvfølgelig er der noget, der hedder Norden, men Norden er jo ikke navnet på organisationen eller på, altså det var lidt forvirrende, folk sagde til mig i starten, er du blevet ansat i Norden? Nej, det er jeg ikke, det står der bare i lovgudet.

Det kan du se, hvis du finder frem til det der forprojekt, at det var ligesom det, man skulle prøve at finde ud af. Kontrapunkt anbefalede sig faktisk, at for eksempel både Nordisk Råd og Nordisk Ministerråd, at alle kunne have det samme logo, som bare hed Nordisk Samarbejde. Hvor nu er der jo tre masterbrands og 20 varianter, men det var organisationen ikke klar til. Så man endte med den her model, hvor alle har svanen, og så har de, hvem der ligesom er blevet godkendt, de har deres eget navnetræk. Og på det tidspunkt, der satte ham, der var generalsekretær og kommunikationschefen, de satte sig så ned med den der lange liste over folk, der havde lov til at bruge svanen. Og så sorterede de. Og så var der mange, der ikke fik lov at bruge den. Og der var også mange, der ikke syntes, det var ret sjovt. Men man sorterede, hvem har gavn af at bruge svanen, men også, hvornår har det nordiske samarbejde gavn af, at de gør det.

Så der var mange, der blev sorteret væk. Og så startede man jo med denne her designproces, hvor Bolinemand designede logoet, og så var der en anden, altså han laver logoer, han laver skrifttyper, så var der en anden grafisk designer, der hedder Line Kurzweil, som var hovedansvarlig for resten af designet. Og de havde så fået et brief, og det var før jeg startede, men de havde fået et brief om, at de skulle lave en version af det logo, der var i forvejen. Altså, de skulle beholde en svane i en form, som man sådan lidt kunne genkende. Og så kom de med det bud, vi kender nu, hvor man jo kan kende svane. Og så kom de med et helt andet, hvor der ikke var nogen svane, hvor der var et N. Og sådan arbejder kontrapunkt. Jeg har arbejdet med dem før, og sådan gør de altid. De laver noget, hvor de følger briefet, og så gør de et, hvor de slæt. Og generelt sekretæren blev ret red, og han sagde bare, at det var ikke det brief, de havde fået, og de kunne bare smide det der med enden væk, og så kørte vi videre med det andet.

Så i det her brief, der var jo ikke rigtig nogen grafikere, der havde været med til at lave det her brief, men da jeg så startede, så sagde jeg, at de skulle finde en systemskrift, fordi jeg kunne ikke rigtig overskue på så kort tid at få implementeret en specialdesignet skrift på alle mulige IT-platforme, jeg ikke nødvendigvis kendte, og hvor

jeg ikke selv var. Så jeg sagde, at det skulle være en systemskrift, og så skulle den understøtte det kyrilliske alfabet, for dengang havde Nordisk Milisår faktisk også et kontor i Rusland.

Det er så blevet lukket siden, men det var ligesom en del. Altså, de havde fået ved Svanen, og så det her med typografien, så var der det her med, at de skulle være fleksible, og de skulle være nemt at efterlive. Og det var sådan set det brief, de fik, så det var jo sådan ret åbent, kan man sige. Så det var ret åbent. Jeg kunne se i nogle af papirerne, der står der, bare så du ikke misforstår det, der er det her grønne svanemærke, som er på vaskepulver og sådan noget. Det optræder mange gange. For lang, lang tid siden, så blev det udviklet i Nordisk Ministerråd, den her tanke om, at man skulle have sådan en mærke på miljørættige, alt fra vaskepulver til bilvask til hvad som helst. Det er siden blevet skilt ud, og det er miljøministerierne i landene, som administrerer det, og det har ikke mere noget med det nordiske samarbejde at gøre, eller Nordisk Ministerråd, eller, og vi tilbød dem, at de måtte godt bruge en grøn version af den nye svane, og det sagde de nej tak til, så der er også mange, der ringer til Ministerrådet og tror, at der er sådan en del forvirring, også fordi det hedder, hvad hedder det, svanemærker og svaneikoner, men når du ser det optræde, altså kontrapunkt har det også med i deres papir, og det er en misforståelse, så du skal bare... Så du skal bare ikke tænke mere over den der grønnes vane.

Men den ser jo ud ligesom det gamle logo.

Ja, eksakt. De er identiske. De er bare den ene af grøn og den anden. Det er tegnet af den samme designer på samme tid. En finsk designer. Men du skal bare ikke... Du behøver ikke at tænke mere over det. Jeg kan bare se, at den stadigvæk optræder i nogle af papirene, og så tænker man, hvad?

Ja, absolut. Og det nævnes jo ofte. Jeg interviewede til eksempel Ida-Lina Strang, som er bildansvarig på Pub, og hun sagde, at den nuvarende loggan, altså nordiske samarbejdes logga, er inspireret af den svanen.

Jamen, jeg tror faktisk, jeg ved faktisk ikke helt, hvad for en tvane, der kom først, men det er det samme, altså det gamle Nordisk Ministerråds logo og den grønne svane er tegnet af den samme designer, og meningen var, at de skulle ligne hinanden, og man skulle forstå sammenhængen, for dengang var det jo samme organisation, der egede begge logoer, men det har slet ikke noget med hinanden at gøre nu.

Så det var, hvis du ville forstå sammenhængen, fordi det kan man jo godt blive lidt forvirret over, hvad det er med de der svaner. Absolut. Var det noget, som overvægtes, når den nuvarende visuelle identiteten skabtes, at man skulle vilje undvike, at folk forknipper nordiske samarbejdet med svanen, og kanskje ændrer loggan på kvinden? Jeg tror, man håbede lidt, at dem, der administrerede den grønne svane, at de også gerne ville have en ny svane, så der ligesom var en blå svane og en grøn. Men det ville de ikke. De sagde, at det var simpelthen for stort arbejde, og det var for velkendt, så de var slet ikke interesseret i at stadigvæk have en svane, der en til en var den samme. Så det var de slet ikke interesseret i.

Og man kan sige, at Nordisk Ministerråd har jo ikke, altså det kan Nordisk Ministerråd jo ikke bestemme. Det er jo ligesom, det er jo givet videre, det er skilt ud, det har jo ikke, altså Nordisk Ministerråd kan ikke bestemme, om dem, der administrerer Svanemærket, skal. Så det var, og jeg kan faktisk heller ikke se, altså jeg kan ikke helt se, hvad, altså jeg synes egentlig også, det er fint, at det er forskelligt nu. Fordi bortset fra, at det hedder noget med Svane, at det er en svane, så er det jo et miljømærke, det er jo ikke noget politisk det er jo ikke, altså det har jo ikke noget med det altså både Nordisk Ministerråd og Nordisk Råd, det er jo et politisk samarbejde det er jo ikke et miljømærke altså jeg synes ikke det gør noget at der ikke er en sammenhæng, det synes jeg.

Ja, ja, exakt. Ja, så sidste frågen som jeg havde var at du har nok dels redan svaret på det her, men hvordan synes du, at samarbejdet mellem de nordiske länderne og det som hold kan bedst udtrykkes visuelt?

Ja, det har jeg jo tænkt lidt over, og jeg synes faktisk, altså jeg synes, det er svært, fordi, jeg synes, det er svært, fordi det er jo sådan et omfattende samarbejde, så det er rigtig svært, hvad kan man sige, at i nogle store organisationer, så har man jo en eller flere, der kun arbejder med det virtuelle og branding og med at rådgive og med at holde øje. Men i det nordiske samarbejde, der er det jo ligesom givet fri. Da jeg var der, kunne jeg godt finde på nogle gange at tage kontakt til nogen og spørge, om de havde brug for noget rådgivning eller noget hjælp. Det tror jeg faktisk slet ikke, der er nogen, der gør mere. Så jeg synes, det er rigtig svært at sige, at der er et fælles. Især fordi der er så mange ikke-professionelle grafikere, der arbejder med det.

Så det lever lidt sit eget liv, og der bliver fået mere

og mere til, og jeg har ligesom lyst til at skrabe mere og mere fra. Så jeg synes faktisk, det er svært at sige, at for en, der kommer udefra, vil det være svært at se alle de ting, der er det nordiske, der hører sammen.

Jeg tror ikke altid, at man kan forstå, bare ved at se på tingene, at de kommer fra den samme afsender, og det hører sammen. Det tror jeg ikke altid, at man kan forstå. Og det synes jeg er lidt ærgerligt. Jeg synes, at man skulle prioritere det, og prioritere, at der var et lidt mere ensartet udtryk, og der var lidt mere fokus på afsenderne. Men det er jo tit, at dem, der sidder og laver de her ting, de kommunikerer meget, synes jeg, med afsenderen i fokus, i stedet for modtageren i fokus, fordi jeg tror, for modtageren ville det være enklere at sige, det her kommer fra det nordiske samarbejde, eller det her kommer fra Nordisk Ministerråd.

Jeg så nogen, der anmeldte identiteten, som skrev sådan, altså synes det var meget flot, men de sagde, jeg forstår ikke alt det her nordisk this og nordisk that. Altså der er jo ingen mennesker, der forstår det her, at så er der noget, der hedder nordisk velfærd, og så er der noget, der hedder nordisk kultur, og så er der noget, der hedder nordisk energi, og så er der noget, der hedder nordisk regionale. Altså der er jo ingen, der forstår det. Jeg synes, at nogen burde tage en beslutning og sige, at det er nordisk samarbejde, eller det er nordisk ministerråd, der er kernen i det her, og det er sådan, vi kommunikerer. Ligegyldigt om det er lavet på et kontor i Oslo, eller et genressourcecenter, der ligger ved Malmø, så kommunikerer vi med et navn. Det synes jeg ville være, og det har jo egentlig ikke så meget med det grafiske udtryk at gøre, men mere det her med afsenderen, at folk har så travlt med at få deres eget navn på den afdeling, eller det kontor, eller det program, at de sådan helt klemmer, hvad modtageren har brug for. Og det tænker jeg, at det kunne være det fineste, man kunne gøre, synes jeg. Det har jo ikke så meget med det grafiske udtryk at gøre, men fordi de fleste bruger jo de rigtige typografier, de rigtige farver, så kan man sige, at billedvalget er der, hvor det nogle gange går ikke så godt.

Altså, man ser mange, altså der er mange stop billeder, og der er mange, jeg synes, der er alt for mange naturbilleder lige meget, om det handler om natur eller ej, men det er også der, hvor det kræver noget. Billeder er jo ikke noget, man finder på en halv time. Så jeg forstår godt, at man nogle gange ender med et billede af, det handler om abort på færøerne, men så viser man et eller andet pænt naturbillede. Det er jo lidt, at man ikke lige gik spritet videre. Så jeg tænker, at hvis man

skulle sige, nu er det mere end 10 år siden, når man besluttede, at vi alle sammen skulle have en fælles visuel identitet, nu kunne det måske være, at der kommer nogen, der havde energien til at sige, skal vi ikke også være en fælles afsender? Er det så klogt, at vi er 20 forskellige afsender? Kunne det ikke være fint, at vi kun var én afsender? Det synes jeg, vi gør mest. Ikke for udtrykket, men for forståelsen af, hvad det nordiske samarbejde er forståelsen af det nordiske samarbejde.

Appendix 6. Design proposal: Limited options, Endless possibilities workshop cards

Limited options, Endless possibilities

Imagining new ways of working *with* a visual identity and sharpen your message visually

7 cards for independent *or* collaborative ideating

Instructions

About this card set	This set of cards is designed for teams or individuals in an organisation who work with a visual identity in their daily tasks. The cards help quickly generate ideas for how to use the visual identity in effective and creative ways. The visual identity should be viewed as a helpful framework, not a limitation.
How to use the cards	The cards can be used: • as prompts for daily visual communication tasks, or • as tools in workshops for developing new visual concepts or strategies. To follow the exercises, you should have a basic understanding of the visual identity's elements (e.g., typefaces, colour codes, logos).
Materials needed	Materials needed • Cards 1–3: Paper and a pen • Card 4: A printer or presentation software to compose a moodboard • Cards 5–7: A laptop and the design software used in your organisation, with all visual identity assets downloaded. Doing these exercises digitally is especially beneficial.

● Throughout the set of cards, this black dot is used to represent the message. For completing the exercises on the cards pick an example of a message. This can be an example from your daily working tasks a piece of news from an upcoming update or event.

Step 1   The sender

Who is the sender? Is the sender the whole organisation? Or just one of its institutions/ teams/ subdepartments? How does that affect the tone of voice?
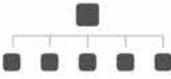
whole organisation   or   part of it   ?

Exercise: Draw a map of your organisation, and circle the department that you are designing for. List everything that you know about the whole organisation. Then make a list of things that are specific for your department.

Step *2* — The message

No communication is neutral. The message gets shaped by the sender, the design and by how the audience interprets it.

The design

message

sender — audience
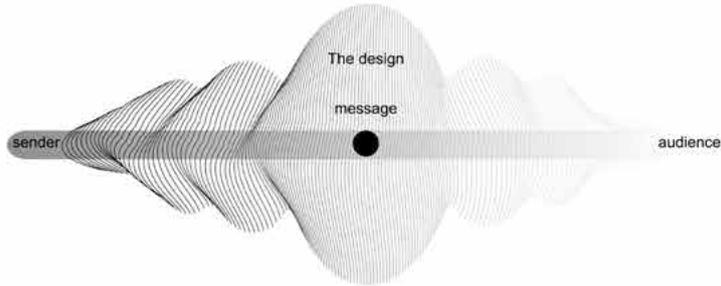
Exercise: Use the example that you have chosen in the beginning and draw on a piece of paper 20 different initial ideas of how the example could be represented visually. Set a timer, for example 5 or 10 minutes for finishing the drafts. If you are in a group, go through the ideas together.

Step *3* — The medium

The restraints, qualities and materials of a medium change how the message gets interpreted.
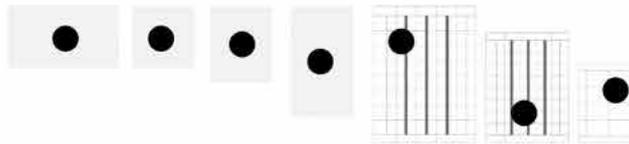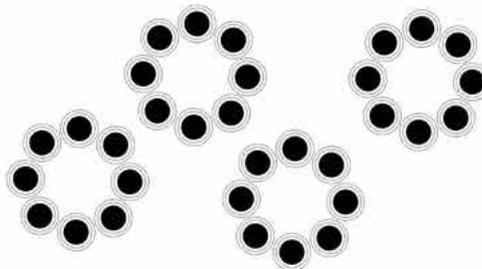
Exercise: Pick one idea from the previous exercise and draw 6 examples of how it could be presented in different digital or print formats. You can also consider other formats than the examples above. Consider what format would be the most suitable for your message.

Step *4* — Please

Design can strengthen the message through creating harmony and emotional resonance.

Exercise: Now you have an idea and a format. Write down keywords about what feeling you think that the design should evoke in the receiver/ audience. After that, find 5-10 examples of visual communication design that imply that feeling and combine them into a moodboard.

Step *5*   Transform

Design affects what is seen before its read. It can simplify complex ideas, intensify them or reshape them entirely.
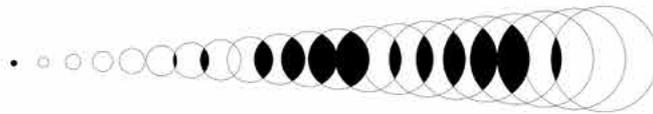

Exercise: Review your moodboard and drawing from that, draft 5 examples of how the example that you are using could be visually represented in your chosen format. Show the drafts to a colleague or someone who does not know the subject of your piece and ask what thoughts the examples bring to their mind. Make notes.

Step *6*   Guide

Design can be used to lead the eye of the viewer. By considering reading direction and compositon as well as by using visual cues you can control in what order the message gets understood.
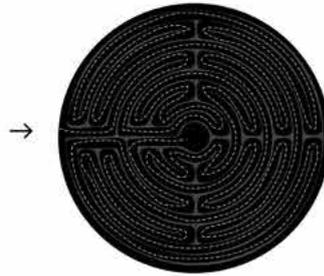
Exercise: Based on the feedback you have gotten from your test audience.Did they undrstand the essence of your message immediately or is further guidance needed? Pick one of your drafts and list 10 ways of how you could guide the viewer through the design.

Step *7*   Evaluate

Designing involves interpreting how visual elements represent and signal ideas to the viewer and how signs interact with each other.

Exercise: Take the draft from your previous exercise and and review it as a whole. Consider hierarchy, scale and the amount of detail. You can also highlight or remove some elements to make the essence of your message stand out.

Appendix 7. Feedback, Interviewee A

Hi Anni,

Sorry for the slow response! I simply didn't have the opportunity to look at it yesterday, as I've had a very complicated publication on my desk that has to be finished.

I have now looked at your work. I find it interesting as a tool for visual communication, and for explaining the role of the visual in communicating a message.

I don't think that a person or group without a background in visual communication would be able to benefit from it, as I believe it is too abstract and intellectualised to be of direct practical use. However, I do think it could be useful for a graphic designer or another person with visual responsibility, as a kind of mind map and as preparation for, for example, a workshop with communicators or other graphic designers. The tasks themselves are too difficult to understand for someone without prior knowledge, but as a basis for a person responsible for the visual identity: who can then create more concrete tasks that draw on clearer, everyday examples, it could potentially work.

It is of course difficult to create a general material that works in many different contexts, but I believe it needs to be more concrete and more clearly connected to the user in order to function and feel meaningful.

I hope you can make some use of my thoughts! It looks neat and appealing.

Appendix 8, Feedback, Interviewee B

Dear Anni,

Thank you very much for sharing your exciting material. It is clear that a long process and many reflections lie behind the cards, and I think the idea of making the design process more accessible to non designers is highly relevant.

That said, I would like to share a few thoughts based on my experience with employees without a graphic design background who work with the Nordic Council of Ministers' visual identity on a daily basis.

Your approach is very design focused and time consuming. The cards resemble a classic design process that works well in teaching or workshops, but which most employees rarely have the time or professional background to carry out in their everyday work.

The biggest challenges in practice are not idea generation but limitation. Employees typically need help staying within the identity more than they need help generating many new visual ideas. In my experience, fixed frameworks, concrete examples, and clear do's and don'ts often support them better.

The cards could become stronger if they were more concrete and more closely connected to the identity. For example, if they showed examples from the Nordic Council of Ministers' visual style, simple workflows, or tools that can be used in five minutes.

I have been thinking about how your card material could best be used without requiring major changes. One idea could be to use it as the starting point for a workshop, for example at the joint communication seminars where around 70 communication professionals from across the Nordic region meet. These seminars always include optional sessions lasting a couple of hours, and some of the participants work regularly with visual communication.

I believe your cards would work very well in a setting where participants have time to immerse themselves and can be guided through the process. This would give them new inspiration and a better understanding of idea development. I imagine that other organisations and companies have similar arrangements for their employees. I am attaching a short guide that I have previously used to onboard student assistants.

I always went through the guide in a short meeting that typically lasted 30 to 45 minutes. It is very practice oriented and shows quite clearly where the challenges usually lie
.
I hope my feedback can help strengthen your project. You are very welcome to contact me again if you have any questions.

Appendix 9. Feedback, Interviewee C

Hi Anni,

You reach out in the most hectic and busy time of the year - and I simply haven't got the band width to focus on your proposal. I've flipped through the cards briefly - and can see they are beautifully designed. But how it works requires much more of my time.

I wish you all the best - and if I can be of any help in the future, please let me know.