



Punishment and imprisonment in the Nordic countries: Comparative perspectives

University of Agder, Department of Sociology and Social Work

John Pratt published his celebrated two-part article about 'Nordic Exceptionalism' in 2008. In this article, and in later publications, Pratt argued that the Nordic countries are exceptions to the Anglo-American trend of increasing punitiveness. The exceptional features Pratt found in the Nordic countries were consistently low imprisonment rates, short sentences, humane prison conditions, an emphasis on normalization and rights, and a high level of social solidarity. Pratt's work on Nordic Exceptionalism has been highly influential, not least in attracting interest and debate on what prisons and punishment look like in the Nordic countries.

During the ten years that have passed since the 'Nordic Exceptionalism' thesis was first presented, several important changes have occurred in Nordic penal policy and practice, not least, significant growth in empirical prison research in this region, much of which engages with Pratt's argument. The Comparative Penology project, from which this conference emanates, is more or less designed as an empirical test of the Nordic Exceptionalism thesis and serves as an apt illustration of the renewed prison sociological interest in Nordic penal practices. Meanwhile, the last decade has seen important developments in the Nordic countries with regard to penal policy. In Norway, for example, the establishment of an all-foreign nationals prison, the renting of prison capacity in the Netherlands, and the introduction of significant budget cuts throughout the Prison service all seem to be in tension with the ideals underpinning 'Nordic Exceptionalism'.

In this conference, we take these two developments as a point of departure, and ask: What do ten years of Nordic Exceptionalism research tell us about Nordic penal policy and practice? In what ways do recent studies, and penal policy developments, support, challenge, and supplement the idea that Nordic prison policies and practices are unusually humane and inclusive? Over the course of two days, we invite researchers with expertise on prisons and punishment in the Nordic countries to present their analysis of such matters. In addition, the Comparative Penology team will present preliminary findings from their study of penal policymaking and prisoner experiences in England & Wales and Norway.

Thursday, June 13th 2019

- 09.30-10.00 Registration, tea and coffee.
- 10.00-10:30 Welcome and introduction to the Conference theme, with presentation of the 'Comparative Penology' project
Ben Crewe
- 10:30-12.00 **Exceptional punishment**
The Nordic Exceptionalism debate has primarily centred around prisons and prison systems. However, punishment is far more than imprisonment. In this panel, we invite researchers to describe and analyse contemporary trends in Nordic punishment more broadly. To what degree is Nordic Exceptionalism relevant when considering punishment ideals and practices beyond the prison? This panel builds on socio-legal perspectives and to this end, panel participants will reflect on the 'exportation' of Nordic penal values and policies as well as Nordic court practices in relation to ethnic minorities.
- *Louise Victoria Johansen, University of Copenhagen*
 - *Kjersti Lohne, University of Oslo*
 - *Synøve N. Andersen, University of Oslo*
- 12.00-13:00 *Lunch*
- 13:00-14:30 **Exceptional transitions? Exploring prisoners' experiences of entry into and release from prison**
- *Julie Laursen, Anna Schliehe and Kristian Mjåland*
 - *Comment: Torsten Kolind, Universitetet i Aarhus*
- 14.30-14.45 *Tea and coffee*
- 14.45-16:15 **Desistance from crime in 'exceptional' contexts**
Research on desistance has been blossoming in the Anglo-Saxon field (see Bottoms & Shapland 2011; Nugent & Schinkel 2016; Maruna 2001), but to what degree are these analyses relevant when exploring desistance in Nordic countries? In this panel, we aim to facilitate discussions about what desistance looks like in 'exceptional' contexts. How much does the generous Norwegian welfare state alleviate the pains of debt, drug use and unemployment, and what factors help people to survive and thrive post-prison?
- *John Todd, University of Oslo*
 - *Thomas Ugelvik, University of Oslo*
 - *Marguerite Schinkel, University of Glasgow*

- 16:30-18.00 **Exceptionalism in exceptional places? Comparing deep-end confinement in England & Wales and Norway**
- *Ben Crewe, Kristian Mjåland and Julie Laursen*
 - *Comments: Sharon Shalev, University of Oxford*

18:30-20:00 Boat trip along the archipelago

20:00 Dinner at [Sjøhuset](#)

Friday, June 14th 2019

7.00-08.00 (optional) Guided morning run in the forest [Baneheia](#) (five minutes' walk from the hotel)

- 9.30-10.45 **Inclusion and exclusion within and beyond the prison: Exploring the punishment of men convicted of sex offences in Norway and England & Wales**
- *Alice levins, Julie Laursen, Kristian Mjåland and Anna Schliehe*
 - *Comment: Paul Leer-Salvesen, University of Agder*

10.45-11.00 *Tea and coffee*

- 11.00-12.30 **Foreign nationals in Nordic prisons**
- In 2017, foreign nationals made up 34 percent of the Norwegian prison population and Kongsvinger prison is now a designated prison for foreign nationals. According to the World Prison Brief, the percentage of foreign nationals is somewhat lower in Denmark (29 per cent) and Sweden (22 per cent), but all three countries have seen a rapid growth in imprisoned foreign nationals. So far, most scholarship on this development has focussed on macro-theoretical explanations and analyses of the nation state (see Barker 2017). In this panel, we focus on empirically based work which emphasises foreign nationals' own perspectives on Nordic imprisonment. How do prisoners experience the all-foreign national prison Kongsvinger? How do ethnic minorities experience imprisonment in Nordic countries? What do these experiences together tell us about exceptional penal practices?
- *Dorina Damsa (University of Oslo)*
 - *Torsten Kolind (Aarhus University)*

12.30-13.15 *Lunch*

- 13.15-14.30 **Order, regulation and gender practices in women's prisons in England & Wales and Norway**
- *Anna Schliehe, Julie Laursen, Alice levins and Kristian Mjåland*
 - *Comment: Linnea Osterman, University of Greenwich*

14.30-14.45 *Tea and coffee*

14.45-15:45

'Nordic Exceptionalism 10 years on' roundtable: What have we learned from ten years of Nordic Exceptionalism research?

The Nordic Exceptionalism thesis has been highly influential in creating interest in Nordic prison regimes specifically and comparative penology more generally. Now seems to be a good time to reflect upon what this case study of penal moderation has to offer the field of comparative penology. Has the NE-thesis and the research that has followed from it made it possible to grasp the penal practices in this particular region? What are the methodological lessons from ten years of debate and research into the NE-thesis? How can researchers avoid glamorising Nordic penal practices while simultaneously reporting truthfully about some of their advantages?

- *Peter Scharff Smith, University of Oslo*
- *Victor Shamma, AFI, Oslo Metropolitan University*
- *Thomas Ugelvik, University of Oslo*
- *Berit Johnsen, KRUS*

15:45-16:00

Thank you and farewell