

# Scandinavian Corporatism in Decline

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## Scandinavian Corporatism in Decline<sup>1</sup>

If asked what characterizes the Nordic countries or the ‘Nordic model’ with regard to interest intermediation and interest group representation in the policy process, most international political scientists would answer *Corporatism*. In this chapter, I question whether this is (still) an appropriate answer. In the absence of comparable data on Finland and Iceland, I focus on the three Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. However, towards the end of the chapter, we will have a look at Finland and Iceland as well.

What, then, is corporatism? In his analysis of Norwegian numerical democracy and corporate pluralism, Rokkan (1966) described two channels of political influence. The numerical-democratic channel is based on territorial representation where the distribution of votes at elections determines who is going to represent the constituency in the Parliament. In the functional-corporatist channel various sectors or functions are represented by organized interests, corporations or interest groups.

The political importance of the two channels may vary. In the 1960s, Rokkan claimed that ‘[v]otes count in the choice of governing personnel but other resources decide the actual policies pursued by the authorities’. The ‘other resources’ referred to the resources various interest organizations carry into bargaining processes. The ‘crucial decisions on economic policy are rarely taken in the parties or in Parliament’. The ‘central arena’, or channel of influence, was the corporatist channel or ‘the bargaining table where the government authorities meet directly with the trade union leaders, the representatives of the farmers, the smallholders, and the fishermen, and the delegates of the Employers’ Association’ (Rokkan 1966: 106 ff.).

Rokkan focused primarily on Norway, but his analysis was relevant for the other Scandinavian countries as well. In the 1970s, Schmitter (1979: 18-22) made a distinction between a highly centralized ‘state corporatism’ (including among others Fascist Italy under Mussolini) and a more open ‘societal corporatism’. The latter was ‘best exemplified by the cases of Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark’. ‘Societal corporatism’ was characterized by ‘noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered, sectorally compartmentalized interest associations exercising representational monopolies’ in negotiations with the state on public policy. In other words, in a political system characterized by societal corporatism, a limited number of interest groups are recognized by the state and given an exclusive right to represent specific functions or sectors.

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<sup>1</sup> The paper is a draft version of a chapter to be published in Oddbjørn Knudsen (ed. 2017): *The Nordic Models in Political Science: Challenged, but Still Viable?* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget). The presentation would not have been possible without a longstanding collaboration with Peter Munk Christiansen and Asbjørn Sonne Nørgaard from Denmark, PerOla Öberg and Torsten Svensson from Sweden, and Gunnar Thesen from Norway (see Christiansen et al. (2010), Öberg et al. (2011), and Rommetvedt et al. (2013)). I thank my colleagues for their invaluable contributions to the understanding of Scandinavian corporatism. I am also grateful to Anne Maria Holli and Stefanía Óskarsdóttir for their advice on Finland and Iceland respectively.

In numerous, more recent comparative studies, the Scandinavian countries are ranked at, or close to, the top of the lists of the most corporatist countries (e.g. Lijphart and Crepaz 1991, Siaroff 1999). If not explicitly, at least implicitly these (and other) studies clearly indicate that corporatism is an important element in Scandinavian politics and policy. In this chapter, we take a closer look at the concept of corporatism and its operationalization and measurement. In the 1970s, Schmitter (1979) raised the question: ‘Still the Century of Corporatism?’ I extend this question and ask: What has happened to Scandinavian corporatism in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries? Furthermore, we will look at possible explanations of recent developments as well as their implications with regard to policy processes and interest group strategies.

### **Varieties of corporatism and democracy**

Corporatism is a contested concept and there are different definitions and attempts to measure the phenomenon. Christiansen et al. (2010: 26 ff.) have made a distinction between a ‘political economy school’ focusing on ‘varieties of capitalism’, on the one hand, and an ‘interest group school’ drawing attention to ‘varieties of democracy’, on the other. As we have already seen, Rokkan related his analysis of corporatist bargaining primarily to *economic* policy. The political economy school is preoccupied with economic interests, their interaction with the state, and the effects on macro-economic performance. Sometimes, corporatism is simply defined as macro-level policy concertation, which leads to distinct macro-economic outcomes or growth strategies. From the outset, political economy scholars focused on industrial relations, economic policy and labour market policy. They hardly acknowledged corporatism outside these sectors.

The interest group school perceives corporatism as a more widespread phenomenon and a part of liberal democracy rather than capitalism. Corporatism is seen as an element of consensual and negotiation democracy, and it can be found in various sectors. The analysis of corporatism in this chapter is based primarily on the varieties of democracy perspective of the interest group school. As suggested by Christiansen et al. (2010: 27), corporatism is defined as the *institutionalized and privileged integration of organized interest in the preparation and/or implementation of public policies*.

The focus on privileged integration in the definition implies that some interest groups are given access to the institutionalized corporatist channel while others are excluded. Furthermore, a distinction is made between policy formulation and implementation. This opens up for the possibility that the degree of corporatism may vary between the two phases of the policy process. And finally, the definition implies that we should distinguish between the structural and institutional prerequisites or causes of corporatism, corporatism as such (as defined above), and the effects or consequences of corporatism with regard to both process and policy characteristics (see Figure 1). These are different independent and dependent variables which are frequently conflated in studies of corporatism.

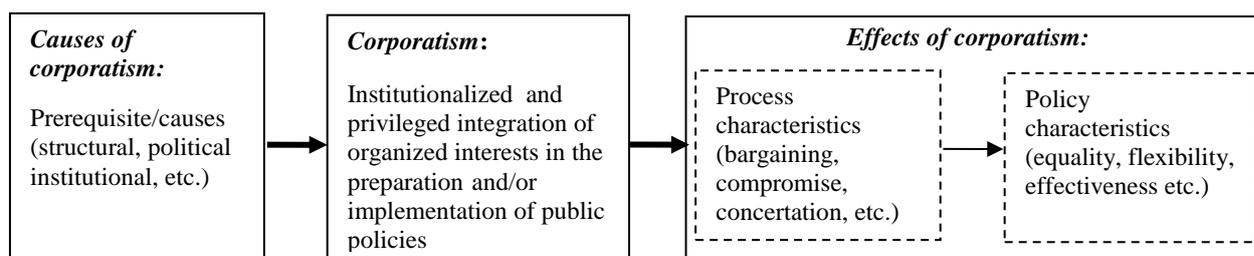


Figure 1: Corporatism, causes and effects. (Source: Christiansen et al. 2010:27)

When we speak of varieties of democracy, we cannot focus only on corporatism; we need to take possible alternatives into consideration. In a book on private interests in national policy-making, Heinz et al. (1993:395) present a fourfold typology of governmental systems based on two dimensions: concentrations of private and government power respectively. A system combining high concentration of private power with low concentration of government power is labelled ‘private government’ while low concentration of private power together with high concentration of government power constitutes a ‘state-directed’ system. In the Heinz et al. typology ‘corporatism’ is related to high concentrations of both private and government power while the opposite, low concentrations of both private and government power, leads to ‘pluralism’.<sup>2</sup>

Heinz et al.’s typology is related to policy *making*. Not only pluralism, but also the electoral channel of representation via political parties and the Parliament may be seen as a ‘conceptual opposite’ to corporatism in the policy formulation process. In the *implementation* phase of public policies, the alternative to corporatism may be the classical bureaucracy of the executive (Christiansen et al. 2010:27).

The wording of Heinz et al., ‘high’ and ‘low’ concentrations of power, indicates that corporatism and pluralism are not categorical variables. Corporatism and pluralism are opposite extremes on a continuous variable, or in other words, matters of degree. Similarly, Schmitter’s definition of corporatism can be interpreted as an ideal type in a non-normative Weberian sense. Some empirical cases, such as those of Scandinavia, may show characteristics comparatively close to the ideal type, while others position themselves farther away from corporatism and closer to pluralism. Perceiving corporatism as a continuous variable opens up for more gradual changes over time.

### Scandinavian corporatism in decline

How then, should we analyze the development with regard to corporatism versus pluralism in the Scandinavian countries? A number of scholars have analyzed the development of corporatism by studying the role of interest organizations at different times, in various sectors and in specific policy-making processes (see for example Blom-Hansen and Daugbjerg 1999

<sup>2</sup> For an elaboration of the typology, separating monolithic and sectorized concentrations of power, and adding the ‘segmented state’ type of governmental systems, see Rommetvedt (2003:9; 2005:742; 2011:22).

and Christiansen et al. 2004 for Denmark; Nordby 1994, Klausen and Rommetvedt 1997 and Farsund 2004 for Norway; and Rothstein 1992, Hermansson 1993 and Öberg 1994 for Sweden). The studies clearly indicate that interest groups can have an impact on policy-making processes, but success rates can vary over time, and some groups are more influential than others.

The birth of Danish corporatism has been dated to the period immediately before the outbreak of World War I by Christiansen and Nørgaard (2003: ch. 3), while Rothstein (1992:112) has argued that the ‘formative moment’ of Swedish corporatism is related to an agreement between the farmers’ association and the government minister of agriculture in 1932. However, most scholars would argue that Scandinavian corporatism is not the outcome of a ‘grand design’ (Christiansen, forthcoming), or a specific decision made at a specific moment in time. The 1930s was an important period in the development of Scandinavian corporatism, but it emerged and developed over several decades, particularly after World War II (Blom-Hansen 2000, Nordby 1994, Öberg 1994).

In this chapter, we will see how Scandinavian corporatism has developed during the last few decades. I follow Christiansen et al. (2010:28 ff.) and focus on the representation of organized interests in public boards, councils, committees and commissions appointed by central government (hereafter ‘committees’). Such committees are highly institutionalized, having room for a limited number of members, and consequently only some privileged organizations can be represented. Some of the public committees are appointed on a temporary basis while others are permanent. Members may include representatives of various interest organizations, civil servants, experts and sometimes politicians. Their mandate is to analyze policy problems and prepare new public policies, or to implement public policies and manage public services in various areas.

Public committees with members representing organized interests are frequently perceived as the core expression of Scandinavian corporatism and thus well suited for the measurement of developments in the degree of corporatism.<sup>3</sup> Figures 2 and 3 show the development in the number of, respectively, policy preparation committees and policy implementation committees with at least one member representing an interest organization. (The figures are based on Christiansen et al. 2010: Tables 1 and 2.)

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion of methodological aspects, see Christiansen et al. 2010:29f.

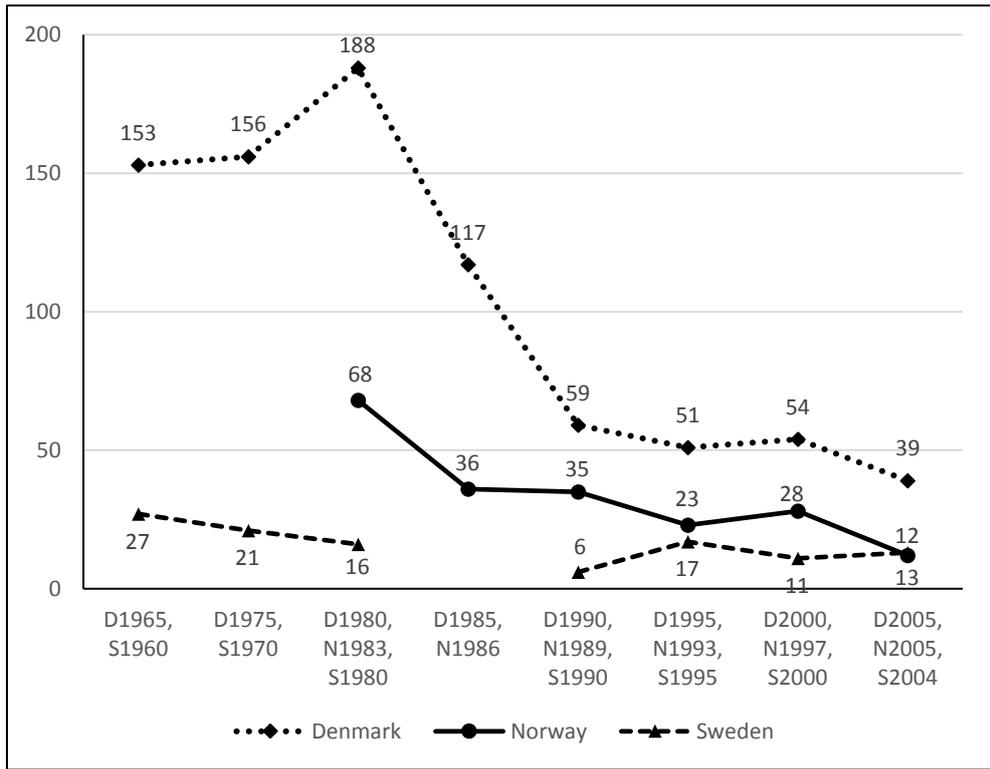


Figure 2. Policy preparation committees with interest group representation

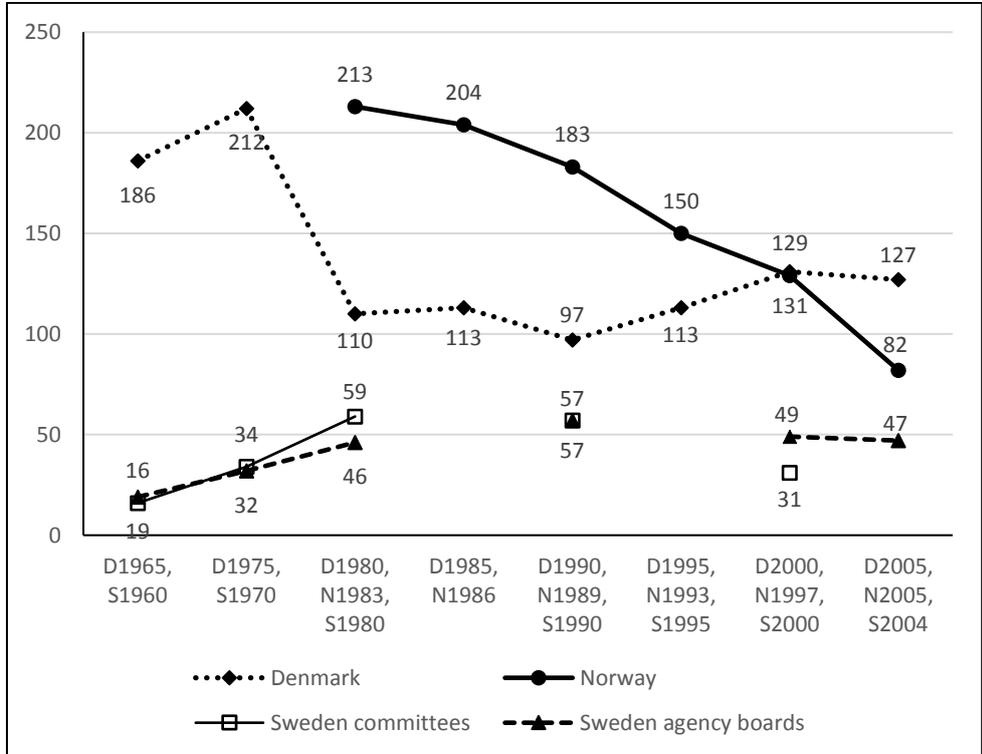


Figure 2. Policy implementation committees with interest group representation

Even though there are nuances in the figures, these clearly indicate that Scandinavian corporatism has declined. In the beginning, we see surprisingly large differences between the three countries, particularly Denmark and Sweden. However, differences are significantly reduced towards the end of the timeline, particularly with regard to preparation committees. This is not in line with what one would expect if there were a single Scandinavian model of corporatism, and when the number of public committees in the three countries converged towards the turn of the millennium, they then converged at a relatively low level of corporatism.

The Danish development illustrates the necessity of making a distinction between preparation and implementation corporatism. The number of Danish policy *preparation* committees increased in the 1960s and 1970s. The number of preparation committees peaked around 1980, and since then Denmark has experienced a rather dramatic decrease in their numbers. The development with regard to Danish policy *implementation* shows a somewhat different picture. The number of implementation committees peaked somewhat earlier than that of preparation committees. From 1975 to 1980 we find a significant decrease in the number of implementation committees, but then the number stabilized. From the 1990s onwards we even see a moderate increase in the number of Danish implementation committees. A more recent study of Danish public committees indicates that that the ‘dualist’ development with decreasing preparation corporatism and increasing implementation corporatism continued. In 2010, Binderkrantz and Christensen (2016:1029 ff.) found a total of 273 committees with interest group representation. Only three of the committees were assigned to drafting specific policies.

Unfortunately, in the case of Norway we cannot distinguish between preparation and implementation committees prior to 1983. However, the total number of committees with interest group representatives peaked around 1980. Thereafter, the total number of both public committees and committees with members from interest groups dropped rather dramatically (cf. Rommetvedt 2011:25). As we can see in Figures 2 and 3, since the beginning of the 1980s the number of both preparation and implementation committees has decreased significantly in Norway. In other words, since 1980 policy preparation corporatism has declined in both Norway and Denmark. In Norway, policy implementation corporatism has also declined, while Denmark has experienced a moderate revival of implementation corporatism after a significant decline in the late 1970s.

The Swedish findings are rather surprising. Sweden is often considered to be one of the most corporatist countries. However, throughout the whole period covered by Figures 2 and 3, we see that the levels of both preparation corporatism and implementation corporatism have been considerably lower than in Denmark and Norway. The data are somewhat limited, but they clearly demonstrate that the number of Swedish preparation and implementation committees with members from interest groups are the lowest in Scandinavia.

Furthermore, Figure 2 shows that the decline in preparation corporatism started earlier in Sweden than in Denmark and Norway. The number of Swedish preparation committees decreased from 1960 to 1980, but thereafter the number of preparation committees stabilized. State agencies that implement policies are more independent of government ministries in Sweden than in Denmark and Norway. Consequently, Christiansen et al. (2010:30) make a distinction between implementation committees (in the Swedish regulatory administration)

and agency boards. From 1960 to 1980, the number of both implementation committees and agency boards increased, thus indicating an increasing level of implementation corporatism (but still at a lower level than in Denmark and Norway). From 1990 to 2000, the number of implementation committees and agency boards decreased. After the turn of the millennium, the number of Swedish agency boards seems to have stabilized while the development with regard to other implementation committees is uncertain due to lack of data.

The findings of Christiansen et al. (2010:33 ff.) clearly demonstrate that *Scandinavian corporatism has declined* since its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s. Since 1980, the decline of corporatism has been most pronounced in the *preparation* of public policies in Denmark and Norway. In Sweden, the decline of preparation corporatism started earlier. In the period covered by Figure 2, preparation corporatism has been more limited in Sweden than in Denmark and Norway, and consequently the decline has not been as strong as in the two neighbouring countries. Developments with regard to corporatism in the phase of policy *implementation* vary among the three countries. Implementation corporatism has declined significantly in Norway since 1980. Danish implementation corporatism declined significantly in the 1970s, but then stabilized before a moderate increase was experienced in the 1990s. Finally, after an increase in the 1970s, Sweden has experienced a certain decline in implementation corporatism. Summarizing the findings, we see that even though there are some variations in the changes and timing, the overall result is convergence towards a significantly lower level of corporatism in the Scandinavian countries.

As indicated above, a distinction should be made between the prerequisites or causes of corporatism, corporatism as such, and the consequences of recent developments in corporatism (cf. Figure 1). In the following sections, we will take a closer look at possible causes and consequences of the decline of corporatism in Scandinavia.

### **Corporatist exchange and its deterioration**

Scandinavian interest groups have been invited to participate in all stages of the policy process. Corporatism is frequently associated with Social Democratic parties. When corporatism expanded in the first decades after World War II, Scandinavian politics was dominated by Social Democrat/Labour Party governments. This was particularly the case in Sweden and Norway, and to a lesser degree also in Denmark. However, as pointed out by Öberg (2015:665), in the case of Sweden ideological and strategic considerations not only of the Social Democrats, but also of important parties on the political right, have paved the way for the participation of interest groups in the formulation and implementation of public policies. No doubt, the same can be said about Norway and Denmark. In his analysis of Norway, Rokkan (1966:106) noted that the non-socialist parties had been ‘losing in the fight for votes’, but the interests of the non-socialist opposition could ‘still be defended through other channels of influence on government decision-making’, namely the corporatist channel.

The decline of corporatism since the 1970s indicates that the prerequisites and causes of corporatism have changed. Changing ideological and strategic considerations may contribute to the explanation of the decline (Öberg 2015:673). The Power Study that was carried out by Norwegian social scientists in the late 1970s and early 1980s claimed that interest groups and

civil servants in closed segments or ‘iron triangles’ had become more powerful than the elected representatives of the people (Egeberg et al. 1975, Hernes 1983). In 1983, the Conservative government in Norway stated that specialized interests had become too powerful, and that it would reduce the number of corporatist committees. In 1991, the Swedish employers’ association decided to withdraw its representatives from the boards of agencies (Rothstein 1992:349, Öberg 2015:670). The Norwegian employers’ association considered doing the same, but decided not to withdraw from public committees (Nordby 1994:146 ff.). In other words, a growing scepticism towards corporatism can be observed, at least in Norway and Sweden.

As pointed out by Öberg et al. (2011), corporatism can be understood as an exchange between the state and organized interests. On the one hand, favourable public policies are of great importance to various interest groups. The state can control public expenditures and legislation, and give privileged groups access to policy-making processes. On the other hand, interest groups may possess resources of interest to government authorities. Interest groups can moderate and discipline their members in support of government policies. In other words, corporatist exchange ‘presupposes that both actors control resources demanded by the other’ (Öberg et al. 2011:367). The prerequisites for (strong) corporatism can be specified according to mandate, unity, assets and intention, as shown in Table 1.

*Table 1: Required properties for trustworthy partners in corporatist exchange (source: Öberg et al. 2011:370)*

<i>Prerequisites</i>	<i>Descriptive definitions</i>	
	<i>Government</i>	<i>Interest group</i>
<i>Mandate:</i> (authority to make decisions)	Control over policy at national/central government level	Organizations with authority to bargain with central government
<i>Unity:</i> (ability to act as unitary actor)	Strong government vis-à-vis parliament	Organizational cohesiveness and representational monopoly
<i>Assets:</i> (exchange relevant resources)	Sufficient financial resources, control of allocation of privileges	High membership, membership support (control of votes)
<i>Intention:</i> (corporatism-friendly attitudes)	Positive attitude to corporatist actors/exchanges	Positive attitude to participation in corporatist exchanges

In this perspective, a weakening or decline of corporatism may indicate that the ‘basic prerequisite for corporatist exchange has been disrupted’ (Öberg et al. 2011:365). Öberg et al. (2011:374 ff.) present a variety of information which clearly indicates that both governments and interest groups are weakened, and thus less able to deliver what the other side wants in the corporatist exchange.

On the *government* side, the *mandate* or control over national policies may have been undermined by the transfer of authority to the international/European level. The Scandinavian

countries are open economies strongly influenced by international cycles and trends. Denmark became a member of the European Union in 1973, and Sweden in 1995. Norway is not a member of the EU, but as a member of the European Economic Area since 1992, Norway is included in the inner market and increasingly influenced by EU regulations.

For several years after World War II, the Labour Party in Norway and the Social Democrats in Sweden won a majority of the seats in the respective parliaments, and consequently could form strong, single-party governments. The Danish Social Democrats never won a majority, but they were the largest party in the Parliament. However, since the 1970s not only the Danish, but also the Norwegian and Swedish governments have been minority and/or coalition governments (Damgaard 1992, Lane 2016). Governments have been weakened vis-à-vis parliaments, and opposition parties have strengthened their influence. In other words, the *unity* of the government together with parliament has been weakened, and consequently the government has become less capable of guaranteeing that policies negotiated with interest groups in corporatist bodies will actually be confirmed by a majority of the Parliament.

In addition to sufficient mandate and unity, governments need *assets* or means to supply interest groups with policies that may persuade them to participate in corporatist exchanges. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Scandinavian public sectors grew significantly. After the oil crisis in the 1970s, Scandinavia experienced economic setbacks. Economic growth declined in Denmark and Norway in the 1980s, and Sweden experienced a dramatic downturn at the beginning of the 1990s. While Norway profited from the petroleum industry, Denmark and Sweden experienced retrenchment. Governments became less able to deliver advantageous policies. However, it could also be important for interest groups to become involved in negotiations on deregulation and retrenchment in order to curb the damaging effects.

Finally, *intention* or positive attitudes towards corporatism is an important prerequisite. As mentioned above, there was consensus with regard to the corporatist development among both Social Democrats and non-socialist parties. However, the weakening of Social Democrats may have contributed to the development of more sceptical attitudes towards corporatist integration of organized interests in policy preparation and implementation. The downsizing of the corporatist committee system in Norway, which started under the Conservative government in the 1980s, continued after the Labour Party returned to office. Consequently, as pointed out by Öberg et al. (2011:382), interest groups have ‘good reasons ... to question whether governments in Scandinavia have stable intentions to engage in corporatist exchanges’.

Even though there are certain variations in the picture, the overall impression is that since the 1970s the prerequisites for corporatism have been weakened on the government side of the exchange. Turning to the interest group side of the corporatist exchange, the question is: Do organized interests have the necessary capabilities?

For *interest groups* to participate in public policy-making, they need a *mandate* to speak on behalf of their members. Focusing on the statutory authority of the confederations of labour market organizations over their affiliates, Öberg et al. (2011:383) argue that the degree of centralization has not changed much in the three Scandinavian countries. As argued earlier,

corporatism can be relevant in other areas than the economic sector and labour market policy. However, among the growing number of interest groups in other sectors, such as leisure, health, the environment and other citizen groups, the mandate to speak on behalf of their members is more diffuse.

Growing numbers of interest groups indicate that *unity* among organized interests has diminished. In Denmark, the number of national interest groups increased from approximately 2100 in 1975 to more than 2500 in 2010 (Fisker 2015:61, Binderkrantz et al. 2016) while Norwegian registrations indicate an increase from nearly 1200 nationwide organizations in 1976 to 2400 in 1992, and nearly 3400 in 2013 (Hallenstvedt and Trollvik 1993:XI, Arnesen et al. 2016:18). Furthermore, the number of Scandinavian confederations of labour market organizations has increased. With a diminishing working class and growing middle class, the share of union members in the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (*Landsorganisasjonen i Norge* [LO]), the blue-collar confederation that cooperates most closely with the Social Democrat/Labour parties, has decreased and consequently trade union concentration has diminished. In Norway, LO's share of the organized workforce has been reduced from 83 per cent in 1958, via 65 per cent in 1982, to 50 per cent in 2014. Today, LO is challenged by three other Norwegian confederations of white-collar workers and academics (Nergaard 2016: 8 ff., Rommetvedt 2011: 28 ff.).<sup>4</sup>

The primary *asset* of an interest group in the exchange with government is the ability to mobilize support among its members. The members' support may include acceptance of deals struck over public policies, or even more important – the members' votes. Since the 1960s and 1970s, both the number of more or less competing interest groups and electoral volatility, or interparty shifts among voters, have increased. Nordic election studies show that class voting and the proportion of voters who consider themselves supporters of a particular party have declined. Increasing complexity with regard to occupational status, decreasing unionization, increasing levels of education and issue voting, together with working class votes for rightist populist parties, are among the factors that may explain this development (Bengtsson et al. 2014: 71, 150 ff.). In other words, increasingly, 'Scandinavian governments cannot take for granted that interest groups control an asset that is an essential component in a corporatist exchange' (Öberg et al. 2011:387).

As we have seen, the *intentions* or attitudes among Scandinavian governments have become less corporatist-friendly than previously. To some degree, this is also the case with regard to interest group attitudes. New organizational types, including ad hoc-based, single-issue organizations, have become more important and numerous. Together with more individualist attitudes among the citizens, this may indicate that the (potential) participants in corporatist exchanges have become less trustworthy.

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<sup>4</sup> It could be added that the level of unionization is lower in Norway than in Denmark and Sweden. In 2013, 54 per cent of the Norwegian labour force were members of a union compared to 67 and 68 per cent in Denmark and Sweden. The lower level in Norway can be ascribed to the absence of a Ghent model of organizing the unemployment administration, with links between the unions and the implementing bodies (Christiansen, forthcoming).

Summarizing their findings, Öberg et al. (2011:389) note that there ‘have indeed been changes in the properties that are required of a trustworthy partner in corporatist exchange’. They find a weakening or decline in the prerequisites for corporatism in the Scandinavian governments’ mandate (e.g. Europeanization), their unity (fragmentation), assets (strained public budgets), and intention (less social democracy). Among interest groups, decline is found with regard to union (fragmentation), assets (electoral volatility) and intention (individualism), while changes in mandate may seem more uncertain. Clearly, disruptions in the corporatist exchange contribute to an explanation of the decline we have observed in Scandinavian corporatism. Denmark, Norway and Sweden have become more pluralist societies and polities. In the next section, we consider some of the consequences of the observed decline in Scandinavian corporatism.

### **Strategic consequences: lobbying**

In a democratic political system, affected individuals and interests are supposed to be informed and to have a say in the preparation of policies. Furthermore, interest groups may contribute new ideas and solutions to policy problems, and the inclusion of affected actors in the policy-making process may facilitate the implementation of new policies. Corporatism can be one way of integrating affected actors in the preparation and implementation of public policies. Corporatist representation may give privileged interest groups an opportunity to influence public policies. However, as we have seen, since the 1970s the corporatist apparatus in Scandinavia has been downsized, and access to policy-making processes through corporatist bodies has been reduced. What, then, are the consequences of reduced access through the corporatist channel?

As noted by Christiansen et al. (2010:25), the political economy school is concerned with ‘the way economic interests are organized, how they interact with state actors and the effects of these variables on macro-economic performance’. Structural variables such as high union membership, strong peak organizations and centralized wage bargaining, together with process variables such as coordination through bargaining, interest mediation and concertation, are assumed to produce specific macro-economic outcomes such as economic growth, reduced strike activity, less unemployment and a more equal distribution of wages. However, I will not go further into the macro-economic consequences of the decline of corporatism here. Instead of focusing on consequences related to corporatism as a variety of capitalism, I concentrate on corporatism as a variety of democracy and on consequences related to policy-making processes (cf. Figure 1).

In this section, we will see how certain strategies applied by interest groups in order to influence public policies have been affected by the decline of corporatism. Alternative interest group strategies may include communication through the media and mobilization of members and the general opinion (Binderkrantz et al. 2015, Thesen and Rommetvedt 2009). However, here I focus on interest group *lobbying*.

As we have seen, corporatism is a highly institutionalized way of integrating privileged interest groups into policy preparation and implementation processes. Lobbying is a less institutionalized, more informal, ad hoc-based and open way of exerting influence. Originally,

lobbying referred to personal meetings with politicians in the lobby of the Parliament, but lobbying may also include direct personal contacts with civil servants. The establishment of a corporatist committee can be initiated by an interest group, but the initiative has to be followed up by the government. Corporatist representation presupposes a willingness of the state to establish corporatist bodies and arrangements, and to include organized interests in these arrangements. Lobbying, on the other hand, is both initiated and executed by the organized interests themselves. Furthermore, lobbying is primarily a one-way communication process where interest groups present their views and demands, and try to influence politicians and civil servants. Corporatism is more of a two-way communication and negotiation process where both parties try to influence each other. Lobbyists do not commit themselves to implementing negotiated agreements in the same way as interest group representatives in corporatist committees and negotiation processes (cf. Christiansen and Rommetvedt 1999, Espeli 1999, Hermansson et al. 1999).

Two factors, push and pull, need to be taken into consideration when organized interests decide how to adapt to changing political circumstances. *Push* factors are ‘environmental changes that drive actors away from a strategy, for example, by blocking previous channels of influence’, while *pull* factors are ‘changes that draw actors in new directions because new promising venues for political influence are opened’ (Rommetvedt et al. 2013:460). In our context, corporatism in decline is an obvious push factor, while the pull factor can be related to changes in executive–legislative relations.

For a long time, Scandinavian parliaments were believed to have lost most of their power to single-party, majority governments and strong bureaucracies. The ‘decline of parliaments thesis’ was popular among political observers and political scientists in Scandinavia. However, commencing in the late 1970s, the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish parliaments became more active and influential vis-à-vis the governments. A ‘reparliamentarization’ or ‘revitalization’ of the Scandinavian parliaments occurred after the Social Democrats lost their dominant position in Scandinavian politics, and government parties have been defeated more frequently in parliamentary voting (Damgaard 1992:204, Rommetvedt 2011:95). The government of Denmark in particular, but also those of Norway and Sweden, have increasingly negotiated legislative settlements with one or more opposition parties (Christiansen and Damgaard 2008, Grønlie 2014, Bäck and Bergman 2015).

As a consequence of the combined effect of push and pull – corporatism in decline and the revival of parliaments – one might expect interest groups to increase their lobbying efforts towards public authorities in general, and the parliaments in particular. In the absence of comparable Swedish data, we have to concentrate on Denmark and Norway. In a number of surveys, nationwide Danish and Norwegian interest groups have been asked about their contacts with various public authorities. ‘Contacts’ is a proxy for lobbying, but it should be added that contacts with the bureaucracy may also include contacts through corporatist committees. Figures 4 and 5 (based on Rommetvedt et al. 2013:472) show the percentages of Danish and Norwegian panels of interest groups who answered that they had at least monthly contacts with the respective authorities.

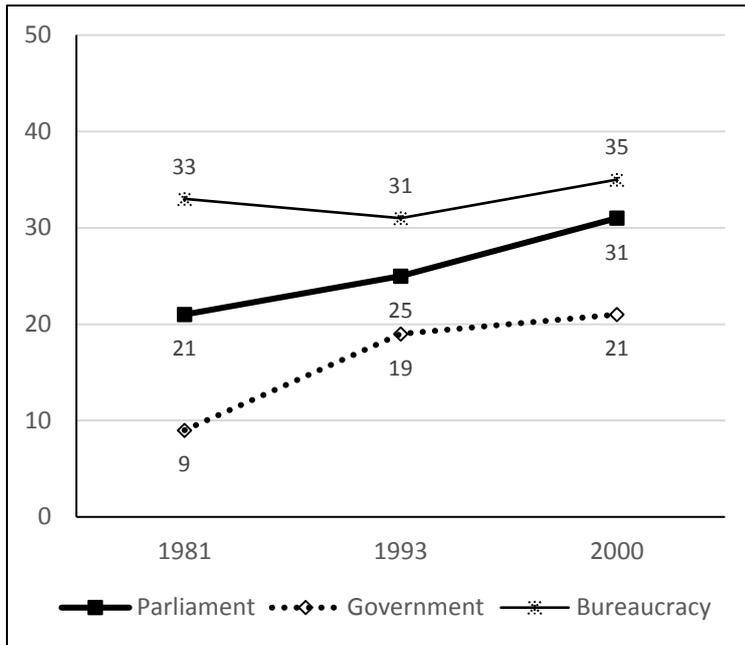


Figure 4. Danish interest groups with at least monthly contacts with public authorities

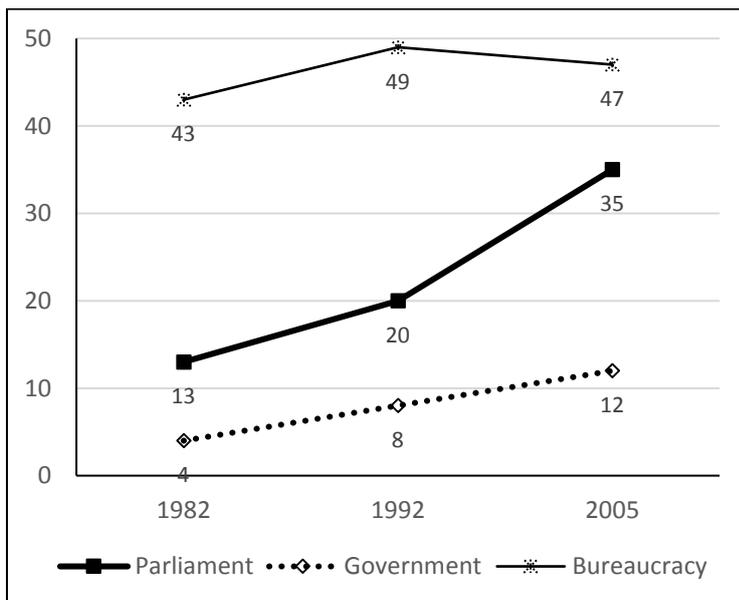


Figure 4. Norwegian interest groups with at least monthly contacts with public authorities

In both Denmark and Norway, we see that the bureaucracy was contacted by the highest number of interest groups. However, interest group contacts with the bureaucracy have not changed much over time. Contacts with the parliaments are less frequent, but we note a significant increase in the percentages of interest groups who reported at least monthly contacts with the parliament, particularly in Norway. A similar trend is found with regard to contacts with governments. In addition, we may add that lobbying targeted exclusively at civil servants in the bureaucracy has become significantly less widespread, while the share of

interest groups who lobby both bureaucrats and MPs has increased, particularly in Norway (Rommetvedt et al. 2013:474).

The findings indicate that while being increasingly excluded from a decreasing number of corporatist committees, interest groups have increased their lobbying efforts directed at public authorities. Furthermore, parliaments have become more important targets for the lobbyists. In 2005, 88 per cent of the Norwegian interest groups reported that contact with the Parliament was important, while 85 and 51 per cent respectively said the same about contacts with ministries and the government. From 1982 to 2005, the importance of parliamentary contacts increased by 10 percentage points, while contacts with ministries and the government decreased by 4 and 14 percentage points respectively (Rommetvedt 2011:107).

Lobbying can serve as a substitute for, or supplement to, corporatist representation. For ‘corporatist outsiders’, or interest groups that do not have the privilege of been represented in public committees, lobbying may serve as a substitute for corporatist representation. For ‘corporatist insiders’, or interest groups that are represented in public committees, lobbying may serve as a supplement to corporatist representation. In Norway, Rommetvedt et al. (2013:474) found significant increases in contacts with parliament and the government among both insiders and – to a lesser degree – outsiders. In Denmark, there was no increase in the contacts with parliament and the government among corporatist outsiders, and only minor increases among insiders. In other words, in Norway lobbying serves as both a substitute for and a supplement to corporatist representation, while in Denmark lobbying seems to serve primarily as a supplement to corporatist representation among corporatist insiders.

### **Policy impacts and democratic consequences of lobbying**

The Danish and Norwegian findings clearly indicate that the decline in corporatism has led to increased lobbying. No doubt, organized interests try to influence public policies in new ways, but do they succeed? Do their lobbying efforts have an impact on policy-making? And what are the consequences with regard to representative democracy?

A survey among Norwegian MPs in 1995 indicated that lobbying may in fact have an impact on agenda setting and decision-making processes. The MPs were asked how often lobbying contributed to various actions (see Rommetvedt 2003:160; 2014:471). Fifty-nine per cent of the MPs answered very or fairly often when they were asked if the enquiries of the lobbyists were a contributing factor when parliamentary committees or committee members asked a government minister for additional information. Respectively, 33 and 24 per cent said the same about interpellations/question-time questions and private members’ bills.

According to 44 per cent of Norwegian MPs, dissenting remarks and proposals in committee recommendations were often related to lobbying. The lobbyists’ enquiries were also a contributory factor when amendments were made to government proposals and guidelines. Twenty-eight per cent of the MPs answered very or fairly often with regard to minor amendments. Only 4 per cent said the same with regard to major amendments, but an additional 40 per cent stated that enquiries from lobbyists sometimes contributed to major amendments in government proposals and guidelines.

In a survey carried out in 2005, Norwegian interest groups were asked how often their proposals had ‘led to’ amendments in government proposals and guidelines (Rommetvedt 2014:470 ff.). With regard to minor amendments, 9 and 41 per cent respectively said that this was the case very/fairly often or sometimes. The corresponding figures for major amendments were 3 and 26 per cent. In other words, both MPs and interest groups agree that lobbying can have an impact on policy-making. (When comparing the figures, it should be kept in mind that the assessments of the MPs were based on the sum of contacts with a variety of lobbyists, while the answers from interest groups were related to their own lobbying efforts, that is, only one actor’s lobbying.)

A Danish study of administrative consultations and contacts with the Parliament in 2009/10 shows that interest groups may have an impact on legislation. Seventy-two per cent of interest group answers to administrative consultations included substantial objections to the proposed legislation. Eight per cent of the group protests were fully sustained and 29 per cent partially followed by the minister when the proposal was presented to the Danish Parliament. Various interest groups sent 245 letters concerning law proposals to parliamentary committees; 53 of these led to changes (Binderkrantz et al. 2014:143, 170f).

The definition and operationalization of corporatism applied in this chapter implies that a rather limited number of privileged interest groups are given access to this channel of influence. Furthermore, corporatist representation gives interest groups access primarily to civil servants in the public administration. Lobbying, on the other hand, is more open, and as we have seen, increasingly directed towards the Parliament. Nevertheless, resources are important for interest groups and their activities towards public authorities. A Danish study based on data from 2009/10 shows that high-income groups with a high number of employees hired for political tasks were more active in the legislative process in both the administrative and the parliamentary arenas (Pedersen et al. 2014). Norwegian data from 1982 to 2005 show that business associations and trade unions are more active than other groups (Thesen and Rommetvedt 2009). In other words, in corporatist arrangements, privileged access is highly institutionalized, but in practice lobbying can be biased as well.

In two surveys, Norwegian MPs were asked to assess some of the consequences of lobbying. In 1995, almost all MPs – 93 per cent – agreed that well-organized interest groups may become too influential compared to weakly organized groups; 56 per cent agreed that specialized interests may become too influential compared to more wide-ranging concerns and comprehensive policies. In 2012, the corresponding figures were reduced to 75 and 32 per cent respectively. In both 1995 and 2012, 91 per cent of the members of the Norwegian Parliament agreed that meetings with lobbyists give them better access to alternative information and expertise in relation to the government and the ministries. Furthermore, 81 per cent of MPs in 1995 and 83 per cent in 2012 agreed that the Parliament acquires improved possibilities to control that the government and the public administration follow up parliamentary decisions and intentions. In 1995, 86 per cent of the MPs concluded that lobbying towards the Parliament had mostly positive consequences (Rommetvedt 2014:474f). The same question was not included in the 2012 survey, but in 2013, 90 per cent of the MPs said that lobbying is generally positive for democracy (Olufsen 2013).

The Norwegian MPs’ assessments show that they acknowledge negative consequences of lobbying. However, since the 1990s they have become less concerned about well-organized

specialized interests becoming too influential. Furthermore, the negative effects of lobbying are overwhelmingly overshadowed by positive effects regarding access to information and counter expertise in the policy-making process, and parliamentary control of the executive in the implementation process. Increased interest group lobbying is a *consequence* of push and pull, or the decline of corporatism and revival of parliament, but it may in turn also *strengthen the position of the Parliament vis-à-vis the Government*.

### **The cases of Finland and Iceland**

The Nordic countries include not only Scandinavia, but also Finland and Iceland. The inclusion or exclusion of Finland and Iceland in ‘Nordic models’ varies. Unfortunately, we do not have access to more recent comparable data of the kind we have applied to the Scandinavian countries. However, the overall impression is that developments in Finland are fairly similar to those in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Iceland, on the other hand, seems to stand out as an outlier, not only in the geographic sense of the word, but also with regard to corporatism.

In the case of Finland, Helander (1997:243 ff.) argues that during the 1960s a rather closed governmental decision-making process was opened up to other actors, including various interest groups. The number of public committees increased, reaching a peak in 1972 with a total of 598 temporary and permanent committees. However, in the 1970s the number of temporary committees declined, while the number of permanent committees stabilized. Permanent committees after 1980 are not included in Helander’s overview, but the number of temporary committees continued to decrease in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. The number of temporary committees declined from 253 in 1970 to 12 in 1995. However, the highly institutionalized temporary committees were gradually replaced by less institutionalized working groups. In 1972, 113 working groups were registered compared to 346 in 1994.

Not all public committees are ‘corporatist’ committees. Public committees should only be categorized as corporatist if they include members from one or more interest groups. Most likely, the mandate of temporary committees is related to policy preparation, while the tasks of permanent committees are related to the implementation of public policies. Consequently, if they include interest group representatives, temporary and permanent committees can be perceived as expressions of preparation corporatism and implementation corporatism respectively. In the absence of data on interest group representation in permanent Finnish committees, we have to concentrate on temporary committees.

In the beginning of the 1960s, most of the temporary committee members were civil servants and experts. The representation of Finnish interest groups was limited, and in most of the temporary committees, there were no representatives from interest groups at all. During the 1960s, a growing number of interest group representatives were included in the committees. The share of interest group representatives seems to have reached its highest level in the first half of the 1970s. In 1980 and 1993, 27–28 per cent of the members of temporary committees

represented various interest groups. However, together with the decrease in the number of committees, the total number of committee seats was reduced from 534 in 1980 to 332 in 1993, and consequently interest group representation was reduced from 146 to 94 members.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, commencing in the 1990s, policy preparation committees have increasingly been replaced by single person, so-called ‘state investigators’ (Holli 2016). In other words, in the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, Finnish policy preparation corporatism declined, but we do not know how implementation corporatism developed in this period.

More recent data on Finland have not yet been published. However, an ongoing study by Anne Maria Holli indicates that the consensual Finnish democracy is changing in a more majoritarian direction.<sup>6</sup> Since the 1990s, there has been a clear trend of change from a corporatist organization of state-society relations towards a more pluralist or neo-pluralist organization. The number of policy preparation committees and membership seats has decreased and consequently there are fewer places for interest groups and NGOs in the preparation of public policies. Interest groups increasingly attend parliamentary hearings and lobby the Finnish Parliament.

Data on Iceland are very limited and the picture of corporatist developments is rather blurry. In his corporatist rankings of 24 countries, Siaroff (1999) places Iceland well below the other Nordic countries, even though Iceland has not been ‘classified often enough to claim any scholarly agreement’. More recently, Jónsson (2014:523) has described Iceland as a political system with ‘a “pluralist” type of interest organization that is characterized by a low level of corporatism and a high degree of competition between major interest groups’. Thorhallsson (2010) was even more categorical when he claimed that Icelandic corporatism ‘fundamentally differs from the social corporatism in Scandinavia’, and that social movements have been ‘explicitly, and deliberately, side-lined in governmental decision-making processes’. He admitted, however, that ‘powerful fisheries and farmers’ lobbies have been in ... close contact with the government’ (Thorhallsson 2010:378 ff.).

Icelandic fishermen belong to a variety of unions and associations which, according to Eythórsson (2000), have been ‘more or less ... represented in different task forces and committees appointed by the Government to review the fisheries policy’. After a broad consensus in the 1970s, fisheries management became ‘the most dividing and conflict-laden issue of Icelandic politics’ in the 1990s. Eythórsson claimed that the practice of ‘preparing new legislation by task forces with broad representation from different stakeholder groups’ was then ‘abandoned’ (Eythórsson 2000:484f, 490). However, after the turn of the millennium this turned out not to be the case. New committees with interest group representatives have been set up by Icelandic governments. Changes in the legislation and taxation of the fisheries industry have normally not been made without close consultation with interest groups. Furthermore, new legislation on subsidies and regulations of Icelandic agriculture has been adopted by the Parliament on the basis of a negotiated agreement between agricultural

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<sup>5</sup> Calculated on the basis of Helander 1997:251, table 5.

<sup>6</sup> Source: personal communication with Anne Maria Holli, University of Helsinki.

producer groups and the state. In other words, corporatist representation in Icelandic fisheries and agricultural policies appears to be relatively strong.<sup>7</sup>

Among scholars belonging to the political economy school, corporatism is characterized by tripartite negotiations on wages and economic policies. In this respect, corporatism is a rather new phenomenon in Iceland. For a long time Icelandic governments relied on unilateral income policies in order to keep inflation and unemployment under control. However, from the late 1960s ‘a slow movement towards a more corporatist regime’ occurred. Labour unions ‘were consulted and occasionally included in different stages of public policy-making’, but it was not until the recession of the late 1980s that ‘conditions for a closer cooperation between labour, employers and government were created’ (Jónsson 2014:519). In the 1990s, tripartite negotiations between trade unions, employers’ associations and the state replaced the former unilateral income policies of the governments (Óskarsdóttir 1999:92). After the financial crisis in 2008, the director of the federation of employers, Vilhjálmur Egilsson (2012), claimed that ‘neo-corporatism gains ground in times of crisis’. In what he labelled ‘the Icelandic Neo-corporative Model’, the social partners are ‘deeply involved in organization and delivery of social services’ such as pension funds, education, rehabilitation and services to the unemployed.

In the absence of systematic data, we should be careful not to jump to conclusions. However, it looks as if the general level of corporatism in Iceland remained weak when corporatism in the other Nordic countries was expanding after World War II. Corporatism within the fisheries and agricultural sectors has been relatively strong in Iceland, but corporatism in other sectors developed late. In the other Nordic countries, corporatism had peaked and was in decline before corporatism expanded in Iceland.

## Conclusion

Most international scholars would probably answer ‘corporatism’ if they were asked to give a one-word description of the ‘Nordic model’ of state–interest group relations and interest intermediation. However, on the basis of the data and analysis presented in this chapter it seems appropriate to ask: Is there *really* a ‘Nordic corporatist model’ of state-interest group relations? The answer depends on how we define corporatism, and the time frame of our analysis.

Sometimes corporatism is loosely defined as close contacts between organized interests and government authorities. In this case, it could be said that all Nordic countries are corporatist. However, one could probably say the same about most Western democratic countries as well. In this loose sense of corporatism, there is no particular Nordic corporatist model.

In the perspective of the political economy school, corporatism is a matter of tripartite bargaining over economic policy and income, and effects on macro-economic performance.

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<sup>7</sup> Source: personal communication with Stefanía Óskarsdóttir, University of Iceland.

Within this perspective, we have seen that Iceland is a deviant case. It was not until the 1990s that the unilateral income policies of Icelandic governments were replaced by tripartite negotiations between trade unions, business associations and the state.

In this chapter, I have analyzed corporatism primarily from the perspective of the interest group school. Thus, corporatism has been defined as the institutionalized and privileged integration of organized interests in the preparation and/or implementation of public policies. Furthermore, corporatism has been perceived as a matter of degree, and (potentially) relevant to a variety of public sectors, and not only for economic policy.

In the case of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, corporatism has been measured on the basis of interest group representation in public committees. In this sense, Scandinavian corporatism started early and expanded particularly after World War II. The data indicate that Danish and Norwegian corporatism peaked around 1980, while Swedish corporatism reached its zenith even earlier. Over the last three or four decades, corporatism in Scandinavian has declined. The corporatist committee systems have been significantly downsized.

Unfortunately, we do not have access to comparable Finnish and Icelandic data, but corporatism seems to have declined in Finland as well. In the case of Iceland, data are even more limited, and the development seems rather dualistic. In general, the level of corporatism has been low. For a long time, interest groups have been influential in the development of Icelandic fisheries and agricultural policies, but corporatist income policies developed late in Iceland.

The distinction made here between preparation and implementation committees has revealed important nuances between the Scandinavian countries as well. Preparation corporatism has declined in all three countries. In Norway, implementation corporatism has declined as well, while in Denmark and Sweden the degree of implementation corporatism has stabilized after reaching a much lower level than in the heyday of corporatism. Denmark has even experienced a moderate increase in the number of implementation committees with interest group representation.

This analysis clearly indicates that it is not appropriate to talk about a single 'Nordic model' of corporatism. The label 'Scandinavian model' may have been more appropriate in the 1960s and 1970s, but even then there were substantial differences between Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Towards the turn of the millennium, the three countries moved in a more pluralist direction. The prerequisites for corporatist exchange weakened, and the overall degree of corporatism declined. Interest groups increasingly resort to less institutionalized and less privileged lobbying and media strategies in order to influence public policies. Consequently, to talk about a single 'Scandinavian corporatist model' is less appropriate in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it would hide important nuances in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish developments.

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