

Institution: University College London
Unit of Assessment: 28 – Modern Languages and Linguistics
Title of case study: Nordic Noir: Engaging the public with research through the Scandinavian Crime Fiction Book Club
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The Nordic Noir Crime Fiction Book Club (NNBC) responds to the current intense UK interest in Scandinavian crime writing and television. It provides a face-to-face and online community of fans of Nordic crime fiction in English in which research on the politics, history, language, and visual and literary culture of the Nordic welfare states stimulates and informs public understanding of and engagement in the Nordic culture underlying crime fiction and television. NNBC also facilitates collaborative involvement and public understanding of broader societal issues and challenges pertaining to crime fiction and television, including politics, language, identity, violence, the publishing and television industries, reading practices, translation, and visual culture.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Research at UCL Scandinavian Studies examines two inextricably linked questions: (a) How can we best understand the politics, history and culture of the Nordic Model (that is, the national welfare societies broadly conceived)? and (b) How do literary genres and visual culture reflect, mediate, and shape the Nordic Model, both in the region and when translated or subtitled in the UK context?</p> <p>Mary Hilson's (Senior Lecturer since 2007) research on the political history of the 'Nordic Model' traces the nationally-specific development of the welfare states in the Nordic region, while demonstrating that these processes are best understood as an example of transnational and thus comparative history (see [a] in section 3). In particular, Hilson (with Andersson [b]) has investigated how the exceptionalism of the Nordic welfare states, particularly Sweden, has led to Scandinavia being idealised internationally as a utopia of social equality, with its virtues sometimes exaggerated for politically expedient reasons. Notably, with the decline of the Swedish model, recent decades have seen a comprehensive renegotiation of myths and images of Sweden, at home and abroad; new and contested narratives about Swedishness and Nordicness have emerged from cultural and political struggles over globalisation, the EU, and immigration.</p> <p>While Hilson's collaborative projects focus on historiography and political and popular discourse, literary fiction is also a powerful locus for the emergence and exportation of images of the Nordic nations. Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen (Lecturer 2010–2013, Senior Lecturer 2013–) has researched the role of crime and other literary genres in interrogating and re-negotiating the relationship between the Nordic (especially Danish) citizen and the welfare state [c]. His research investigates reading practices amongst crime fiction audiences: the circulation and consumption of books, engagement in social media and other communities, the cognitive and bodily aspects of reading. His work is an example of how pathways to impact can themselves help researchers to develop and sharpen their research questions [d].</p> <p>Research by Claire Thomson (Lecturer 2007–2013, Senior Lecturer 2013–) investigates the role of visual culture, especially the public information film and similar genres, in reflecting and shaping the identity of a citizen of the Danish Welfare State. A particular focus is how welfare state principles and practices were instantiated in the architecture of the transnational Danish-Swedish Øresund region, the setting for much contemporary popular crime literature, television drama and documentary, and how this in turn functions as visual metaphor and physical environment in which national and transnational norms are negotiated [e]. Tying together the department's collective interests in political discourse and literary and cinematic fiction, Thomson also researches the mid-twentieth-century phenomenon of the <i>kulturfilm</i>: cultural or educational short films commissioned by the State or by non-governmental organisations. Her work [f] investigates the role of the cinematic style and affective impact of these short films made to inform, to educate, and to influence the behaviour of citizens.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>[a] Hilson, Mary (2008). <i>The Nordic Model: Scandinavia since 1945</i>. London: Reaktion Books.</p>

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Submitted to REF 2. Positively reviewed in authoritative sources: 'Mary Hilson has made a major contribution to Scandinavian studies in this concise, thorough, and well-written survey of contemporary Nordic history.' (*Scandinavian Studies*); 'This book contributes to a better understanding of the Nordic model by highlighting the convergences with and divergences from the rest of Europe and within Scandinavia... challenges the preconceived notion that Scandinavia is an entirely distinct region, politically, economically and socially.' (*Journal of Contemporary European Studies*).

[b] Andersson, Jenny and Hilson, Mary (2009). 'Images of Sweden and the Nordic Countries'. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 34 (3) 219–228. DOI: [10.1080/03468750903134681](https://doi.org/10.1080/03468750903134681). A leading journal in the field with rigorous peer review.

[c] Stougaard-Nielsen, Jakob and Simonsen, Peter (eds.) (2011). *Scandinavica* Special Issue on Literature, Welfare and Well-Being. [Whole issue]. *Scandinavica. International Journal of Scandinavian Studies* 50 (1). Most articles are open access, including editors' introduction: <http://www.scandinavica.net/2011-1.php>. *Scandinavica* is peer reviewed and is the leading UK journal of Scandinavian literature and culture.

[d] Stougaard-Nielsen, Jakob (2013). 'Skandinaviske krimier og velværelsen'. *Aktuel forskning*. Institut for Litteratur, Kultur og Medier, Syddansk Universitet, 2013. Available open access: http://www.sdu.dk/Om_SDU/Institutter_centre/lkv/Videnskabelige+tidsskrifter/AktuelForskning/2013AF, and on request. Peer-reviewed journal.

[e] Thomson, C. Claire (2011). "The Sun will Shine on the Homes of the Future": Danish Welfare Architecture on a Scale of 1:1'. In *Urban Constellations*, ed. Matthew Gandy. Berlin: Jovis, pp. 199–202. Available on request. Favourably reviewed in leading urban studies journal: 'Accessible to specialist and non-specialist readerships, its "essence" lies less in pedagogy and more in a certain, exploratory energy. Harnessing the insecurity and poetry of the essay, it is willfully multifarious; a spectrum of 'constantly changing contexts' that ignites rather than answers the urban question.' (*City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*)

[f] Thomson, C. Claire (2013). 'Lamps, light and enlightenment: PH's *Denmark* and Ole Roos' *PH-Light*'. *Kosmorama* 249. Submitted to REF 2 and available open access: <http://www.kosmorama.org/ServiceMenu/05-English/Articles/Lamps-Light-and-Enlightenment.aspx>. Commissioned and peer-reviewed article for a major Danish film journal.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The Nordic Noir Crime Fiction Book Club (NNBC) exists as an online community and also hosts regular events in London. It was founded to enhance viewers' experience of Nordic crime literature and television by providing relevant background information and facilitating discussion about Scandinavian culture and society, through engagement with the research described in section 2. Since its launch in February 2011 to coincide with the arrival of the Danish television series *The Killing* in the UK, and up to 31 July 2013, there were a dozen NNBC events, averaging 40–50 attendees, in settings including cafes, community centres, arts venues, museums, and the Danish Embassy [1]. From this initial aim of deepening the enjoyment of a defined online and face-to-face community of fans by enhancing contextual understanding, NNBC has expanded its reach to provide similar benefits to a wider audience, through the national and international press, and through invited participation in public events.

The *reach* of the NNBC is demonstrated by its **high profile online and on social media**: the accompanying Wordpress blog, featuring commentary and event summaries, had 51,841 visits from individuals in 105 countries between January 2011 and July 2013 [2]. Podcasts of selected events on UCL iTunesU were downloaded or streamed 392 times in the first month they were launched (September 2011) and have sustained popularity, with 639 downloads/streams between January and July 2013. The NNBC Facebook page attracted over 500 'likes' by July 2013, while NNBC and Department of Scandinavian Studies (which retweets NNBC material and vice versa) had a combined reach of over 1,300 Twitter followers [3].

Within this larger pool of beneficiaries was the core group consisting of some 300 active London-based fans of Nordic crime fiction and television, who attended events and joined our mailing list, and participated in discussion and knowledge exchange via our social media platforms. Member

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profiles included various professions (from psychotherapist to civil servant, to radio researcher), with ages ranging from teens to 70s. Around half of participants at each event were repeat attendees, demonstrating that this is a **sustainable and growing community**. To attract an enthusiastic audience, most events for NNBC members featured a visiting Nordic author or director. The guest speaker's contribution was complemented with lively and accessible presentations by UCL researchers, and hosted by a UCL researcher whose expertise matched the thematic or national focus, and thus stimulated discussion between audience and speakers.

For example: The Bridge Briefing (2.5.2012) attracted a paying audience of 45, and responded to UK interest in the Danish-Swedish crime co-production *Broen* (The Bridge). This series centres on the relationship between Danish and Swedish detectives, and crucial to the UK viewers' enjoyment of the series are many implicit regionally-specific tensions and practices, spanning language, law, culture and political norms (the fictional killer's motive is to spark debate on social and legal injustices). The event was planned by crowd-sourcing via Twitter what kinds of background information UK viewers needed. Four 20-minute presentations by invited speakers covered Danish-Swedish cross-linguistic communication (a key narrative device in the series); an overview of the portrayal of the region in crime fiction; and the political and architectural context of the Øresund Bridge and regional development. The event was hosted by Thomson, who drew on her published and ongoing work on the cultural, literary, filmic and social history of the region [e, f] to identify emerging themes, plant relevant questions, and facilitate audience discussion [1].

Feedback received during and after such events was uniformly positive. Qualitative evidence of impact was gathered using feedback forms, and the Wordpress blog. Comments include: 'Another excellent event [...] thanks to Jakob, I understand the fine distinctions between the (seemingly) hundreds of Danish political parties (where Right is Left and Left is Right)' (Barry Forshaw, blog, 19.2.12, after Borgen Briefing event); 'I hadn't appreciated the closeness of the community – people knowing each other quite so much. The need for the sidekick in literature was already documented but to explain so much of Icelandic history/geography not previously appreciated' (anonymous feedback form, June 2011, after NNBC meeting with Icelandic author Yrsa Sigurdardottir) [1].

NNBC attendees thus benefited from an **improved understanding of the social, political, historical and linguistic issues** pertinent to the Nordic crime fiction and television they enjoyed. They benefited from provision of background information which assisted in satisfying interpretations of plot, setting and characterisation, and were involved in collective reflection, with likeminded attendees, authors and UCL researchers on issues related to reading, viewing, writing, translating and programming. The meetings stimulated subtle and detailed public debate on issues central to crime fiction – criminality, ethics, social change, ethnic and gender identities – which play out in distinctive but comparable ways in Scandinavia and Britain.

Beyond our London events and our blog, our research and the mediation model developed through NNBC resulted in **numerous invitations to participate in public events and media stories** in Britain and abroad, demonstrating the significance of our research-led contribution through NNBC to this popular subject. For example, in March 2012 Stougaard-Nielsen was invited to discuss Scandinavian crime fiction's popularity in Britain at Horsens Bogmesse, a major Danish book festival held in a former prison [4], based on his research for [d]. In March 2012 he appeared in the BBC4 documentary *Time Shift: Nordic Noir* (2011), on BBC5 Live Saturday Edition [5] – the RAJAR listener figures for the station in March 2012 were 6 million and the programme has had 58,659 views on YouTube. His UCL Lunch Hour Lecture for the public on the relationship between the welfare state and crime fiction (drawing on [c]) has had 662 views on UCL Youtube and the resulting SoundCloud podcast was listened to 2,700 times during the impact period. He also contributed material on crime fiction to two Brain Train podcasts on the environment and sociopathy, which together have had 2,922 listeners [5]. Stougaard-Nielsen's research has also enhanced the commercial offerings of Arrow Films, the main distributor of Scandinavian drama in the UK. Arrow Films commissioned a 1000-word commentary from him in March 2012 [text removed for publication] [10].

The reach of this work extends across Europe: Stougaard-Nielsen has been interviewed in the Danish, Italian, Finnish, Slovenian, Greek and UK press. A powerful example of synergy between media and NNBC came about in Stougaard-Nielsen's interviews with Slovenia's largest daily

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newspaper *Delo* and in the Italian online newspaper *Affaritaliani.it* in July 2011, assessing the power of crime fiction to diagnose and mediate racism and extremism after the terrorist attacks in Norway. These in turn proved to be of interest to NNBC members: when extracts were translated into English and posted on the NNBC blog, they were viewed 546 times [5]. Meanwhile Thomson was invited to chair a Nordic Noir panel at the London media industry event ProMax 2012 as a result of NNBC events, and was interviewed by the Danish broadsheet *Politiken* (daily print run of 94,169, Dansk Oplagskontrol; 800,000 monthly web visitors, wikipedia) about the popularity of Danish culture in the UK (20.8.2012) [6]. Hilson was invited by the Nordic Horizons parliamentary interest group to speak on 27.10.2011 at a sold-out (100-capacity) seminar at the Scottish Parliament on the Nordic welfare model in the context of growing UK (especially Scottish) interest in the culture and society of the region [7]. Such discussions require us to explain to a Scandinavian audience the popularity of Nordic popular culture in the UK (drawing on research such as [b] in section 3), or to explain aspects of Nordic culture to a UK or international audience (drawing on research such as [a], [c–f] listed in section 3).

A significant instance of **audience expansion** was our video for *The Guardian Online*, conceived by Thomson and Vicky Frost (Television and Radio Editor at *The Guardian*), and presented by Jesper Hansen, Teaching Fellow in Danish. Planned in conjunction with the UK launch of *The Killing III* in November 2012, the video enhanced the viewing experience of readers by providing a language-focused cultural briefing. The video attracted [text removed for publication] 260 comments from readers, including: ‘just wanted to say that I wish all foreign language learning materials were as interesting and fun as this mini-lesson’ (GavinRoberts, 16.11.12). [8]. This video was followed by a Q&A feature hosted by *The Guardian’s* Radio & TV blog (14.12.2012), which featured Hilson, Stougaard-Nielsen and Hansen answering readers’ queries about the Danish culture underlying *The Killing* [9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[1] Evaluation and feedback forms for Nordic Noir crime Fiction Book Club events, available on request.

[2] Statistics on visitor numbers and provenance, as well as podcasts, and public comments from the Nordic Noir Crime Fiction Wordpress blog. <http://scancrime.wordpress.com>. Google Analytics report of website usage available on request.

[3] Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/nordicnoir>; Twitter <http://twitter.com/nordicnoir>.

[4] Horsens Bogmesse Book Festival <http://krimimessen.dk/krimigenren-til-debat.html>.

[5] Examples of media engagement: Time Shift: Nordic Noir (3.3.2012). See IMDB page: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1821270/>. YouTube: <http://youtu.be/RiwObVhyoc8>; RAJAR figures http://www.rajar.co.uk/listening/quarterly_listening.php (RAJAR all regions, 3 months ending March 2012); UCL Lunch Hour Lecture: <https://soundcloud.com/uclsound/scandinavian-crime-fiction-07mar2013>; Brain Train podcast: Episodes 4 and 5 on <https://soundcloud.com/brain-train-podcast>.

Article featuring interview with Stougaard-Nielsen in Italian media: http://www.affaritaliani.it/politica/norvegia_anno_zero290711.html.

[6] Thomson media engagement. Discussion with members of NNBC on Nordic Noir blog in response to request for comment from Danish journalist: <http://scancrime.wordpress.com/2012/08/20/help-please-nordic-culture-and-the-british-zeitgeist/>.

[7] Hilson invitation to Nordic Horizons: Facebook announcement and notice that it was sold out <https://www.facebook.com/events/170515256364369/>.

[8] [text removed for publication]

[9] *Guardian* blog on Danish language and culture. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2012/dec/14/farewell-killing-guide-to-denmark>.

[10] [text removed for publication]