



Nordic strategy research—Topics, theories, and trends



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ABSTRACT

Strategy research occupies a central position in business studies, but despite its global reach mainly has been considered as geographically homogenous. This paper aims to contribute to a better and more nuanced understanding of the strategy field by assessing Nordic contributions to the international strategy field. Using a bibliometric approach it shows that the Nordics holds an increasingly strong position in international strategy research but also identifies differences. Denmark is the single most successful Nordic nation across all measures, and even matches the international forefront in citation per publication. The success appears related the degree of co-authorship with international strategy scholars. Together, findings establish that Nordic strategy research contributes strongly to the core of international strategy research. Implications for several stakeholder groups are provided.

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1. Introduction

Much of what is claimed about important research fields is based on an assumption of research as evenly spread across nations. As one of the most prominent fields in business research, strategy is often described as global, and with an impressive theoretical variation and richness (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 2005). Further, some studies have distinguished the varied contributions of strategy research in (Cummings & Daellenbach, 2009) and between different journals (Azar & Brock, 2008). However, little heed has been given potential differences in the contributions of different regions or nations to strategy research. Instead, dominatingly, assessments of the field are dominated by geographically homogenous accounts (Bowman, Singh, & Thomas, 2006; Furrer, Thomas, & Goussevskaia, 2008; Herrmann, 2005; Hoskisson, Hitt, Wan, & Yiu, 1999; Phelan, Ferreira, & Salvador, 2002; Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruiz-Navarro, 2004), disregarding such potential differences between regions and countries.

The Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden – constitute one such region. While there are several influential researchers tied to Nordic universities publishing in avowedly international strategic management journals (e.g. Foss & Hallberg, 2014; Regné, 2008; Vaara, Junni, Sarala, Ehrnrooth, & Koveshnikov, 2014) this reveals little about the Nordic contributions to the international strategy field. For instance, studying business publications in general, Engwall (1996) found that Nordic

scholars differed both in publication frequency and theoretical starting points compared to non-Nordics, such as an early and strong influence by Cyert and March (1963). Nordic business research also has been found to emphasize network relations rather than economics-based views, and draws on a strong case study tradition compared to international research (Stentoft Arlbjørn, Jonsson, & Johansen, 2008), suggesting not only that contributions also to international strategy research can differ between regions and countries, and that the Nordics might stand out in different ways.

Given the centrality of strategy research and the tendency to describe this field as conceptually diverse but geographically homogenous, the overarching question remains whether there are differences in strategy publication between and within regions. Recent studies have pointed to both similarities and differences in publication patterns between Nordic institutions, and between these and institutions in non-Nordic countries (Sihvonen & Vähämaa, 2015), however not explicitly addressed the strategy field. The condition of Nordic strategy research likely is of interest also beyond scholars in the field, since if left unstudied, universities, funding agencies, and policy makers risk investing scarce resources for research less than optimally. The above arguments give rise to a number of important questions: are there any trends to the extent to which Nordic scholars publish in leading strategy journals, and are there differences between the Nordic countries? Do Nordic research favor certain strategy topics or theories over others? What is the impact of this research, and are there any patterns with regards to the author constellations producing it?

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This paper aims to contribute to a better and more nuanced understanding of the strategy field by assessing Nordic contributions to the international strategy field. Guided by a view of strategy research as recognizable by being channeled through certain outlets, rather than dealing with unique topics (Furrer et al., 2008), this paper is inspired by a bibliometric approach of quantitative data to conduct a multi-level analysis of research published in leading strategy journals. The study contributes to a more nuanced picture of the strategy field. Findings increase granularity of the field through analyzing research contributions in a regional and national context. Concretely, it identifies and discusses factors that can contribute to explain patterns of publication success and impact of the Nordic countries. It thus highlights the importance of a geographical dimension to analyses of research fields.

This rest of the paper is structured as follows. The background of the study is presented first, placing strategy and Nordic research in a broader context before specifying the methods applied in this study, drawing on quantitative comparisons between strategy research from different regions and countries. Findings based on data from a decade of strategy publishing are presented, before these are discussed in a broader theoretical context. Lastly, contributions of the study are presented together with suggestions for future research.

2. Background

Strategy research takes an overarching perspective on firms to explain performance differences in competitive markets and thereby deals with one of the oldest questions in business studies (Ansoff, 1965; Porter, 1980; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). The term itself originates from the Greek *strategos* for general, and *stratego*, a verb denoting the leading of armies to destroy the enemy (Bracker, 1980), and still military connotations of winning and losing dominate connotations in how the term is used in business studies (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). Even if a wide array of definitions exist (Bracker, 1980; Nag, Hambrick, & Chen, 2007), this research stream can be described as dealing with “that which relates to the long-term prospects of the company and has a critical influence on its success or failure” (Agarwal & Helfat, 2009, p. 281).

This definition reveals that while the dependent variable in strategy research explicitly or implicitly relates to the financial performance of firms (e.g. Jensen, 2000), independent variables can span almost any phenomenon in the organization or the wider business environment. This includes early emphases on planning (Chandler, 1962) and industry position (Porter, 1980), as well as more recent interests in performance impacts from arguably more behavioral aspects including human resources (Tzabbar, Aharonson, Amburgey, & Al-Laham, 2008), environmental enactment (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985), practice (Whittington, 1996), managerial cognition (Mezias, Grinyer, & Guth, 2001), routines (Felin & Foss, 2009), organizational identity (Livengood & Reger, 2010), gender equality (Cook & Glass, 2014), networks (Håkansson & Snehota, 1989), or materiality (Schriber & Löwstedt, 2015). Strategy research thus has embraced a range of perspectives, theories, and concepts from adjacent fields and includes different schools of thought, each with its own form and focus (Bracker, 1980; Mintzberg et al., 2005). In the same manner, strategy thinking is applied in a variety of contexts, not least in sports, but also in health care (King, 2001), policing (Skogan & Hartnett, 1997), universities, and even municipalities (cf. Kornberger & Clegg, 2011).

In consequence of this width it is difficult or even impossible to unambiguously delineate the strategy field based on particular approaches or topics (Nag et al., 2007), since such efforts would run the risk of simultaneously excluding important contributions

and including scholars not considering themselves as belonging to, or even openly distancing themselves from strategy research. An alternative to historic methods (Summer et al., 1990) or citation analyses (Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004), one way to delineate the strategy field is to think of it as sharing the common denominator of being accepted by peers as contributing to developing theory in strategy publishing outlets (e.g. Furrer et al., 2008). A notion of the strategy field useful for the present study therefore is that consists of research that partakes in, is aimed at, and considered fulfilling the necessary conditions of relevance and quality set by international peers.

But describing strategy as one research field; be it with different facets and foci (e.g. Bowman et al., 2006; Hoskisson et al., 1999), risks downplaying potentially important differences. Among the claims that strategy research is global, reviews and assessments are dominated by homogenous accounts disregarding any variation in how regions or nations contribute to this field. However, there are reasons to believe that this reflects rather an ideal than a fact. For instance, Boyd, Finkelstein and Gove (2005: 841) noted that “[b]usiness Policy and Strategy is the second largest division of the Academy of Management, and counts 25 percent of its membership from outside the United States. Furthermore, half the membership of the Strategic Management Society lies outside North America”. While compelling, such statistics might hide important geographical differences.

Indeed, participation in the perhaps leading strategy conference, the Strategic Management Society conference reveals geographical differences. At the 2014 convention in Madrid, US and Europe represented 87 percent of participants. Asia including China represented 8 percent, while participants from Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East represented only about one percent each. Figures for 2015 show little improvement, suggesting that participation in the strategic management arena is less equally geographically distributed than typical accounts of the field indicate. The origin of theoretical contributions reveals a similar pattern. Geographical imbalances prevail, in particular a bias toward data from Western economies (Wright, Filatotchev, Hoskisson, & Peng, 2005). In contrast, empirical contexts such as Africa remain scarce (for a recent exception see e.g. Julian & Ofori-dankwa, 2013).

There are reasons to assume that Nordic researchers share beneficial starting points for contributing to the ongoing strategy debate. The traditionally welfare oriented, export-intense Nordic countries have offered generations free access to higher education and proximity to successful firms. Business education in the Nordics were inspired by the elite ideal of Wharton School of Finance and Commerce and the London School of Economics, and early Nordic business schools copied the German “Handelshochschulen” (literally “colleges of trade”) and retained a larger distance to universities (Engwall, 2007), setting these countries apart from e.g. the United Kingdom (Engwall & Danell, 2011). The shared history of Nordic business research was also institutionalized in the Nordic Academy of Management. Recent rankings of Master’s and MBA place business schools in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Norway in the top 100 globally (Financial Times, 2014), suggesting fertile conditions for producing business research.

Indeed, many Nordic scholars have succeeded in making significant contributions to the strategy field. In strategy terms: scholars in the Nordics have been early movers in currently much-debated topics such as responsiveness to dynamic environments (cf. Hedberg, Bystrom, & Starbuck, 1976), the strategic value of services (Normann, 1991), and strategy practices (Pettigrew et al., 2003). More recently, Nordic researchers also have been prominent in conceptual cross-fertilization, e.g. combining critical discourse

analysis with typically strategic phenomena (Vaara, Tienari, & Laurila, 2006) or pairing dynamic capabilities and practice perspectives (Regnér, 2008).

At the same time, rivalry for limited publication space is increasing. Chinese universities had no publications in the Strategic Management Journal, arguably the leading outlet of strategy research, during the ten years before 2001. Between 2001 and 2007 that figure had reached 16—in the following seven years (2008–2014) Chinese universities had produced 43 publications. Such changes suggest that past performance is no guarantee for success in the strategy arena. It might even be that Nordic scholars are making more progress in other disciplines: among the top 25 most cited of the 23,446 articles and reviews listed by Web of Science as published in social science 2005–2014 by scholars with affiliations to universities in the Nordics, only one avowedly deals with strategy management (Laursen & Salter, 2006)—the rest with institutional theory, innovation, and the like. While it appears likely that contributions to strategy research are not evenly spread between geographical regions such indications remain anecdotal. Specifically, a fuller picture of how Nordic strategic management researchers contribute to this important but competitive field of business studies remains an empirical question—and yet awaits an answer.

3. Methodology

This study is designed as a comparative multi-level analysis inspired by a bibliometric approach of research publications in selected journals. Bibliometric methods span a broad set of approaches united by the “collection, the handling, and the analysis of quantitative bibliographic data, derived from scientific publications” (Veerbek, Debackere, Luwel, & Zimmerman, 2002, p. 181) and is a common method for assessing articles or authors that contribute to a research stream, that can also be combined with analysis of keywords. More specifically, this study takes the Nordic countries as one case of a region whose contributions to leading international strategic management publication are analyzed, both together and separately. Importantly therefore, in line with previous studies (e.g. Sihvonen & Vähämaa, 2015), this study is based on publications with at least one author affiliated to a Nordic university, acknowledging that one publication can have several authors at universities in different countries, as well as individual authors have several addresses.

In line with the view that the strategy field can be considered as that research which is accepted by peers as contributing to developing theory in strategy publishing outlets, data gathering was focusing on publications in journals considered leading in strategy research. One consequence of this operationalization was that data were selected based on the channel of output rather than specific content (see also Furrer et al., 2008). This had the benefit of avoiding a potentially arbitrary selection among a potentially endless number of articles whether contents belonged could be classified as strategy research or not, since the strategy concept potentially can span so different aspects (Nag et al., 2007). While excluding papers taking a strategic outlook published also in other journals, this decision meant delegating the decision of the relevance, quality, and belonging to a particular research stream to its peers (Vermeulen, 2005).

Journals labeled as “Strategic Management” in the most recent ABS list of journals at the time of the study (the version 4 of 2010) were included. These were, in falling ranking order: Strategic Management Journal, Journal of Economics and Management Strategy, Advances in Strategic Management, Long Range Planning, Technology Analysis and Strategic Management, Strategic Change, Business Strategy and the Environment, Strategic Organization, Journal of Change Management, Business Strategy Review, and

Foresight. The Web of Science was used, as this is the generally accepted leading database for scholarly production. In effect, the database provided results from five journals only: Strategic Management Journal, Long Range Planning, Strategic Organization, Technology Analysis and Strategic Management, and Business Strategy and the Environment. The search was limited to the timeframe 2005 through 2014 to allow for ten consecutive years. All studied journals were founded before 2005.

Concretely, the ten journals were entered as “publication name”, combined with the five main Nordic countries in the “address” field, thus identifying authors using an author address in one of the Nordic countries.¹ First, overall Nordic contributions were calculated as a percentage of total publications in the relevant period, and listed separately for different contribution types (editorials, reviews, and others; a category used to summarize e.g. book reviews that were anonymous, and therefore impossible to trace to a particular country).² Moving on to the most relevant contributions; research articles and reviews and excluding e.g. reviews, editorials, contributions listed as letters, corrections, and the like, analysis then proceeded to probe involvement per country was probed, producing tables of the frequency of publications and singling out research in the Nordic countries.

The next step focused the topics covered in Nordic research reviews and articles. Even if not perfectly depicting actual topics (Furrer et al., 2008) keyword analysis has been found fruitful in bibliometric methods (e.g. Di Stefano, Peteraf & Verona, 2010). KeywordPlus, a function offering keywords provided by each journal, was superior for this study compared to author keywords that were missing in almost half of the articles. Extracted keywords were summarized (merging differences in phrasing; e.g. “market” and “markets”; cf. Cummings & Daellenbach, 2009) and listed from most to least common. Because it involved substantial manual work this procedure was not repeated for international publications. As a consequence; no statistical comparison of topics is made; but rather; the Nordic keywords were compared to typical themes appearing in literature reviews.

The common measure of research impact is citation count (Azar & Brock, 2008). The number of citations (without self-citations) for the Top 20 most publishing countries was listed for the relevant time period, including the Nordic countries, listing the number of citations per publication separately³ along with the h-index of each country. The h-index measures how many articles have been cited how many times and can be applied both to single researchers and collective entities such as regions or countries. More formally, the index h is defined as the number of papers with citation number $\geq h$ (Hirsch, 2005) and therefore favors authors, or countries, with a more evenly cited publication list over those with a few highly cited papers but many papers with only few citations.

Lastly, co-authorship was analyzed in two ways. First, Web of Science offers a tool for comparing how often Nordic scholars publish together against how often they co-author with non-Nordic colleagues. Additionally, the order between multiple authors' names can reflect contributions (Floyd, Schroeder & Finn, 1994), and impact perceptions of who has contributed since first

¹ The study included Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. Iceland did not appear in data. One author can have several addresses and in different countries, even if this was the exception in data.

² Results depend i.a. on the database prescription of the institution from which the search is conducted. When the search was repeated the number of found publications shifted slightly: from 2292 on June 11, 2015, and 2,291 two days later despite using the exact same search phrase (copied and pasted from a separate document). These minor deviations do not significantly alter the main results of the study.

³ Since citation figures change constantly, this study represents a snapshot. To ensure comparability, the number of citations was assessed during one day (August, 2016).

names are likely given most attention (e.g. when subsequently referred to using the “et al.” format). Therefore, second, the frequency of first author was assessed manually to see whether any patterns appeared regarding the position of Nordic authors. All empirical results are presented in table throughout the analysis.

3.1. Findings

3.1.1. Trends in Nordic strategy research in the international arena

Overall, publications in leading strategy journals have varied but shown a growth in number in the studied decade, as visible in Table 1. In total, the strategy research field equaled a total of 2292 articles, reviews, editorials, and others (e.g. letters) between 2005 and 2014. The annual number of publications grew from 241 in 2005 to 290 in 2014. However, growth was not constant but fluctuated with a low of 146 in 2006. The average number of publications per year for the studied period was 229.2. Comparing international (including Nordic) figures against Nordics reveals interesting differences. Publications of all kinds by scholars with a Nordic affiliation amounted to 173 in the same period. While 76.4% of the international publication consisted of articles, the same figure for Nordic scholars was significantly higher, with 89.0%. However, while reviews constituted 13.6% of international output, it was only 4.6% for the Nordics. Interestingly, in 2005 the number of reviews exceeded that of articles, unique for the entire dataset, almost comparable to the 104 reviews in 2008. (To test for potential coding error in received data, this figure for 2008 was set to 0, still leaving the ten-year total Nordic and non-Nordic average at 9.0%.) International scholars outpace Nordics if less clearly also when it comes to editorials (7.3% against 5.2%), and other publications including corrections, letters, biographies, and comments from conferences and meetings (2.7% against 1.2%). Overall, this indicates that Nordic scholars are relatively more engaged in

publishing of original research than publishing in other capacities, such as being editors.

When turning to the main publication forms Nordic strategy scholars have been able to seize a growing slice of this growing pie with 154 articles and 8 reviews. The trend of these types of contributions by Nordic scholars in relation to the overall strategy research is shown in Table 2. With 12.1% in 2014 Nordic scholars had increased their share of the international research article and review production more than five times in a decade, however with some fluctuations. Published articles largely explain both this growth and the fluctuations, with only minor influence from the publishing of reviews, and averaging at 8.3%, the share of Nordic articles has more than doubled over the relevant period. The increasing Nordic presence in the international strategy research stream suggests a strong competitiveness especially in terms of research publications. Although figures for reviews are more uneven and should be taken with some care they, too, indicate an increasing trend. In all, it appears that Nordic scholars are predominantly active in producing novel research rather than commenting on or editing research, and that they are increasingly successful in publishing in the strategy field.

3.1.2. Contributions per nation

If Nordic strategy researchers are increasingly visible in the international strategy field, are there any differences between the Nordic countries? Fig. 1 lists the top 20 countries in terms of total publication in strategy publishing in the relevant time period, separately showing total production (including editorials, etc.), and separately, articles and reviews. Overall, the 2292 identified total publications involve authors from 64 nations; however, the frequency differs significantly between nations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, scholars from the US take the lead with 860 publications; more than twice the records by the second nation; England. The

Table 1

Comparison between Non-Nordic and Nordic total contributions to international strategy research 2005–2014.

Year	Non-Nordic					Nordic				
	Total publications	Articles	Reviews	Editorials	Other	Total publications	Articles	Reviews	Editorials	Other
2014	290	261	12	9	8	35	34	1	0	0
2013	250	215	19	12	4	20	20	0	0	0
2012	241	206	14	17	4	13	11	2	0	0
2011	221	201	0	17	3	21	20	0	0	1
2010	230	215	1	10	4	16	15	1	0	0
2009	218	179	20	16	3	28	24	2	2	0
2008	268	137	104	24	3	16	12	1	3	0
2007	187	115	20	40	12	12	8	1	3	0
2006	146	111	6	10	19	7	5	0	1	1
2005	241	111	115	12	3	5	5	0	0	0
Sum:	2,292	1,751	311	167	63	173	154	8	9	2
	of total publications	76.4%	13.6%	7.3%	2.7%	of total Nordic publications	89.0%	4.6%	5.2%	1.2%

Table 2

Nordic contributions as percent of international strategy research (N = 162).

Year	Nordic contribution (all publication types)	Nordic contribution (articles)	Nordic contribution (reviews)
2014	12.1%	13.0%	8.3%
2013	8.0%	9.3%	0.0%
2012	5.4%	5.3%	14.3%
2011	9.5%	10.0%	NA
2010	7.0%	7.0%	100.0%
2009	12.8%	13.4%	10.0%
2008	6.0%	8.8%	1.0%
2007	6.4%	7.0%	5.0%
2006	4.8%	4.5%	0.0%
2005	2.1%	4.5%	0.0%
Average	7.4%	8.3%	13.9%

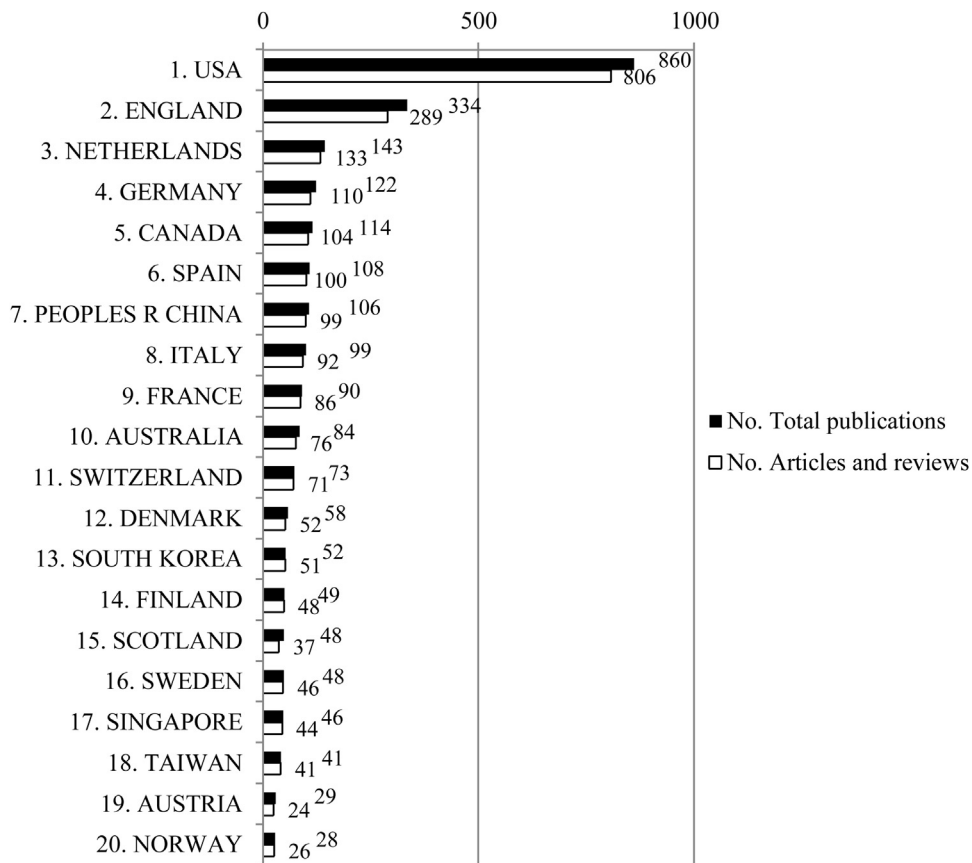


Fig. 1. Number of strategy publications 2005–2014 by authors from 20 countries.

Netherlands, a comparatively small nation in terms of population reaches a third position, beating Germany, Canada, and Spain. Among the Nordic countries, Denmark takes the lead on place 12 with 58 total publications (of which 52 articles and reviews), followed by Finland on place 14 with 49 (48), and Sweden closely after on place 16 with 48 publications (46). Scholars affiliated to Norwegian universities ranks on place 20, with 28 publications (26). Beyond demonstrating all four countries in the top 20 list, in itself a sign of strength, one might note that if ordered according to articles and reviews, Sweden would beat Scotland to place 15 (otherwise article and review figures are falling in parallel throughout the table.) That Denmark is having a higher output than Finland and Sweden is a finding we shall find cause to return to below.

3.1.3. Topics and theories

To analyze the topics studied by Nordic researchers the keywords attributed to the studied research articles were analyzed. Focusing on the 154 research articles, 549 individual keywords appeared 1151 times, itself witnessing the width of Nordic strategy research. Table 3 shows the ten most common keywords over the relevant time period as well as per year. The most recent year, the average times each specific keyword appeared was 2 (with a standard deviation of 1.43) indicating a fragmentation in keywords, typical also to the larger field of business studies (Furrer et al., 2008). Interpreted carefully it appears merited to claim that Nordic research ranges a broad set of topics, and that research efforts are evenly spread.

Many keywords used by Nordic scholars are highly generic to business studies and strategy research. The most common keyword was “firms” (43 times) followed by “performance” (38), “innovation” (34), and “industries” (21). Data does not allow for

identifying robust patterns but intuitively separated offer insights into topical and theoretical emphases in Nordic strategy research. Beyond conceptual terms generic to the field in terms of means or ends of firms (e.g. “strategies” or “competitive advantage”), “knowledge” is the most common theoretical construct appearing 19 times among the keywords. Just outside of the list appear more revealing theoretical or conceptual emphases: the resource-based view on place 11 (appearing 14 times), exploitation on place 12 (12), capabilities on place 13 (11), and dynamic capabilities on place 17 (10) followed by networks (10) and absorptive capacity (9). Even if not compared statistically with international strategy research, a comparison with emphases in recent strategy research (e.g. Furrer et al., 2008), data suggest that Nordic research centers on topics and theories common to or even dominating in current international strategic management scholarship.

3.1.4. Impact on the international strategy field

Quantity in itself is not the only measure of how well a region is doing in terms of publishing. One measure of impact of Nordic research in strategy research is the degree to which others use publications. To illustrate the total impact Table 4 ranks the top 20 nations according to number publications of all forms. USA dominates with 31,228 citations, more than four times than the citations of the second, England with 7161, and third Netherlands with 3033 citations, beating English-speaking countries such as Canada (place 5) and Australia (place 10). The Nordic countries find themselves at the lower half of the list. Again Denmark takes lead, on place 12 with 2058 citations, followed by Finland on place 14 (802), Sweden on place 16 (696) and Norway on place 20 (431).

Additional information about research impact is offered by comparing the h-index. Since this measure is dependent also on the number of articles, it is not surprising that USA again takes lead,

Table 3
The most common keywords in Nordic strategy research articles per year and 2005–2014.

	2005 (21)	2006 (31)	2007 (79)	2008 (92)	2009 (132)	2010 (111)	2011 (140)	2012 (108)	2013 (141)	2014 (296)	Most common 2005–2014
1	Choice (1)	Firm (2)	Competitive advantage (5) Firm (4)	Absorptive-capacity (3)	Performance (6) Capabilities (3)	Firm (4)	Innovation (6)	Performance (5)	Performance (9)	Firm (10)	Firms (43)
2	Competition (1)	Industry (2)	Firm (4)	Industry (3)	Capabilities (3)	Product development (2)	Firm (4)	Firm (4)	Innovation (6)	Performance (10)	Performance (38)
3	Competitive advantage (1)	Acquisitions (1)	Capabilities (3)	Knowledge (3)	Experience (3)	Innovation (3)	Industry (3)	Knowledge (3)	Perspective (4)	Innovation (9)	Innovation (34)
4	Cooperation (1)	Biotechnology (1)	Innovation (3)	Performance (3) (3)	Firms (3)	R&D (2)	Performance (3)	Management (3) (3)	Strategy (4)	R&D (9)	Industries (21)
5	Efficiency (1)	Collaboration (1)	Resource-based view (3) (3)	Perspective (3)	Evolution (2)	Performance (2)	Strategy (3)	Strategy (3)	Knowledge (3)	Competitive advantage (6) (6)	R&D (20)
6	Experience (1)	Companies (1)	Dynamic capabilities (2) (2)	Strategy (3)	Industry (2)	Networks (2)	Business (2)	Competitive advantage (2) (2)	Organizations (3)	Exploitation (6)	Strategies (20)
7	Failure (1)	Complex (1)	Performance (2)	Determinants (2) (2)	Innovation (2)	Management (2)	Decision- making (2) (2)	Industry (2)	R&D (3)	Firms (6)	Competitive Advantage (19) (19)
8	Firm (1)	Consequences (1)	R&D (2)	Framework (2)	International joint ventures (2) (2)	Knowledge (2)	Identity (2)	Innovation (2)	Competitive advantage (2) (2)	Evolution (5)	Knowledge (19)
9	Future (1)	Cooperation (1)	Acquiring firms Advantage (1)	Innovation (2)	Management (2) (2)	Industry (2)	Knowledge (2)	Market (2)	Consequences (2)	Resource-based view (5) (5)	Perspective (17)
10	Industry (1)	Diversification (1)	Renewable energy technology (2) (2)	Market (2)	Market (2)	Impact (2)	Market (2)	Policy (2)	Differ (2)	Dynamic capabilities (4) (4)	Management (16)

Please note that certain years the least common keywords are equally common as keywords not in the top ten. For instance 2005 all keywords appeared only once, making the included keywords as common as those not included. When used equally often, keywords are included (and excluded) following alphabetical order.

followed by England and Canada, but with China taking a position in the top nations, again illustrating the rapid Chinese progress in terms of strategy publishing. Again, when comparing figures in the h-index column in Table 4 Denmark takes lead among its Nordic peers with an h-index of 19, followed in order by Sweden (16), Finland (14), and Norway (9). This suggests that Denmark remains at the top in the Nordics not only with a few highly cited papers, but with a well-rounded output. Similarly, while with fewer publications and citations, Swedish publications surpass their Finnish colleagues, if only marginally, in terms of broadness of impact.

However, arguably the most interesting result appears when taking a more granular view of the reception of Nordic research. Given its sheer size the top position of the US might come as little surprise. Also when putting the number of citations in relation to the overall journal publications, the right column of Table 4 shows that also here the USA takes lead with 36.3 cites per publication. However, this is a position surprisingly contested by Denmark beating all other nations on the list: with only decimals' difference to the US, Denmark reaches an average of 35.5 citations per publication. This is explained by the high number of citations; almost on par with China, but only about half the number of China's publications. Taken together, this points to a great impact of studies involving Danish scholars. While the h-index for Denmark is not comparable to that of the US, this suggests that there are a few Danish studies that generate much attention and that this makes up for other studies with fewer citations (in turn lowering the h-index). This measure also would put Sweden (at a position shared with Singapore) right behind Denmark. Taken together, this suggests that the impact of Nordic research is larger per article, and especially so for Denmark.

3.2. Co-authoring patterns

So far, two levels have been discussed: the Nordic strategy research in comparison to international publishing, and Nordic countries separately. However, co-authorships often span boundaries. One interesting question then is to what degree Nordic strategy as a collective develops with or in isolation from the wider strategy scholarship. More precisely, do Nordic researchers primarily co-author with their Nordic peers, or prefer to cooperate with other nationalities?

Co-authorship in the studied Nordic publications is shown in Table 5. This table shows a clear tendency toward international cooperation over intra-Nordic authorships. USA is the most common address of co-authors (co-authors in the own country excluded) in Denmark, Finland and Norway. Sweden is the exception, having Denmark as the second most common co-author address after the US. In Denmark, the US is followed co-authoring with scholars in England and Germany; in Finland by a co-author in France and the Netherlands, but in Norway by Denmark, and in turn Australia. Next to Danish co-authors, Swedish authors prefer cooperating with authors from England and the US. Overall, this indicates that there is virtually no such thing as a common Nordic research community, but rather that Nordic strategy research is highly internationally intertwined, especially with scholars in the US.

Moreover, the preference to co-author with non-Nordics is almost parallel to success in terms of number of publications: when calculating the share of Nordic co-authors of all co-authors for each focal country, Norway takes the lead with 29.2%. Sweden comes second with 23.1% and Denmark third with 14.8%. Not only does Nordic co-authoring come only at sixth place in Finland; the overall level of Nordic co-authorship is only 10.3%. Thus, with the exception that Finland is the most internationally intertwined Nordic country (beating Denmark) in terms of its strategy research,

Table 4
The most cited strategy research per country of origin (all publication forms).

Ranking	Address	No. Total publications	Times cited (without self-citations)	h-index	Citations/ publication
1	USA	860	31,228	93	36.3
2	England	334	7,161	40	21.4
3	Netherlands	143	3,033	28	21.2
4	Germany	122	2,028	23	16.6
5	Canada	114	3,138	28	27.5
6	Spain	108	2,525	27	23.4
7	Peoples R China	106	2,232	28	21.1
8	Italy	99	1,555	19	15.7
9	France	90	2,391	27	26.6
10	Australia	84	1,297	21	15.4
11	Switzerland	73	1,700	20	23.3
12	Denmark	58	2,058	19	35.5
13	South Korea	52	695	12	13.4
14	Finland	49	802	14	16.4
15	Scotland	48	537	13	11.2
16	Sweden	48	696	16	14.5
17	Singapore	46	1,134	18	24.7
18	Taiwan	41	334	11	8.1
19	Austria	29	492	11	17.0
20	Norway	28	431	10	15.4
Sum		2,532	65,467	(23.9)	(20.2)
(Average):					

Table 5
Top 20 countries of origin of co-authors favored by Nordic strategy scholars.

Focal country Ranking	Denmark		Finland		Sweden		Norway	
	Author address	Number	Author address	Number	Author address	Number	Author address	Number
1	(Denmark)	52 (100%)	(Finland)	49 (100%)	(Sweden)	48 (100%)	(Norway)	26 (100%)
2	USA	11	USA	8	Denmark	4	USA	6
3	England	9	France	4	England	4	Denmark	4
4	Germany	4	Netherlands	3	USA	4	Australia	2
5	Norway	4	Spain	3	Germany	2	England	2
6	Sweden	4	England	2	Italy	2	Finland	2
7	Australia	3	Norway	2	Netherlands	2	Austria	1
8	Austria	3	Brazil	1	Switzerland	2	Canada	1
9	Italy	3	Canada	1	Australia	1	France	1
10	Netherlands	3	Italy	1	Belgium	1	Ireland	1
11	Belgium	2	Luxembourg	1	Finland	1	Mexico	1
12	Brazil	1	Portugal	1	Luxembourg	1	Netherlands	1
13	India	1	Sweden	1	Norway	1	Sweden	1
14	Israel	1	Switzerland	1	Spain	1	Switzerland	1
15	Luxembourg	1						
16	Peoples R China	1						
17	Portugal	1						
18	South korea	1						
19	Switzerland	1						
International co-authors (including Nordics)		54		29		26		24
No. of Nordic co-authors (percent)		8 (14.8%)		3 (10.3%)		6 (23.1%)		7 (29.2%)

the ranking of non-Nordic co-authoring almost perfectly mimics the publishing ranking success.

Data also reveals insights regarding author constellations. Table 6 shows that scholars in Finland are more prone to publish alone, with 15 single-authored equaling almost a third of all

published Finnish articles and reviews. While Sweden and Norway fare about equal with approximately a fifth with single authors, Denmark stands out at the other end of the spectrum with only 6 publications with a single author. The number of authors in co-authored publications is about similar between the countries. It is

Table 6
Author combination patterns of articles and reviews.

	Denmark	Finland	Sweden	Norway
Articles and reviews	52	49	46	26
Single-authored publications (as percent)	6 (11.5%)	15 (30.6%)	11 (23.9%)	6 (23.1%)
Co-authored publications	46 (88.5%)	34 (69.4%)	35 (76.1%)	20 (76.9%)
Co-authors per co-authored publication (average)	2.5	3.1	2.6	2.6
Articles with Nordic first author (of co-authored publications, excluding purely national cooperation), (as percent)	26 (56.5%)	9 (26.5%)	11 (31.4%)	6 (30.0%)
Purely national co-authored publications* (as percent of total co-authored publications)	11 (23.9%)	12 (35.3%)	17 (48.6%)	7 (35.0%)

* Excluding publications by authors with affiliations in different countries.

also interesting to note differences with regards to the position of Nordic scholars in co-authoring constellations. While scholars from the three other countries are first author in about 30% of publications, scholars with an address at a Danish university stand out with 56.5%.

4. Discussion

Nordic research has been prominent in several fields of business studies, and several individual Nordic strategy scholars are influential, but a fuller picture of how scholars in the Nordics compare to their international peers in strategy research has not yet been provided. Taking a broad view of what constitutes strategy research and arguing that important developments take place in the strategy field constituted by the highest-ranked strategy outlets, this study has taken a multi-level approach to analyze contributions by the Nordic countries in comparison to international publications, at national level, and at author level in leading strategy outlets during the most recent decade.

Findings display that scholars affiliated to Nordic universities are more prone to contribute to the strategy field in some roles than others. Compared to international peers, Nordic scholars are less successful in participating in what can be considered key positions. The figures should not be overestimated, but small, persisting differences exist in the number of editorial contributions compared to other nationalities. Beyond its immediate effect on e.g. citation frequency, this also can have important long-term effects. Editors play key roles in framing past, present, and future directions of a research field (Hunter, 2013). Moreover, it can affect the success of publishing original research since editors play a unique role in publishing decisions (Boyd et al., 2005).

In contrast, findings demonstrate that the Nordics is strongly represented by publishing in the international strategy research arena. Over the studied period the number of publications with at least one author affiliated to a Nordic University is on par with the international research community, and showing an increasing trend. Indeed, Nordic scholars have a relatively higher output of research papers and reviews than their international peers, and all Nordic countries position themselves among the top 20 most successful nations. Indeed, if considered together, the Nordics would reach a third place globally, only behind the US and England, before countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, and aggressive newcomers on the strategy arena such as China.

Taken together, strategy research can be described as a Nordic strength. While Nordic scholars have been found to produce 5% of general management research (Sihvonen & Vähämaa, 2015), in turn a fivefold increase from two decades ago (Engwall, 1996), strategy research stands out with 8.3% for research papers and 13.9% of reviews. Strategy therefore can be added to a number of fields where Nordic research has made significant contributions: processes (Hernes, 2007), e.g. in internationalization (Melin, 1992), logistics (Stentoft Arlbjørn et al., 2008); institutional theory (Brunsson, 1982; Røvik, 2011; and organization research more broadly (Czarniawska-Joerges et al., 2003). Along also with welfare research (Sandberg, 2013); corporate social responsibility (Gjølberg, 2009); and studies of gender, power and resistance (Tienari, Søderberg, Holgersson, & Vaara, 2005), strategy research stands out as a Nordic forte.

When combined with the insights from theoretical reviews of how the field has evolved, findings from this study hint at explanations to this strong and increasing Nordic presence. The improved publishing frequency of Nordic scholars appears to coincide with recent intellectual turns in strategy research (Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004); from economics-based exogenous explanations to systematic performance differences (e.g. Fouraker & Stopford, 1968; Porter, 1980) toward internal

organizational factors (Bowman et al., 2006). In particular, this trend is visible in increasing attention to ambiguous and socially complex processes (Dierickx & Cool, 1989), how social processes matter for competitive advantage (Winter, 2003) through gradual growth of experience (Zollo & Winter, 2002), in growing interest in organizational practice and routines (Regnér, 2008), and micro-foundations of capabilities (Foss, Heimeriks, Winter, & Zollo, 2012). These developments match traditional strengths of Nordic research of embracing bounded rationality to question simplistic positivist assumptions in rationality-biased economics-based business research (Engwall, 1996). For instance, Nordic research was early in emphasizing the role of social ties (Edström & Galbraith, 1977), tacit knowledge (Kogut & Zander, 1992), organizational norms (Hedlund, 1993), processes (Hernes, 2007), and the role of gradually growing organizational experience as explanation for strategic growth (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), particularly drawing on qualitative methods and generous access to first-hand data (e.g. Carlson, 1951).

Hence, while previously working to set Nordic strategy research apart (Björkman & Forsgren, 2000), these intellectual developments has made the international center of gravity move toward issues and concepts traditionally a “core competence” of Nordic strategy research. This conclusion is substantiated also by the topics and theories preferred by Nordic scholars increasingly matching theories favored in international publishing including knowledge (Grant, 1996; Kogut & Zander, 1992), capabilities (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993), and dynamic capabilities (Helfat et al., 2007; Teece et al., 1997), or the resource-based view (Barney, 1991). Put differently, data patterns in Nordic publishing paired with previous research reviews of the strategy field suggest that the growing Nordic publishing success can be explained by changes; not so much in Nordics, but in international research placing the Nordics as a whole in a beneficial early mover position (Makadok, 1998).

The clearest success becomes visible when breaking down publishing at national level. Denmark stands out as leading in Nordic strategy publishing. Not only has Denmark produced the highest number of publications in leading strategy outlets both with regards to all publication forms and research articles and reviews. While Finland comes close in publishing, Denmark also enjoys the highest citations count, more than three times the Finnish number. Also the higher Danish h-index suggests a well-rounded portfolio of highly cited publications compared to their Nordic peers. Most striking, however, is the Danish citing per publication only decimals from that of US publications. Taken together, while all Nordic countries position themselves at the top 20 most publishing nations, Denmark stands out as exceptional in its international impact.

Although data do not allow for causal conclusions, tentative explanations emerge. The Danish and Finnish successes coincide with the strongest tendency toward international over Nordic co-authorship. Even if itself no evidence of causality, this suggests that co-authoring with international in general and US scholars in particular is a benefit, an interpretation supported in earlier studies (Björkman & Forsgren, 2000). Interestingly, however, this appears only a partial explanation, since these countries also range at different ends on the spectrum when it comes to co-authoring frequency. While almost a third of all Finnish publications have a single author, 88.5 percent of Danish publications are co-authored, suggesting that there are different paths to successful Nordic publishing.

Thus, a complementary insight is that while international co-authoring can matter, this does not detract from individual skills. Insofar as author positions reflect the individual contributions in the author team (Boyd et al., 2005; Floyd et al., 1994), a first-author position of 56.5 percent of internationally co-authored papers suggests that this publishing success largely relies largely on the

efforts and skills of Danish researchers. In itself, this supports the notion that “star scientists” play major roles in pushing publication statistics (Acedo, Barroso, Villanueva & Galán, 2006). This complementary insight is supported also by the Finnish reliance on individual achievement leading to successful publishing. However, when impact is included, the success of the Danish international “network strategy” confirms that co-authoring can create not only high-quality publications (Laband & Tollison, 2000) but also is central in explaining an almost world-leading international citation per publication impact (Katz & Martín, 1997). In short, the Danish feat stands out even more since combining high output with impact is hard in the strategy field (Bergh & Perry, 2006).

5. Conclusion

This study set out against a background where pictures of important research fields still are dominated by a view of research as globally homogenous. While the field of strategic management takes a central position in business studies not only by virtue of the pertinent questions it asks but also by its influencing both in- and outside of academia, it is somewhat surprising that this field typically is described as varied in terms of topics, but with little attention to the potentially varied contributions to the field across regions and nations. In a world where many countries, not least the Nordics, strive to further establish themselves as knowledge economies, increasing nuance to the picture of research contributions in central fields is likely to benefit several stakeholders with an interest in research. While Nordic countries have proven their mettle in business studies in general and individual Nordic scholars are prominent in the strategy arena, the question about the degree to which Nordic research contributes to the strategy field has remained missing. Against this background this study has aimed at nuancing the understanding of the strategy field by assessing topics, theories, and trends of Nordic strategy research over the last decade.

Overall, this paper contributes to strategy research by adding nuance to how the strategy research field can be fruitfully understood. It complements traditional accounts of the strategy field as theoretically diverse but geographically homogenous (Bowman et al., 2006; Furrer et al., 2008; Herrmann, 2005; Hoskisson et al., 1999; Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004). Highlighting the case of Nordic strategy research has illustrated differences in academic strategy research between different geographical contexts on international, Nordic, and author constellation levels. This geographical dimension thereby complements studies distinguishing the contributions of strategy research as a whole, within (Cumplings & Daellenbach, 2009) and between different journals (Azar & Brock, 2008), and thus offers a more nuanced picture of the field.

This study places strategy among the research disciplines that deserve to be highlighted as a Nordic forte. Taken together, the Nordics is the third most successful producer of strategy research, outpacing business studies in general, and with an increasing trend. Put differently, while the Nordics are often mentioned as leading other fields of business research, strategy research is a field where Nordic scholars are already established and taking an increasingly stronger position. This increasing success is explained not by change in Nordic research foci, but in the international research field, and more specifically with an increasing international attention to constructs already deeply rooted in a Nordic research tradition. Thus, put in strategy parlance, rather than e.g. a dynamic capability to adjust to international trends (Teece et al., 1997), the growing Nordic success can be described as an early mover advantage and core competence in areas more recently addressed by the international scholarship.

Lastly, the geographic nuances also revealed clear differences between the Nordic countries. Denmark stands out from its Nordic peers as the star both in term of numbers of publications and impact. Most strikingly, however, this appeared in citation per publication by scholars affiliated to Danish universities matching the level of US. While the Finnish success depends on a significantly larger share of single author papers compared to their Nordic peers, Danish authors more often co-author, and co-author internationally. Findings thus confirmed earlier arguments emphasizing the benefits of international co-authoring, but this feat is even more remarkable since high output (in terms of number of publications) and impact has been found to be rare in strategy research.

This study also offers insights to practitioners. The finding that Nordic strategy research is highly competitive on the international arena and more so than management and organization research in general should benefit universities and research funding agencies interested in supporting successful research. Although data suggest a measure of equifinality in that different author constellations can lead to comparable outcomes in terms of publication levels, the Danish example suggests that to increase impact co-authoring with international scholars is advisable. Since well-reputed universities cannot be bolted together but depend on carefully nurtured interdependencies and relationships (Boyd, Bergh & Ketchen, 2009), scholars, research funding agencies, politicians and university managers at various levels should benefit from the importance of organically growing co-authoring.

As every study this one has limitations that connect to opportunities for future research. The choice to focus the most recent decade excludes potentially interesting trends appearing before that. As a result of the bibliometric approach the study has been mainly quantitative, and offers little insight into actual contributions or authors, something that fruitfully can be approached in future reviews of the Nordic strategy research. Perhaps the clearest limitation however results from defining the strategy field as publications in acknowledged high-ranking strategic management journals, rather than a broader set of publications. This approach is in line both with the definition of the strategy field and with extant research (e.g. Hoskisson et al., 1999), and was considered superior to the risk of applying arbitrary delimitations of what belongs to the strategy field or not. Still, this approach likely has excluded important contributions to strategy thinking. Lastly, this study has taken the Nordics as one case of a region. The findings from this study point to the fruitfulness of searching for a nuanced understanding of strategy research also in other geographical contexts. Perhaps most obviously, this could offer additional insights into research from many areas so far not prominently appearing in international strategy research such as Africa, South America, or Asia beyond China.

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