

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**  
**THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**



**Bachelor thesis**

**Male role in parental leave in the Nordic  
Countries**

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## **Statement:**

I declare that I have worked on this thesis myself, without any help. All the resources and literature are properly cited. This work has not been used to attain any different or similar degree.

In Prague 29.5.2020

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# 1 Important terms

- Maternity leave – Time reserved for mothers to be at home with a child, or time mothers take off work in the last months before childbirth. “According to Peter Moss (2009), maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave are the most common types of leave. Maternity leave is reserved for mothers [...]. The motivation for maternity leave is usually related to health, with the aim of protecting the health of the mother and the newborn child.” (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.31).
- Paternity leave – “According to Peter Moss (2009), maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave are the most common types of leave. Maternity leave is reserved for mothers and paternity leave for fathers, [...]. Paternity leave is often taken upon the birth of a child, with the aim of enabling parents, the newborn and possible siblings to spend time together.” (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.31).
- Parental leave – Time off work that can be used by both parents. “It can be individual, non-transferable right, with certain time periods allotted to each parent, or it can be a family-based right to leave which parents can decide to share in the manner most suitable to them.” (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.31).
- Parental allowance – “Nordic parents receive economic compensation for lost income while on parental leave. This compensation may be income related or flat rate. The compensation is crucial for family economy, but it also symbolizes the value society places on care work. A low compensation is considered less encouraging for fathers’ leave use, because, as a result of segregation and discrimination in working life, men frequently earn higher incomes than women” (Haataja & Nyberg, 2006 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.43).
- Father’s/mother’s quota – “A father’s/mother’s quota means that part of the leave is reserved exclusively for the father or mother; it is nontransferable, i.e. it cannot be used by the other parent (Moss 2009).” (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.31).
- The Nordic family model – “The Nordic model has been characterized by the high rate of labor participation of both men and women, efforts to achieve equality between women and men, and by society’s concerted investments into the care and education of children. The Nordic countries have tried to find a balance between the demands of working life, gender equality and the best interests of children.” (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.13).

- Cash-for-care system – additional benefit received after parental leave if your children do not attend any state kindergarten. “Besides the childcare programs – and generally less noted in the international welfare literature – parents in the Scandinavian countries have the option of a cash-for-care benefit after parental leave. In Denmark the benefit can be taken up when the child is between 6 months and 3 years old, in Norway from the age of 1–3 and in Sweden when the child is 250 days to 3 years. Norway introduced this option in 1998, Denmark in 2002 and Sweden in 2008, but each with different intentions.” “[...] the main purpose was to create equality between parents who make use of state-subsidized childcare and those who care for their child at home, and thus received no financial support.” (Rostgaard, 2014, p.10-11).
- Dual carer-dual earner model – “In the international welfare literature, the Scandinavian welfare model is often praised for having achieved the so-called dual earner-dual carer model, in providing for a gender model where men and women to a (more) equal degree share paid and unpaid work (e.g. Gornick & Meyers, 2009). This includes men and women’s participation in the labour market – the paid work component – as well as their equal sharing of care work in the family – the unpaid work component.” (Rostgaard, 2014, p.4).

## **2 Male role in parental leave in the Nordic countries – Nordic model of family care**

Nordic region is recognized worldwide for their approach towards gender balanced society. Key role in achieving gender balanced society has male participation in the leave system and female participation in the labor market. In other words, the redistribution of paid and unpaid work between the parents. For the past few years the role of male caregiver has been emphasized within the Nordic countries, or even in the rest of the world. In my thesis I would like to explain key principles and contradictions concerning male role in parental leave in the Nordic countries.

### **2.1 How I found out about this topic and the evolution of my opinion on this topic:**

The topic of parental leave is very close to me and is going to concern me sooner or later (as a future mother). I was lucky enough to travel to Norway with Erasmus+ program for ten months, which gave me rare opportunity to not just observe, but also study how parental leave is implemented within Norway and other Nordic countries. While studying in Norway one of my subjects was *Gender Equality in the Nordic countries*, which focused on different spheres of life from the view of gender equality. One of the spheres was family and its functioning. This was where I first discovered that parental leave can be shared by fathers. Not only it is possible, but also very common among the Nordic countries. This concept about sharing your parental leave with the father of your child excited me for several reasons - as a future mother, university student, future ambitious employee... Simply put I realized it is not necessary for me to spend three years on maternity and parental leave risking I would lose any career ambitions I might have tried to pursue otherwise. Maybe not even being able to participate properly in the labor market again. As I delved deeper into the issue, my knowledge about the parental leave and differences in use of the leave within various countries started to evolve and change, and with it my attitudes towards parental leave use. Even though I have devoted many hours studying this topic I still cannot say, I have a clear idea about parental leave and how it should or should not be used. Parental leave, its division, and other connected issues are not simple and easily decided problems. They concern complex and complicated spheres of life which are usually private and differ country from country, family from family, individual from individual. Under no circumstances am I trying to give exhaustive and complete solution to this complex issue. I am simply trying to point out some critical and important points in this topic, as well as

highlighting some of the various attitudes towards parental leave. Comparing different countries with different policies and historical development can be helpful in finding new ways to focus at the same problem, thus creating new solutions.

## **2.2 What I plan to achieve with my research:**

I would like to present more forms of use of parental leave to the public. I feel as though this topic is not discussed enough within the Czech context. I would like to change that with my research and add up to this field. Moreover, I would like to present the Nordic model of childcare and parental leave policies. I feel as though Scandinavia is a great example of achieving equal based system of leave, balancing professional and personal life, redistributing the rights and obligations more equally. Hopefully, the Nordic model of family care will serve as a goal we could try to achieve as well. While living in Norway I could personally witness many of the social constructions discussed below, which was certainly a great experience and gave me lot to think about. Observing family life in Norway was a rewarding experience I am very grateful for.

My research goal is to compare the conclusions from theoretical background outlined below with the findings from officially published document. Look into convergence and divergence between the two and make conclusions about the Nordic region and their key values for parental leave. See what role men take on within this region. Using qualitative content analysis of written document published by *Nordic Information on Gender* in 2018 I should be able to reach conclusions about current situation in Nordic region (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018). I feel it is vital to mention I am not trying to give exhaustive explanation of researched issue nor am I claiming my conclusions from the research are absolute. I am merely trying to open the discussion about this topic and maybe encourage others to enquire in this field further.



### **3 Theoretical background**

I would like to introduce some general theoretical concepts understood within the field of parental leave, and within Nordic context of parental leave. I have summarized the important terms and definitions above for better orientation in the theory. In this part I am trying to outline what principles are used in the field of family policies, Nordic family policies, gender component of fatherhood and motherhood, and finally, how the parental leave works in the Nordic countries, what main principles and tools they are using. Later in my thesis, I will continue with empirical section, where the main empirical processes will be explained, as well as my own research.

#### **3.1 Family policy in general**

Family policy should support families and their normal functioning. It is a cross-section field, which affects public and private sphere of life. Family policies should help families and should not interfere too much with their private life. They should also respect family's ability to make decisions, while being able to intervene when necessary. Each country has a different set of family policies with regard to cultural, historical development. Family policy making should also reflect current family needs and requests.

Family policies usually reflect time for children and their parents. They specify the conditions, in which parents can take up leave and also what support during they can receive during this period. As defined by Kamerman and Kahn the family policy is - "In general, family policy may include services, cash and fiscal benefits. A broad definition may include family policy directly aimed at families with children, as well as services such as childcare, leave schemes, and income benefits such as family allowances. It would also address health care, labor market and social assistance policies, etc. that affect family life and children's opportunities later in life. It could also include support for family members outside the nuclear family, such as a carers' allowance to care for an older relative" (Kamerman & Kahn, 1997 in Rostgaard, 2014, p.3). There are three most common types of leave – parental, maternity, and paternity leave. Each type of leave has a specific conditions and rules which need to be met in order for us to be able to use the leave period. For example, in Czech Republic you can use leave until child is three years old. Mothers are allowed to 28 weeks of maternity leave if they have one child and up to 37 weeks of leave if they have two or more children (Burdová,2008, p.35). Fathers can use parental leave from the moment their child is born. Fathers can use their parental leave

while the mother is on maternity leave. In this case parental allowance is only paid to one of the parents in Czech Republic (Zákon č. 262/2006 Sb., zákoník práce).

In the era of post-modernism families become more entwined with state, but also more dependent on one another. This situation creates the necessity of family policy in general. To help navigate our lives better and facilitate the lives of families as much as possible (Možný, 2011, p.23). In post-modern era state has taken up some of the responsibilities traditionally done by families such as education, healthcare, protection etc.

### **3.2 Family policy system within Nordic countries**

Scandinavia has many tools for including fathers into family life. One of those tools is parental leave for fathers and paternity leave. Parental leave for fathers is my main focus in this thesis. The Nordic countries try to operate with parental leave in general. The goal is for fathers to be able to participate in family life without any severe disadvantages for mothers. In context of parental leave flexibility, parental allowance, length of leave and many more issues are discussed (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.13).

The Nordic region is well known for their efforts in the field of family policies. Those policies are meant to balance family life and career ambitions of each individual. Family policies should also help equalize the amount of paid and unpaid work each parent is participating on. Most of all, family policies are made to help children have fulfilled life. They should reflect their interests (Rostgaard, 2014, p.3). Sweden followed by other Nordic countries was the first one in the world to introduce father's quota. The idea behind this entitlement is to encourage fathers in taking up leave time by giving them non-transferrable right to use part of the parental leave. This is just one of many examples why is Scandinavia so far ahead in family policy system. They have been developing and implementing gender equal family policies longer than most countries in the world. Family policies here integrate services as well as cash benefits. These policies are based on equal universal principle (Anttonen et al, 2012 in Rostgaard, 2014, p.3). Even though there are considerable differences within family policy field in each of the Nordic countries, they share similar features as opposed to the rest of the world and are often used as an example for gender equal distribution of rights and responsibilities. The Nordic countries have devoted time and expertise to develop structures of family policies which are considerable of families and children and their current needs. If we look at leave efforts in general the goal is three-fold according to Rostgaard: "to enable parents to reconcile work and family, to ensure a more gender equal sharing of paid and unpaid work and to provide solutions in the best interest of the child. Simultaneous achievement of all three goals has not always been possible,

however.” (Rostgaard, 2014, p. 13). One of the greatest challenges remaining within family policy field is to include immigrant families, as well as various types of families, such as single-parent families or same-sex couples etc. With single mother families and immigrant families there is a greater threat of poverty. Also, immigrant families often do not reach the same set of rights as Nordic region residents. This results in reluctance of immigrant fathers to take up parental or paternity leave, usually they are the main source of family welfare. Until we can establish some conditions, which would favor various types of families across the Nordic region (or anywhere else in the world) we cannot legitimately talk about equal rights and gender equal distribution of rights, obligations and benefits (Björnberg, 2016, p.511).

### **3.3 Gender system and its connection to motherhood and fatherhood**

Gender system is a term for a system which establishes social and cultural roles and a set of rules for each role with which the society is in accordance to (Renzetti, Curran, 2003, p.20). We may also call it sex/gender system. Gender system contains institutionalized patterns of gender differentiation. These patterns can differ in various societies. All the patterns have these three components in common: 1) social construction of gender categories on the base of biological gender 2) distribution of work based on gender 3) society’s regulation of sexuality within which some forms of expressing sexuality are rewarded and others penalized (Renzetti, Curran,2003, p.21). The above-mentioned patterns are slowly inserted into our way of thinking, ever since we are born. This may happen on a conscious, subconscious or even unconscious level. We learn more about these patterns from Sandra Bem when she postulates her theory about the lenses of gender. Theory about the lenses of gender is a theory about creating gender, which claims that while we create gender we are soon stopped by the lenses of gender. According to Sandra Bem there are three lenses of gender 1) gender polarization 2) androcentrism 3) biological essentialism (Renzetti, Curran,2003, p.103). These lenses change our perception of the world. The lenses of gender together with sex/gender system assemble our cultural heritage. They reinforce and support our behavior within our cultural context. Our cultural heritage then creates our view of the world. How we perceive motherhood/fatherhood ever since early childhood creates our own idea about motherhood/fatherhood. We observe and learn how “the right mother/right father” should be like. According to the patterns of behavior we experience ourselves we behave later in life as a mother or a father. We can find gender system in almost every sphere of life. One of the spheres we encounter gender system is also labor market. The gender pay gap is very current topic, as well as the willingness of employer to let employees on parental leave. Another chapter of this tale is the return of mothers or fathers

to the labor market after parental leave, specially, if the leave is taken over longer period of time. All these topics are closely entwined with the ability of a parent to use (or not to use) his or her parental leave. Their usage of parental leave can partially determine how their relationship with their children evolves. Furthermore, their usage of parental leave may reflect how they perceive motherhood, fatherhood. Until the labor market is making it beneficial for people who do not use parental leave, and until the current circumstances stay the same, we cannot expect change in attitudes toward parental leave from parents anywhere (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.16-20).

### **3.4 Parental leave in the Nordic countries**

In all the Nordic countries it is very common that parents split their parental leave. Comparing to Czechia where parental leave is among the longest ones, it can be shorter, differently distributed, or guided by a different set of rules (policies). In all the Nordic countries parents are taken as equals. Child in the Nordic countries is also taken as an individual that is to a certain extend self-reliable and autonomous. Children are entitled to spent equal time with his or her mother and father. In Nordic countries fathers take up more parental leave than anywhere else in the world.

#### **Norway**

Norway has a separate type of leave for mothers and fathers. There is some freedom in choosing how to divide part of the leave, but Norway reserves some of the leave for either parent (including non-biological parents). Norway (as well as Finland) uses so called “parental-choice oriented policy model” (Wall, 2007 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.32). Norway is considered most advanced in effective parental leave (length of leave multiplied by level of compensation) according to a 2008 report conducted by UNICEF (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.33). Norway introduced at first paternity leave and later on also parental leave for fathers. Father’s quota was introduced in the middle of 1990’s in Norway. Father’s quota is considered one of the most explicit gender equality measure. The period that individual parent is able to take is 47 weeks, which is a little less than a year. Leave periods compensated at a low, flat rate, or with no compensation with child at home is longest in Norway (and Finland). You can take leave periods up until the child turns three years. Norway has no period specifically reserved for mothers as a “maternity leave”. There is a leave period that pregnant women and/or mothers who have just had a child can take. This period is three weeks before and six weeks after childbirth. The length of paternity leave is two weeks in

Norway. Quotas help implement the gender-neutral principle of leave which is used in Norway as well as other Nordic countries. There are quotas for mothers and fathers. Father's quota was first introduced in Norway in 1993. Later the quota month was implemented and extended to ten weeks. The right to compensation during leave is connected to employment. Specifically, parents who were active in the labor market and earning pension/generating income for at least six months out of last ten months before the leave period are entitled to parental allowance. Fathers in Norway are entitled to leave even if the mother of a child was unemployed prior to childbirth, but their leave is still connected to the mother of a child. In the case you are a non-biological parent in Norway you have almost the same rights and responsibilities as a biological parent. The only difference is mothers do not get the leave prior childbirth and fathers can use his leave during the first six weeks of parental leave. Same-sex couples are entitled to parental leave and allowance as well. Even in the case that they are not child's biological or adoptive parents. You can have 27 weeks of leave at full compensation or 37 weeks at a reduced compensation, they are to be used after the first six weeks within three years of childbirth, the parent postponing his leave must be working full time. You can also use parental leave part time in Norway. The system of part time leave is called "graduate leave". Graduate leave combines many options of part time leave and part time employment. Norway pays the highest parental allowances (% of previous income), but paternity leave is not paid, and father's must negotiate his compensation during this time with his employer. The % of previous income parents in Norway receive is 80-100%. Norway as well as all the other Nordic countries have established parental allowance ceiling. The ceiling cannot be higher than six times the national minimum allowance. If you were unemployed six out of ten months prior childbirth you receive one-time payment after childbirth. Patterns of use among mothers and fathers shows that 82% of mothers and 85% of entitled fathers use parental leave (Lappegård, 2008 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.48). Father's right to leave is tied to mother's right in Norway. The 85% of entitled fathers corresponds to 60% of all fathers (Duvander, Lappegård, Andersson, 2009 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.48). Another obstacle in taking up parental leave can be that parents can only use leave right after childbirth. Individuals outside the labor market are not able to take parental leave which is another example of complication in usage of parental leave. Studies also suggest that mothers are staying at home at the same time as fathers use their parental leave. If a couple in Norway decides to use longer leave at a lower compensation level it mostly affects maternity leave length. Parents who work in low-status and high-status professions have chosen shorter leave for various reasons. While parents in low-status professions choose shorter leave for economic reasons, parents in high-status

professions choose shorter leave because they want to return to work as soon as possible. Mothers who were employed prior to childbirth return to work sooner as well. Women's income plays a big role in the use of parental allowance. Women with higher incomes use less days of parental allowance before the child's third year than any other women. This may not mean that they spend less time with children, fathers can play a role in this scenario. Fathers of these same children can spend longer on parental leave and the couple may afford to stay at home longer with lower compensation level. Studies also suggest that mothers who have low-income jobs stay at home for a longer period, whereas fathers with low-income jobs use shorter periods of leave (Lappegård, 2008 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.55). Another study finds that the more equal the wages of both parents are, the more likely are fathers to use parental leave (Lappegård, 2008, Brandth&Kvande, 2003, Fougner, 2009 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.55). When we look at education as a factor affecting use of parental leave, we can see that less-educated fathers are less likely to use parental leave (Brandth&Kvande, 2002 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.56). Men in executive position in Norway use less of parental leave than other men. Self-employed men stand out as they usually take no parental leave at all, and if they decide to use the leave they tend to go for a longer period (Grambo & Överli 2008, Mesterton 2008 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.57). From the demographics point of view, parents are more likely to have longer leave periods with their first child than with other children. Married fathers in Norway use more leave which suggest that established couples create a better environment for supporting fathers in leave use. Age as a factor shows us that fathers between 29 and 35 use up the longest leave periods (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.57-58).

## **Sweden**

Looking at the leave system in Sweden the leading principle in leave policy is gender neutrality. Sweden also reserves some of the leave for either parent (including non-biological parents). Sweden (as well as Denmark and Iceland) uses so called "one-year leave gender equality-oriented policy model" (Wall, 2007 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.32). Sweden takes eighth place in effective parental leave (length of leave multiplied by level of compensation) (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.33). In 1974 Sweden was the first country in the world to introduce parental leave for both parents. Sweden (same as Norway) also introduced father's quota in the middle of 1990's, which is considered to be one of the most explicit gender equality measure. Sweden offers the longest period individual parent is able to take off work. This period consists of joint-parental leave, together with specific mother

or father quota. All together the period is 60 weeks which is a little bit over one year. In Sweden parents can stay at home with child on low, flat rate, or with no compensation. In terms of length Sweden closely follows Norway and Finland which have the longest periods in this comparison. Sweden does not have maternity leave period reserved for mothers. Sweden, same as Norway, has a period of leave for pregnant women and for women that have just had a baby. The leave period are two obligatory weeks within seven weeks before and seven weeks following childbirth. Pregnant women who work in high-risk positions can have extra fifty days of leave. Paternity leave in Sweden is for two weeks and those two weeks must be taken within the first two months of child's life. The shared part of leave - parental leave - is one year in Sweden. The gender-neutral principle which is used as a main principle in leave system in Sweden brought quotas for fathers, but more importantly for mothers as well. Father's quota was introduced in 1995 in Sweden. The quota consists of two months leave period. The right to take a leave is residency-based in Sweden for fathers. Also, if you do not have custody of your child, you are unable to take the leave. If you want to have income related compensation during your leave period, you must have worked for at least 240. Paternity leave in Sweden is employment based, there is a two-week paternity leave for all fathers who are working. In terms of adoptive parents and parental leave, adoptive parents do not have the right to parental allowance if the child they are adopting is over the age of ten years. Same sex couples can use parental and paternity leave if they are partners with the child's biological mother/father. Parents in Sweden have quite flexible options in how to take up their parental leave. It is possible to take the leave for at least three periods annually for one parent. This can be done until the child is eight years old or finishes his or her first year of school. The use of parental leave in Sweden can be also on part-time base. Sweden is considered to have the most flexible system of parental leave. Parents can divide their leave into many different alternative leaves, they can also add them up little by little, the smallest increment being hour daily. Parental allowance in Sweden is same for maternity, paternity and parental leave and also same if you are using father's quota. For 390 days parents get 80% of their previous income, after this period they can go on a lower, flat rate for another 90 days. Sweden has put a minimal and maximal amount that parents can receive as a parental allowance. The minimum is 604€ per month and maximum 3318€ per month<sup>1</sup>(Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.45). One unique concept in Sweden is gender equality bonus. It was introduced in 2008. Gender equality bonus was brought in as a motivation for parents to divide parental leave more equally. The principle

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<sup>1</sup> According to the exchange rate in 2009

is you get economic compensation as a form of tax break which parents may collect in one year after the leave. There is a correlation between equal division of leave and the amount of the bonus. The more equally shared leave the greater the amount is. The amount is paid to the parent with greater use of days of parental allowance. If the time that parents used parental allowance is equal the payment is done to a younger one of them. When the couple have more than one child the equality bonus grows. The couple is eligible to use this bonus if both parents use their sixty days' quota period. Majority of Swedish mothers use their parental allowance (95%). Among mothers who do not use it are mostly immigrant mothers or self-employed mothers who do not share the same leave options to leave as regular employees. You may use your parental allowance until your child is eight years old. In comparison only 44.7% of fathers of children born in 2007 used parental leave during the child's first year (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.47). With child's growing age more fathers are likely to use the parental leave. When the child is eight up upon 88% of fathers have had used their leave. The use of parental leave by mothers have been declining ever since the beginning of this century. With tools like father's quota Sweden was successful in promoting more leave for fathers. Importantly, we must distinguish between parental leave and parental allowance in Sweden. Parents can extend their period at home by being at home partly and partly using parental allowance. If we were to use absolute numbers for comparison, we might end up getting different data depending on what we base our numbers on. The overall is clear, percentage of Swedish fathers on parental leave used to be 50%. After the introduction of "father's month" it grew to 85% (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.53). Another factor which might influence parental leave usage is the level of compensation during the leave. The level of compensation has declined and risen in the past, with those changes in compensation levels came also changes in leave use. In Sweden, as well as in almost all the Nordic countries, the compensation ceiling has been given. The compensation ceiling has a large impact on number of parental allowance days which fathers use. Different studies have shown that father who chose not to use their leave days are usually outside the labor market, or with poor connection to it. In the study from Sundström and Duvander from 2002 we can see that fathers with higher income took longer parental leave in the middle of the 1990's. Other research from Sweden has observed that mothers who have low incomes tend to take longer leaves, while fathers who have low incomes use shorter leaves (Duvander, 2006 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.55). Demography plays a role as a factor influencing leave usage. In Sweden both mothers and fathers tend to take longer leaves with their firstborn child. Marriage is another important demographic factor. Married fathers use more leave days than any other group of



fathers. Next demographic factor is age. Studies show that older mothers and younger fathers use parental leave for longer periods (Duvander, 2006 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.57). Immigrant families usually do not share the same rights and are in worse jobs, which makes it harder for them to use parental leave in a way that would suit them. Majority of immigrant fathers do not take parental allowance days. Those who do use more of parental allowance than Swedish-born fathers (Duvander and Eklund, 2006 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.58). Even though Sweden is aiming at becoming gender equal country in all possible ways, studies suggest that mother's preferences in how to distribute parental leave among the couple are the ones that decide in the end. In conclusion, Sweden has made it possible for mothers as well as fathers to go on parental leave for the longest period. This may be why fathers in Sweden use more leave than fathers in Norway, Finland or Denmark. Also, Swedish fathers may use parental leave even if they do not have relationship with the mother of the child.

## **Denmark**

Denmark, same as Norway, has a separate type of leave for mothers and fathers. Denmark falls into the category of "one-year leave gender equality-oriented policy model" (Wall, 2007 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.32). In the world's comparison of so called "effective parental leave" (length of leave multiplied by level of compensation) Denmark is on the seventh place. Denmark also introduced father's quota as other Nordic countries did, but the quota was taken back after few years (in 2002). Instead of the quota Denmark implemented longer leaves. The government in Denmark considered the quota to be too intrusive in the private life of families. Later father's quota was re-introduced, but only in the industrial section. Denmark (and Finland) has the longest leave period reserved for mothers. In Denmark it is four and a half months of leave before and after childbirth. The period that one parent can use is fifty (full compensation) or fifty-eight weeks (reduced compensation). The period for maternity leave in Denmark is four months, out of which one month should be used prior childbirth. Paternity leave in Denmark is for two weeks. Paternity leave must be taken within the first two weeks after childbirth. As a father in Denmark you must have had established fatherhood and live with your child during your leave period to be able to use your leave period. As well as in Norway and Iceland, Denmark also has compensation during leave tied to employment. Danish mothers can get compensation as long as they have worked minimum of 120 hours in the thirteen weeks prior her leave, if she is entrepreneur, she must have worked six out of the last twelve months. Unemployed women and students also get some kind of compensation

depending on specific situations. As far as non-biological parents are concerned, the only thing that vary is they are able to take two weeks of leave together. Same sex couples can also take leave. Denmark has the longest leave period of all the Nordic countries when we are looking at it as a whole. Meaning Danish parents can take the leave until the child turns nine. Denmark has 32 weeks at full compensation and can extend those to 40 weeks at reduced compensation level. Parents can also decide to postpone eight to thirteen weeks of leave for later, up until the child is nine (sometimes even later, depends on agreements with employer). Denmark is one of the two Nordic countries which pays the highest income-based parental allowances. Compensation on any kind of leave in Denmark is 90% of previous income. Young people under the age of 25 get the highest minimum allowance of all the Nordic countries. This allowance is called *Ungesats* or youth allowance. Looking at patterns of leave use among mothers we discover that 94% of mothers use parental leave and even more of them uses maternity leave. The number of fathers who use parental leave (which includes the use of paternity leave) is 68% in 2003. This number increased to 79% by 2008. In terms of paternity and parental leave more fathers have used paternity leave – precisely 89% of all fathers using leave. The data for fathers using parental leave suggest that 24% of all fathers using leave reported going on parental leave (Olsen, 2007 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.48). Denmark is also one of the countries where the use of leave by mothers is still greater and has not declined so much since introducing leave for fathers. Parents can use their leave until the child is of school age and they usually save some part of the leave for later (Olsen, 2007 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.50). Among women in Denmark there is a tendency of losing human capital value during their time on parental leave which ultimately means a loss of income. This tendency is usually short-term (Datta Gupta & Smith, 2002 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.53). When leave time reserved only for fathers was first introduced in Denmark, the portion of fathers using the leave time increased from 7% to 24% within four years (Borchorst, 2006 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.53). One of the factors affecting parental leave and its use among fathers is education. Studies suggest that more educated fathers use more of parental leave and are more likely to use in general (Olsen, 2007 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.56). Similar findings and correlations can be seen with occupations. Fathers who are in higher positions such as engineers, advocates etc. use up more of their leave than fathers with lower positions such as office workers (Mesterton, 2008 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.57). The opposite has been true for mothers in Denmark. Self-employed fathers in Denmark create a group that is not in correlation with other groups of fathers. Self-employed fathers tend to not

take parental leave at all, but if they do, they use up longer periods. When looking at demographics as a factor, older fathers usually take the longest leave (Mesterton, 2008 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.57).

## **Finland**

In Finland you have also separate leaves for mothers and fathers, as well as in Norway and Denmark. Finland uses “parental-choice oriented policy model”, which is also used in Norway (Wall, 2007 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.32). In terms of effective parental leave (length of leave multiplied by level of compensation) Finland has a second place, right after Norway within the Nordic countries. Finland gave fathers firstly the right to paternity leave, followed later on by the right to parental leave. In 2003 Finland first introduced father’s quota. Finland (as well as Denmark) has the longest period reserved for mothers -four months of maternity leave. Period of time each parent is able to take is almost a year in Finland - 46 weeks. Looking closer on leave length, from a point of view of the child – how long can a child be at home with a parent, including leave periods at low/flat/no compensation, the leader would be Finland and Norway. You may take leave in Finland with low compensation rate until your child turns three years (Eydal & Rostgaard in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.36). As a mother in Finland, you may transfer your maternity leave to the father of the child, if you are not able to take care for the child for health-related reasons. Paternity leave is three weeks long in Finland. The usage of paternity leave for fathers can be divided up to four increments while the mother of the child is on maternity/parental leave (9-10 months). Parents in Finland can also decide on how to split parental leave. Finland has only parental leave quota for fathers, not mothers. Finland offers bonus leave for fathers, if they use two weeks of shared parental leave. At first the bonus leave was two weeks, which later became extended for two more weeks. In 2011 father’s quota was extended into 12 weeks (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.39). Parents in Finland also have to meet certain criteria to be able to use their parental/paternity/maternity leave. For fathers in Finland the criteria are they have to live in an established partnership with the mother of the child. Adoptive parents in Finland may use parental leave if the child they have adopted is younger than seven years of age. For same-sex couples the rules are following - registered partners can use parental leave if one of them is biological parent of the child. In terms of flexibility Finland is considered the least flexible. Fathers have slightly better conditions regarding flexibility. Paternity leave is for three weeks and this time can be divided up to four segments. They also have father’s month (six weeks) which can be used within thirty weeks that follow mother’s parental leave period.

Greater flexibility in usage of parental leave for fathers in Finland was put in place for one reason – to encourage fathers to use more of their parental leave (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.43). Parents can choose to use parental leave on part-time basis. This type of leave was introduced in Finland in 2003. Part-time basis leave is not very favorable for Finnish parents. The rules for this kind of leave are more restrictive, also you may not extend the period of your leave in total by taking part-time parental leave. Part-time leave is not often used by parents, study shows (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Närvi, 2009 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.43). In every Nordic country there is parental allowance during parental leave. Finland pays the lowest income-based compensations. The level of compensation is somewhere between 70 and 90% of previous income and depends on leave period as well. Parents on parental leave receive 75% of previous income for the first five weeks and 70% for the rest of the leave period (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.44). Finland is the only country of the Nordic countries which has no ceiling for parental allowances. Finland has the second highest minimal allowances - € 551. If the income before leave was lower than € 6513 annually the allowance is paid during the leave time. Less than 1% of Finnish mothers decide not to use maternity or parental leave. Of all Finnish mothers 1.5% work during maternity leave and 4% during parental leave, because you can work while obtaining minimum allowances (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Närvi, 2009 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.46). Of all the fathers in Finland 83% used paternity leave and 17% used parental leave in 2008 (calculation by Lammi-Taskula from registry data in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.48). The percentage of fathers using leave grows slightly every year. Fathers' usage of leave periods has not decreased mothers share of leave periods by a great number in Finland. Even though fathers' usage of leave is growing, study shows that mothers are usually at home using their leave period simultaneously (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Närvi, 2009; Brandth & Overli, 1998 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.51). The introduction of so-called father's month in Finland has increased the number of fathers using their leave in total, but the share of days used by a single father has decreased, because majority of fathers use the father's month days solely. Moreover, researches have brought up that mothers who are less educated use greater proportion of their leave, while more educated women chose to share their leave with the father (Lammi-Taskula, 2007; Lammi-Taskula & Närvi, 2009 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.56). Employers attitudes towards employees using their leave time is becoming even more positive in Finland. Although we have taken a long way in approaching gender equality with regards to leave use, there are still considerable flaws in the system. Studies display the fact that Finnish fathers who consider

themselves as main providers for the family are less likely to use their share of leave (Salmi, Lammi-Taskula & Närvi, 2009 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.58). This demonstrates how much traditional gender system upholds distorted distribution of parental leave use.

## **Iceland**

In Iceland as well as in Sweden the main focus within leave policy is on gender neutrality. As an example of this principle serves the fact that proper term for either mother or father in legislation is gender neutral term such as “parent” (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.32). In Iceland portions of parental leave are saved for either parent. Iceland (as well as Sweden and Denmark) fall into the category of so-called “one-year leave gender equality-oriented policy model” according to Wall (Wall, 2007 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.32). Iceland became recognized worldwide as a leading country in gender equality concerning parental leave. In 2003, Iceland introduced 3+3+3 model of parental leave. The model is built upon a principle, which gives each parent three months quota and the remaining three months can be divided between the parents as they see fit. With this model Iceland became country with longest quota given to fathers. Iceland does not have specific period of time given to mothers as maternity leave. Instead they use the 3+3+3 model. Mothers can however use one month out of their three months quota before the child is born. Both of the parents can use their parental leave at the same time, meaning they can both stay at home and care for the child for up to three months. Before the introduction of the 3+3+3 model fathers in Iceland were allowed to one month of quota, which was later extended to two months. Since 2003 the 3+3+3 model has been effective meaning fathers get three months quota. Women in Iceland had their three months quota since 2001. If you are a parent who does not have custody rights, you may still be able to use part of the leave. The condition here is that the parent with custody allows for it to happen. Compensation is tied to income and employment in Iceland. If parents have worked half a year before their child was born, they can receive compensation from the parents’ fund. For the rest of the parents there is a fixed sum they get. For parents who are also students this amount is slightly higher than for unemployed parents (Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.45). For same sex couples apply the same rules and obligations as for heterosexual couples in Iceland. Icelandic parents can use up to nine months of parental leave, which can be taken in an uninterrupted period or in separate portions. Since 2010 the time within which you may use your leave has been increased to three years (Eydal, 2010 in Ministerrådet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.42). Part-time leave is not legally permitted in Iceland.

However, you can make a deal with your employer if you want to go on a part-time leave (Gíslason, 2004 in Ministerrádet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.43). Looking at level of compensation, Icelandic parents used to receive 80% of their previous income. Since 2010 parents who earn more than the ceiling of parental allowance obtain just 75% of their previous income. The parental allowance ceiling has been introduced across all the Nordic countries. In Iceland as an impact of economic crisis the ceiling has been declining. In 2010 the parental allowance ceiling has dropped down to almost half of its value in 2007 (Eydal, 2010 in Ministerrádet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.44). The minimum allowance is entwined closely with the total of time worked before going on leave. Part time employees obtain lower levels of compensation compared to employees working full time. Also, full time students get higher levels of minimum compensation than employees working full time. According to a research by Jonsdóttir & Adalsteinsson 99% of mothers used their parental leave period, as well as 88% of fathers in the years between 2001 and 2004 (Jonsdóttir & Adalsteinsson, 2008 in Ministerrádet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.47). Before the so called great parental leave reform that underwent in Iceland in 2001 fathers were allowed to use paternity leave. Different conditions applied for employees in public and private sector. Public sector employees could use two weeks of paternity leave at full compensation. Private sector employees had better conditions for the use of paternity leave and study shows that one third of private employees used their paternity leave before the introduction of the 3+3+3 system mentioned above (Haataja, 2009 in Ministerrádet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.48). After the introduction of 3+3+3 system fathers have no paternity leave rights, they have part of the parental leave assigned, which they cannot exchange with anyone. Since the reform of 2001 the percentage of fathers using parental leave has been increasing – 82.4% in 2001, 87.6% in 2006 and 88.5% in 2007 (Eydal & Gíslason, 2008, Information from The Childbirth Leave Fund and personal communication with Gíslason in Ministerrádet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.48). Moreover, public sector employees usually use longer periods of time on leave than private sector employees. This may be connected with many factors such as work environment, or general attitude towards leave usage, specially, for longer periods of time. Despite all the reasons mentioned above, Icelandic parents tend to encounter positive attitude towards parental leave usage (Gíslason, 2008 in Ministerrádet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.56). Closely connected with the parental leave reform is the change in share of use of parental leave. Among all Nordic countries Iceland has witnessed the greatest changes. Mothers' portion of leave cannot exceed two thirds of the leave, whereas in the past mothers used to take up the whole leave period. This does not imply that mothers take up less days of their leave, only that the shared portion of

leave has been redistributed. Increased usage of parental leave by fathers is very important for equally sharing parenting responsibilities as well as participation in the labor market. For Icelandic parents it is usual to share parts of parental leave while participating in the labor market. (Gíslason, 2007 in Ministerrádet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.57). The great parental leave reform also ensured that while fathers are obligated to use greater share of the leave mothers are still able to use their share of leave. This is one of the reasons why we could see the effect of this reform so early on in the change of the use pattern (Eydal & Gíslason, 2008 in Ministerrádet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.52). So far, we have mentioned different types of conditions and obligations for fathers if they decide to use their leave period. However, fathers in Iceland may also choose not to use their leave. In this group of fathers, we can often find men who do not share the same household as the mother of the child, or male students (Eydal, 2008 in Ministerrádet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.57). One of the important factors effecting leave usage is income level of a parent. In Iceland researches suggest that fathers with higher levels of income use their share of parental leave more often (Gíslason, 2007 in Ministerrádet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.55). Furthermore, another study has shown that fathers stay on leave for longer periods if the mother is participating in the labor market (depending on her position in the labor market). One of the main reasons not to take the three months allotted to fathers was loss of income (Jonsdóttir & Adalsteinsson, 2008 in Ministerrádet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.55). When we look at how sharing household effects usage of parental leave by fathers, we can see that Icelandic fathers are more likely to take their part of parental leave if they share a household with the mother of a child (Eydal, 2008 in Ministerrádet, Nordiska. Publikation, 2012, p.57). To conclude, Icelandic fathers use the longest period of parental leave due to the fact that in Iceland men are allowed to have the longest period of parental leave of all the Nordic countries. We have also witnessed other influences on parental leave usage such as level of income, mother's participation in the labor market etc. All in all, Iceland, as well as the rest of Scandinavia has positive attitude towards usage of parental leave by fathers. There are many policies and activism, which try to encourage fathers in sharing more of the obligations connected with childcare.

To conclude the theoretical part, Nordic region is far ahead in balancing paid and unpaid work between men and women. Meaning they try to promote gender balanced distribution of rights and obligations. They have been successful in approaching gender balanced society. We must remember those changes have not happened over night. Nordic region has come a long way and have been evolving in this direction for longer period than any other region in the world. In the article written by Korsvik we can see that Nordic policies have been developing for a

long period. She talks about childcare policy development and the importance of grassroots activism. Korsvik also points out the challenges that lie ahead for Scandinavia. Concerning fathers and male initiative in parental leave promotion. Her conclusion summarizes those concerns: “A feature of the historical development since the 1970s is the increased public attention paid to men as fathers. Few men, however, have organized politically in these matters, and the male ‘voices’ putting forward demands for the daddy quota have belonged to men who have been handpicked by Labor government ministers responsible for gender equality. This article reveals that ‘the world’s best fathers’, which the Minister for Children and Equality pays tribute to as one of the reasons why Norway has become the most gender equal country in the world, are *products* rather than initiators of the gender equality policy. Besides, the prominence of the ‘world’s best fathers’ in the gender equality discourse might be interpreted as a public educational project. If a message is repeated over and over again, it may eventually become reality.” (Korsvik, 2011, p.148). As important to mention is the fact, that even though Nordic countries have conquered many challenges in their way, there are still some left to attain. One more important note towards gender equality and family practice in the Nordic region is shown in the article by Ahlberg et. al. She looks into the difference between policy making and actual family practice. Ahlberg’s conclusion is that while many changes have happened in the Nordic region, in family practice the pre-existing family norms are still present. They have only been adjusted to new circumstances (Ahlberg et. al., 2008, p.94). As we can see the process of approaching gender balanced society is far from over. Instead of looking at the Nordic region as a perfect example of gender balanced society, we might look at this region as one with more experience in this development. Thus, we can learn from their mistakes and follow their successful steps.



## 4 Empirical section

The goal of my research is to continue in the current researches that have been done within the Nordic countries which focus on parental leave for fathers and how changes in usage of parental leave by fathers affects families. I am going to conduct a qualitative content analysis of an official document published by *Nordic Information on Gender* published in 2018 (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018). With content analysis I want to examine how theoretical hypothesis about parental leave is reflected in current events (2018) and everyday life. Whether continuous change towards more equal parental leave is being reflected in the state documents and how. Some of the questions I will be asking in order to find patterns and relevant data are as follows:

What is the difference between the results of the researches conducted in 2018 and the hypothetical background outlined above?

What tendencies towards convergence are there? What kind of trends might be observed there?

What tendencies towards divergence are in between them? How this might be observed?

Do the research findings support the hypothesis formulated above? Why? Why not?

### 4.1 Research strategy, techniques of data collection

For my research strategy I have decided to use qualitative content analysis, which best suits my intentions in this research. I have chosen qualitative approach because of the nature of my own research. I am convinced that qualitative approach will enable me to examine the selected topic more deeply. My aim is to compare the results of researches within the Nordic countries with current events and everyday life. How does theory and everyday life vary? I am going to work with the hypothetical background formulated above and compare it with officially published state document. Before we can examine and compare these two, we need to establish some basic terms and processes used within qualitative research. This will help us understand each step of our empirical inquiry.

Qualitative analysis is often underestimated. More frequently, we can see researches using quantitative analysis as a research technique. Qualitative research offers us great amount of information about very small number of individuals. We cannot generalize our conclusions to the whole population with qualitative research. In other words, qualitative research has low reliability, but potentially high validity. Whereas with quantitative research it goes the other way around. Quantitative research can usually be used as a generalization to the whole

population (high reliability), but cannot describe relations between variables, or why exactly are they happening to great extent (Disman, 2002, p.287). Furthermore, qualitative research uses the logic of induction. This means we firstly observe and collect the data. Later on, we seek patterns, repetition, and meaning in our collected data. From there, we formulate premises, assumptions. Finally, we have the result of the research, which are usually newly formulated hypothesis, or theories (Disman, 2002, p.287). Qualitative research helps us understand people in their social behavior. In qualitative research the researched groups, individuals, or objects determine which variables become the most important (valid), and which become redundant. The role of researcher in qualitative research is to find important structures between all of the variables, which the individual we are researching considers relevant. This is the greatest strength of qualitative research (Disman, 2002, p.290). Ideally, the qualitative and quantitative researches complement each other. Meaning that if we do qualitative research of some kind, some other researcher may add up to this knowledge by doing quantitative research on the same given matter and vice versa. Qualitative research helps us understand observed reality as mentioned above. In sociological research sociologist can be perceived as a stranger trying to understand observed reality. The concrete process of qualitative research usually goes on three steps. First, we have an input – given social issue we want to examine. Second, we do field research, which entails multiple processes at once. We are, simultaneously, creating research sample, collecting data, analyzing them and interpreting these data. This all happens at the same time. Third, we have output – hypothesis, or grounded theory. Grounded theory is a term defined first by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. The theory explains strategy for developing theories from existing data without the use of any prepared criteria about which data should be selected. This means we are creating theory purely on inductive logic, which is the base of qualitative research (Disman, 2002, p.299). Grounded theory strategy is built upon two main principles – theoretical sampling and constant comparative method. Theoretical sampling - Process of a data collection with the goal of creating theory in which the researcher concurrently collects data, codes and analyzes the data, decides where to collect another data, so that he can extend the theory that is formulating. This whole process is only controlled by the formulating theory, not by anything defined prior. This process is happening until the research is theoretically saturated. Theoretical saturation means there are no longer new information. Everything we get we have already categorized and analyzed. We only see repetitive patterns. Researcher who aims to create new theories, or theoretical ideals cannot use traditional processes in his research - first coding than analyzing the data. The researcher is continuously re-organizing and re-integrating his theoretical concepts while looking at his materials and creating new theories. The goal of

the constant comparative method (concurrent application of coding and interpretation) is to create more systematic theory than we would get out of other research methods. The methodology of a research is not created prior, but in the course of collecting data. The methodology of a qualitative process is complete when there is no more new information. New data are not helping us understand studied problem better. This is when the research is theoretically saturated (Disman, 2002, p.300-301). What we are trying to achieve when we create a sample in qualitative research is to represent the population of research issues, population of its relevant dimensions. The first step we take in qualitative research is the construction of a sample, we finish this operation before starting other field operations. Construction of a sample in qualitative research means we first choose who to interview at first, or what document analyze at first. Later, we carry on, to decide who to interview on a second place (same with documents) and so on until we have a saturated research. We must keep in mind that the qualitative research of a document is not done with the aim to test our hypothesis. We examine the given document to find existing patterns and structures (Disman, 2002, p.304). One of the processes that holds the utmost importance in qualitative research is categorizing the data and coding. If we are successful in coding our data efficiently, we can work more efficiently and make our analytical process a little more fluent. We understand the term coding as defined by Coffey and Atkinson: “The term *coding* encompasses a variety of approaches to and ways of organizing qualitative data.” (Coffey, Atkinson, 1996, p.27). Coding used in analytical process usually aims to achieve three actions according to Seidel and Kelle’s theory from 1995 – “(a) noticing relevant phenomena, (b) collecting examples of those phenomena, and (c) analyzing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures.” (Seidel and Kelle, 1995, p. 55-56 in Coffey, Atkinson, 1996, p. 29). Even though coding mainly serves to simplify our data, once we have established that, we can use the process of coding to complicate our data once more. This might seem as illogical, but our data complication in this process helps us extend the frameworks in which we are thinking, bringing new light onto “old” information (Coffey, Atkinson, 1996, p.30). Even a relatively simple level of coding can produce complex outcomes. Codes help us see the links between concepts and categories. They are useful in uniting data from different parts of documents/interviews under the same category (Coffey, Atkinson, 1996, p. 45). According to Strauss 1987 codes and the process of coding can be used as a tool to extend our framework within which we work. Explicitly: “Strauss links the initial process of coding (which he refers to as open coding and which is essentially what we did with the interview extract with which we exemplified our earlier discussion) to a more refined process of using categories to generate broader conceptual

frameworks. Strauss identifies a set of procedures that allows initial categories to be elaborated and developed.” (Coffey, Atkinson, 1996, p.48). We have seen above what role coding plays in our research process and how it helps us create categories and link different segments of data together. Coding is commonly used within the method I am intending to use in my research – content analysis. I would say it is one of the key components of content analysis.

Content analysis is widely used research method. This method can be used both in qualitative and quantitative research. Firstly, we should define what we mean by content analysis - content analysis as a research method by Berelson is: “Research technique for objective, systematical, and quantitative description of observed (manifested) content of communication (“whichever symbolic behavior”)” (Jeřábek, 1992, p.85). In qualitative research we use content analysis to review given content and look for reoccurring patterns and structures, which help us understand researched issue. In the broadest definition content analysis is used to analyze any kind of communication. Even though content analysis is most frequently used to evaluate products which were created for other than research purposes, we can use content analysis as a technique for evaluating open qualitative questions in various questionnaires. Key principle of content analysis is examining given content (interview, document etc.) through system of categories we have created. In these categories we must simply express subject matter of content analysis and given unit of measurement. Content analysis helps us to see hidden meanings and the overall meaning direction of communication. The most often use of content analysis is to analyze a written text, document, diary etc., but there are two other ways we can use content analysis. First is visual content analysis. This can be an analysis of a pictures, advertisements etc. Second is audio content analysis, which can be acoustic announcements, audio recording of a speech etc. Finally, content analysis can be a combination of all the content analyses mentioned above. If the research requires to present who provided the information, document, speech... we are analyzing, for whom the information was intended, in what manner and to which outcome. All these might be necessary in different researches and may change the nature of the research. The most essential element of content analysis is creating categories. Over the years, researches have come up with basic rules which ought to be followed. These rules help us navigate our research better. Basic rules for creating categories are based upon experience. Here are the rules: 1) Determined categories can be created after we have become acquainted with all of the material. The reason for this rule is the unpredictable nature of variations which may occur. 2) For each research we decide to undergo, we must create new set of categories suitable for our concrete research and the analysis we plan to do. Universal categories for every research are not a possibility. 3) The system of categories we create must be comprehensive. All of the

information must be categorized in a logical manner. We cannot have a category for information which is hard to categorize. We would be losing valuable material for analysis. 4) Categories must exclude each other. If unit belongs to one category, we cannot assign the same unit to a different one. All of the researchers must comprehend the categories in the same manner. 5) Classification of content information must be agreed upon by multiple researches. They must categorize the information until they come to the same set of categories. Categorization of content is done in multiple waves to ensure clarity. 6) Our evaluation must contain complementary results, as well as information about how and in what extent given categories were represented in the content we are analyzing. Furthermore, literal transcription of content is needed to saturate each category. On a final note, we must remind ourselves that working with this technique requires practice. Ideally, practice under professional supervision (Surynek et. al., 2001, p.132-133).

Content analysis falls in the broader category of secondary analysis of data. Secondary analysis of data is a research method when we used data which have been used for a different purpose than a research and we examine them for research purposes. Among advantages of secondary data analysis is saving time and expenses. The material you need is often already collected for you, which saves you time and money. Another advantage might be less invasive nature of secondary analysis of data. This method is viewed less intrusive compared to other research methods. Secondary analysis of data is also suitable for comparative analysis such as international comparison, analysis of trends etc. Disadvantage of secondary analysis of data is the lack of needed data, which are unavailable, and we cannot retrieve them additionally. Moreover, some of the original data might be faulty, which we might be unable to detect (Jeřábek, 1992, p.83). I have mentioned rules for creating categories within content analysis.

Here is the process of content analysis as described in Jeřábek, 1992:

- “Choice of documents
- Choice of categories
- Choice of filed unit - word (smallest unit), topic (theme), character (e.g. social status, ethnic affiliation), sentence or a paragraph, item (whole unit)
- Choice of contextual unit (bigger unit, which contains filed unit and helps unequivocally determine meaning in which it is used)
- Determination of a system of quantification - occurrence (coded as yes or no), frequency (how many times has the unit occurred), magnitude (area), strength, intensity” (Jeřábek, 1992, p.85).

## **4.2 Choosing research sample, environment of research**

I have decided to choose the state issued document for my content analysis, because it was already published document about the topic I would like to research. Therefore, I would save time and money. Another reason for my choice is the less intrusive nature of already issued document. I will take information which have already been published for a different purpose and do my analysis on them. Meaning there is a lesser chance to create some ethical issues within the research. Also, the document already contains summarized information which I am inquiring. However, I am aware of the risk of losing important data due to incorrect interpretations in the original document and mistakes that may lead from them. I will do my best to proceed correctly and keep in mind all possible risks of the secondary data analysis, as well as all the advantages.

## **4.3 Analytical procedures**

My analytical procedure of the state issued document begun with the decision to do both visual and textual content analysis. There are three pictures in the document, providing me with the opportunity to do both - visual analysis and analysis of the written text. I will start the analytical procedure with analyzing the pictures, later moving on to analysis of the written document.

Analyzing the pictures attached to the state issued document I found that there is an effort to portrait fathers as caregivers – the picture of a father with a child on a front page (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018, p.1). There is also a picture with a father on a walk with a pram highlighting the role of a male caregiver. To be approaching gender equality we can see in the document there is a picture of a pregnant woman. Women have irreplaceable role in the childcare and are seen as a part of this process. I feel as the visual component of the document is trying to stress the role of a male caregiver, while keeping in mind the role of a female in childcare (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018, p.1,4,6).

For the analysis of the written text I started with reading the document. For the second time I have read it, I have created some basic categories which I recognized within the text. For the third time I read the document I already had set of categories which I noted within the text. The categories are these: Labor market, Nordic region, key values of Nordic parental leave, father figure, grassroot effort, state participation, mother figure, challenges of Nordic region. I have looked for re-occurring patterns and structures within these categories. I will talk more about those patterns and structures below. After re-reading of the document and having created categories. I have simplified the data into these categories, which I later look at again, from a

new perspective and tried to complicate the data again. This way I have inquired the data from multiple perspectives until my research was saturated and new data were no longer coming up. Only re-occurring information. At first, I would like to outline some general description of the studied document. In the issued document we could find information about what this publication focuses on and what is its agenda, followed by introduction. In the introduction part we could read about essential facts about parental leave, its connection to labor market, development in the Nordic region, current situation in the Nordic countries. The introduction was followed by chapter on shared and paid parental leave. This chapter focused more closely on the Nordic region and their parental leave usage, which leave schemes they use. This chapter was accompanied by summarizations at the bottom of the page. Those contained some key information in a compiled way. We could find here information from what state efforts have been done in the Nordic region, through rules for each country of the region, to levels of benefits and remaining challenges. The chapter was finished by a graph, showing share of parental leave taken by fathers. At the very end of this brief, true stories were given from magazines and researches (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018). Moving on with my research, I will study the categories I have developed and give examples of re-occurring patterns within these categories. From the first category labor market the re-occurring pattern was the emphasis on gender equality at work, as well as on employers to give employees parental leave that would favor the usage of leave by fathers. Some examples of the importance of gender equality in a workplace - “Promoting gender equality at work is thus not only the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do.”, “Today the Nordic countries lie ahead of the curve on women’s participation in the labor force.”, “Gender-equal parenting also contributes towards a more gender-equal participation in the labor market. The fact that women take more parental leave than men can still affect their careers negatively in too many cases. An extended absence from work may reduce a person’s status and opportunities in the labor market. Thus, when more men take long-term parental leave, the prospects for gender equality in the labor market increase.” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018, p.5, p.8). For the relationship between employers and employees and their agreement on parental leave conditions here is an example – “Nordic employers across industries also recognize that flexible work arrangements do not impede productivity, but rather reduces stress and enables both working women and men to attend to their family responsibilities.”. Discovering these patterns in the document leads me to conclusion that there is tendency towards convergency between the theoretical background outlined above and the state issued document. The trends concerning both gender equality at work and conditions at

work which favor the usage of parental leave by fathers are observable in the theory as well as in the document reflecting on current events.

For the category of Nordic region, the structure which was highlighted the most in the document was painting the region as one with similar features and attitudes towards leave policy making. Some illustrative cases – “The Nordic region can be seen as a case in point. Combined, the five Nordic countries have come to represent the 11<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world, not despite their policy commitment to gender equality and social justice, but because of it. Today the Nordic countries are known as financially strong welfare states with good living conditions.”, “Descriptions of life in the Nordic countries often reference ‘the Nordic model’, which is characterized by a political ambition to reduce inequalities and by effective cooperation between the social partners and with collective bargaining in the labor market.”, “To encourage men to take parental leave, all Nordic countries have tried to make their parental leave schemes as flexible as possible, for example by extending the timeframe within which the leave can be taken and enabling parents to divide the leave into several shorter periods for both parents.” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018, p.5, p.8). This again suggest the accordance between the theory and the current situation of the Nordic countries.

The category of key values of Nordic parental leave has insinuated some of the main principles that are held high the Nordic region. Here are concrete examples – “Enabling and promoting shared parental leave has been another key to prosperity for the Nordics. The countries have even encouraged paternity leave, which sets a path towards more involved fatherhood and happier and healthier families.”, “The Nordic countries promote an equal sharing of parental leave between women and men for several reasons. One of the reasons is fairness, and a belief that mothers and fathers should take equal responsibility for their children, and that children have the right to be with both parents.” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018, p.5, p.8). Those values have been repetitive in appearance in this document, as well as in all the theoretical background I have gathered.

Amongst another categories I have chosen to focus on a father figure in the document. What became clear is that Nordic region puts great importance on father figures and fatherhood in connection to happy family life, as well as healthy. Also, fathers’ involvement in childcare is vital for mothers’ ability to participate equally in the labor market. Some concrete citations to support my argument follow – “Men’s involvement in childcare and unpaid work has also been a policy priority, based on the understanding that it is good for children, good for parents and good for society. As such, they have been at the forefront of introducing longer, paid parental leave that can be shared between parents.”, “Nordic research shows that men who take longer



parental leave also take more responsibility at home. They are more involved in the care of their children, have better relationship with them and do more unpaid housework. Importantly the men spend time caring for the child or the children alone, after their partner has returned to work. This establishes a more fundamental sense of shared responsibility between parents.” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018, p.7-8).

The fifth category I used for my content analysis was grassroot effort. Grassroot effort have been important component in societal change within Nordic region in history and today. As such it is reflected in the theory, as well as the state issued document. In this case the research findings support the theory formulated above. One of the representations is – “In recognition of a gender imbalance in the distribution of parental leave, and with the explicit goal of promoting gender equality both at home and in the workplace, the Nordic countries have taken initiatives to increase the rate of paternity leave through campaigns, organizations and quotas.” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018, p.7).

Continuing my content analyses one of the important categories I discovered was state participation, concretely state participation in policy making and helping promote gender equality in parental leave. The pattern which came surfacing in this category was how have all of the Nordic countries participated in the effort to implement policies which are helping more gender equal distribution of obligations and responsibilities. Helping to create more social just society. Some examples of this claim could be – “Building on this, the Nordic countries have introduced a range of policies since the 1960s that facilitate women’s engagement in paid work, as a part of broader policy agenda to advance gender equality and social justice.”, “The Nordic governments are committed to playing their part in achieving the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, and seek to enable international knowledge sharing and facilitate a collective improvement in the stride for gender equality.” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018, p.5).

Furthermore, I used the category of mother figure to inquire the state issue document. What I discovered is that for mothers it is vital to be able to participate in a labor market, which is achieved through sharing parenting responsibilities. This has been repeated throughout the document, as well as all the theoretical materials I have worked with co create the theoretical background in this thesis. This trend can be observed convergently in both the document and the theoretical part above. As a demonstration of my argument here, we can use the beginning of the document saying – “Only half of women in the world engage in paid work. Many do so in poor working conditions with low pay, without any access to maternity protection or parental leave. Childcare is often unreliable or unaffordable, and violence and sexual harassment are a

reality of many working women's day. These exclusions are a violation of women's basic human rights. What is more, gender inequality at work is economically inefficient and ultimately costly for companies and countries alike.” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018, p.5).

The last category I devoted my inquiry to was challenges of Nordic region. Here we can find some divergencies between the theory above and the state issued document. The theory outlined in this work suggests that Nordic region is a leader in gender equality, which is true, but also there are some areas, which could use improvement. I have pointed out throughout this thesis that there is a space for improvement even within the Nordic region when we talk about gender equal society. However, I feel we can see the challenges expressed more explicitly in the state issued document than the theoretical background. Here are some examples of challenges that repeatedly re-emerge within the Nordic context – “Revising the parental leave schemes to make them more inclusive of non-traditional families is a challenge that remains to be solved across Nordic countries. People in the Nordic countries live in a great variety of family constellations, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) families and single-parent households. However, for the most part, Nordic family benefit systems are built around the notion of heterosexual, nuclear families, and this can have unintended effects on families that do not conform to this norm”, “One issue that has not received the same attention is that many adults (women in particular) take on the bulk of caring responsibilities for their ageing parents or other family members, in addition to their own children. What are the implications of this dual care role on women’s participation in the labor market, particularly in the light of an ageing population and increasingly longer life expectancy?” (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018, p.10-11).

Conclusions from my research are following, within the theory outlined above and the state issued document published in 2018 there are mostly tendencies towards convergence. We can observe the trends mentioned in theoretical part emerging in the current situation of 2018. There are many important factors to be followed within the field of a parental leave in the Nordic countries. However, the main principles keep repeating themselves and resurface within different theoretical frameworks and analyses of current situations. Those re-appearing principles have been analyzed under following categories - labor market, Nordic region, key values of Nordic parental leave, father figure, grassroot effort, state participation, mother figure, challenges of Nordic region. Within these categories I looked even deeper for structures and patterns of social reality. I have tried to give examples of the most repetitive patterns above to support my argument about convergence between theoretical background and the issued document. I will now try to move from analyzation towards interpretation. The analysis of

written document was accompanied by visual analysis. As I mentioned above, there were three pictures. Two of them depict male caregiver, the last is capturing pregnant woman. What we can gather from this is the authors were trying to focus on a role of male caregiver, while keeping in mind the role of woman in caregiving. From the textual part we could learn about some basic information on parental leave and what benefits sharing parenting can offer on different levels (family, state...). Along with advances of the shared parental leave, some challenges in the Nordic region were introduced. The brief was concluded by true stories segment, which gave the factual part a real-life dimension. I feel like real-life examples help us understand and observe discussed principles and patterns better. The interpretation here would be authors tried to give some general framework on what the situation is like in the Nordic region concerning parental leave. They have tried to bring the factual part closer to the reader by adding true stories at the end of the document. All in all, I arrived at the conclusion that there are convergences between the theoretical background outlined above and the state issued document. I believe the theory supports the document. Furthermore, I am convinced current situation is reflected in the document, which in turn is in accordance with our theory.

#### **4.4 Evaluating research quality**

If we are evaluating any given empirical work, we must focus on several important bases. Some of the bases we should consider are – what type of document (in this case) are we studying, how reliable is our source of data, what might be problematic within our research, our role as a researcher, bias. I have chosen state issued document for my analysis, which means the data have been carefully collected. However, given that the document is published by the same region I am researching, I must be careful of bias. My research has been conducted by me and I am aware of my own limitations as an unexperienced researcher. With this in mind, I feel as though I have done my best to follow research procedures mentioned above and with their help arrived towards conclusions. As we are talking about qualitative research there is large probability in achieving high level of validity. I am not trying to give exhaustive explanation of given issue. I hope my research will help to open up a discussion and deeper inquiry into this field for other researchers. This way we can map out this field of expertise better and understand studied issues more in the future.

#### **4.5 Ethical questions within social sciences research**

For our research to be ethical it is necessary to obey ethical codex while we are conducting social-science research (or any other). For these purposes researchers in around the world have

created associations of social sciences, psychology and so on. Within these associations they have created codices, which are to be followed in order to conduct an ethical research (Babbie, 2007, p.71). I think best summarized are the ethical issues of social research in Babbie (2007). He has summarized most common difficulties of social research into a set of main points:

#### “Ethical Issues in Social Research

- What is ethical and unethical in research is ultimately a matter of what a community of people agree is right and wrong
- Researchers agree that participation in research should normally be voluntary. This norm, however, can conflict with the scientific need for generalizability.
- Researchers agree that research should not harm those who participate in it, unless they give their informal consent, thereby willingly and knowingly accepting the risks of harm.
- Whereas anonymity refers to the situation in which even the researcher cannot identify specific information with the individuals it describes, confidentiality refers to the situation in which the researcher promises to keep information about subjects private. The most straightforward way to ensure confidentiality is to destroy identifying information as soon as it's no longer needed.
- Many research designs involve a greater or lesser degree of deception of subjects. Because deceiving people violates common standards of ethical behavior, deception in research requires a strong justification - and even then the justification may be challenged.
- Social researchers have ethical obligations to the community of researchers as well as to subjects. These obligations include reporting results fully and accurately as well as disclosing errors, limitations, and other shortcomings in the research.
- Professional associations in several disciplines publish codes of ethics to guide researchers. These codes are necessary and helpful, but they do not resolve all ethical questions. The researcher must keep in mind that it is important to properly refer to used resources.” (Babbie, 2007, p.80).

If we want to conduct an ethical research, we should follow these codes. I have in my research followed ethical code as defined above. I am aware of the importance of ethical research and of my obligations to community of researchers.

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### 5.1 Internet resources

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