

WORLD-CLASS DANISHNESS

Culture as Competitiveness in Danish Globalization Strategies

Søren Christensen

The paper examines the interrelations between culture and economy in recent Danish globalization strategies. Taking as its starting point the thesis of an emerging 'national competitive state' the paper shows the huge importance ascribed in Danish globalization strategies to national culture as a force for economic competition. The ensuing version of 'Danishness' is discussed with reference to the literature on 'neo-nationalism' and, more specifically, it is argued that current Danish globalization strategies can to a significant extent be viewed as assertions of the inherent economic rationality of neo-nationalism in an emerging global 'knowledge' or 'innovation' economy.

Keywords: globalization strategies, innovation, cultural economy, Danish values, neo-nationalism

We must improve our ability to exploit Danishness efficiently.
(Morten Østergaard, MP, the Danish Social-Liberal Party)

It has long been recognized by students of globalization (or glocalization) that, in the words of Roland Robertson, '[l]ocality is, to put it simply, globally institutionalized' (1992: 172). This famously applies to the global institutionalization of the nation and of nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but it applies no less to various forms of national re-assertion in the current phase of neo-liberal globalization. The emergence around the world of anti-globalization localist and nationalist movements is a familiar example. Less familiar, however, is the opposite case – that is, the global diffusion of specific institutions and symbols of national 'globalization readiness'. One expression of this is the prominence gained in recent years by a peculiar type of policy

document – the national globalization strategy. Over the last decade, in many countries various types of national councils have been set up either by the state itself – as in the case of the Nordic Globalization Councils – or by private actors such as think tanks, businesses or trade unions in order to develop overarching strategies for enhanced national competitiveness in the new global economy. These national strategies invariably project a glorious future in which the nation has been turned into an 'innovation nation' (the UK), a 'leading knowledge society' (Denmark), a 'winner in the age of globalization' (Sweden) or a 'vibrant global hub' (Singapore). As such they manifest above all a national 'determination to win' in terms of which nation-states mobilize internally and assert themselves externally as active subjects rather than as passive victims of globalization.

In this paper I shall discuss in more detail the Danish version of this kind of national strategizing.

As attempts by nations to re-imagine themselves as winners of economic globalization these national globalization strategies should by themselves be of ethnological interest. However, the Danish globalization strategies have the added ethnological interest of ascribing a fundamental importance to 'culture' in this respect – of turning Danish values and traditions into the very backbone of Danish competitiveness. This fusion of culture and economy is of course not uniquely Danish. It has long been argued that the transition to an economy based on experience and/or creativity implies an increasing economic centrality of culture (Warde 2002) and the importance of culture is routinely invoked in national globalization strategies.¹ In the Danish case, however, this connection between national culture and economic performance has been worked out to an extent which is, to my knowledge, unparalleled. Even more importantly, it has been so – in one of its versions, at least – in terms which explicitly invoke the 'neo-nationalist' agenda (Banks & Gingrich 2006) which has dominated Danish culture and politics for almost a decade. In this sense, one of the main interests of the Danish case may be that it highlights the connection between two tendencies which seem to be equally prominent in contemporary European nation-states – on the one hand the effort to strengthen national competitiveness and on the other hand the effort to strengthen national cultural values.

The overarching framework of my analysis is the assumption that the current flurry of national globalization strategies in general, and of Danish ones in particular, should be viewed in terms of the emergence of a new kind of state rationality adapted to the current phase of globalization – 'the national competitive state' (Hirsch 1995; Pedersen 2006; Kristensen 2007). While this state may still be seen as subservient to the demands of neo-liberal globalization, it contrasts sharply with the minimalist state prophesied by many observers in the 1990s, in the sense that it is a highly activist and interventionist state rationality (Kaspersen 2005; Pedersen 2006). This certainly has to do with the enormously increased importance of issues such as immigration and terrorism (post-9/11). But it is probably also re-

lated to changes in economic rationality itself. As suggested by labels such as 'the information age' (Castells 2000), 'the knowledge-based economy' (OECD 1996), 'post-capitalist society' (Drucker 1993), 'the creative economy' (Florida 2002) or 'the innovation economy' (Innovationsrådet 2004, 2005), there is today a broad consensus that the global economy has entered a new era in which the fundamental sources of wealth no longer are traditional factors of production such as land, labour and capital, but more ungraspable and immaterial ones such as knowledge, creativity and innovation.

If this is the case, then competitiveness cannot simply be viewed as a matter of political stability, fiscal responsibility and ample supplies of skilled labour. Instead, competitiveness requires the systematic cultivation of a new range of human qualities – those peculiar and, until recently, non-economic qualities (like flexibility, creativity, cooperative skills or trust) which economists within the field of 'cognitive capitalism' call 'intangibles' (Kristensen 2008). Competitiveness in a knowledge or innovation economy is thus inseparable from a new kind of population care on the part of the state – or, in (even more) Foucauldian parlance, with a new biopolitics of the knowledgeable, creative and innovative population. In this sense the national competitive state must be understood not simply as an interventionist state, but as a state which specifically targets and enrolls the allegedly 'deepest' and most 'human' aspects of the lives of its population for the purposes of global economic competition.

The account I give of culture as a crucial 'intangible' resource for the Danish competitive state can best be summarized in terms of two, seemingly opposed, theses. The first is that the enrolment of national culture as a crucial source of Danish competitiveness is inseparable from the 'corporatization' of the competitive state. Decades ago corporations started to provide themselves with cultures in much the same way that nations have cultures. In Denmark today it is the national competitive state which is providing itself with a corporate-style culture made up of 'basic values' and 'core cultural competencies', themselves identified according to methods of 'cul-

tural benchmarking' largely derived from the field of business studies. Thus, if against all neo-liberal predictions, the 'strong' state seems to be back, it is also a state whose strength to a large extent is modelled on neo-liberal forms of corporate governance.

The second thesis is that this Danish emphasis on culture as the key to competitiveness is inseparable from the current 'securitization' of the nation-state in Europe and elsewhere. To the extent that Danish values are made into the very population resource on which Denmark's future prosperity and welfare hinge, they tend to become a national treasure which must be staunchly defended and obsessively worried about. Here the question of competitiveness coalesces with a wider neo-nationalist agenda to make Danish values the touchstone of a new discourse of national security. This security perspective on culture is indisputably a state perspective and it thus suggests that, even if to a large extent the national competitive state models its own activities on forms of corporate governance, it is not just a 'mega-corporation', but still very much a state. Whether this securitization of Danish culture is really – and can possibly be made – consistent is, however, a different matter which I shall discuss in my conclusion.

Before proceeding, however, the limitations of national globalization strategies as sources for an understanding of this emergent state rationality must be acknowledged. Rhetorically, these strategies are generally characterized by a tone of almost feverish interventionism (the UK must 'unlock the talent of all its people' etc. [Department for Innovation Universities and Skills 2008: 4]). This vision of strategic omnipotence testifies to the aloofness of these strategy documents from the messy practicalities of day-to-day governmental activity. As such they are inherently insufficient as materials for the detailed 'studying through' of an 'anthropology of policy' (Shore & Wright 1997). Nevertheless, such documents may constitute interesting materials for a more limited 'anthropology of meta-policy'. They can be viewed as meta-policy documents in the sense that even if they propose policies almost *ad nauseam*, in most cases they are not primarily about concrete policies as such. Rather, they are concerned

with the very question of what 'seeing like a state' (Scott 1998) means in the new era of global economic competition. As overarching national strategies they seek first of all to outline the national competitive state itself as a distinctive kind of policy space (or 'state reason' [Foucault 2007]) – to work out the scope of its possible activities, the objects with which it should be concerned, its modes of mobilizing and motivating, its rhetoric of global dangers and national redemption. Precisely in their curious mixture of self-aggrandizing pep-talks and stern admonitions with hard-nosed economic reform proposals these national strategies may, I believe, provide valuable insights into the ongoing construction of the national competitive state as a set of distinctive modes of emotionalizing and dramatizing as well as of rationalizing policy activity in the name of competitiveness.

The Innovation Council: Culture as Copy Protection

In the last few years, two different national councils have been established in Denmark with the purpose of designing strategies for the future prosperity and welfare of Denmark in an ever more globalized and competitive world. In 2005, the newly re-elected Liberal-Conservative government established a Globalization Council largely patterned on the Finnish Globalization Council. While in the spirit of national consensus it included leaders of trade unions, employers' organisations and research institutions, it was headed and run in characteristically no-nonsense fashion by Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen himself. In spite of the breath of its composition, it is therefore generally considered a top-down project, an almost unconcealed instrument of the government's political agenda.

This, however, does not apply to the second national council, the Innovation Council which was founded in 2003. While three government departments are among its co-founders, its driving force is not the government, but the independent think tank Huset Mandag Morgen.² The Globalization Council and the Innovation Council both operate according to a vision of Denmark as 'a leading knowledge soci-

ety' (Regeringen 2005: 6), but their styles of strategic reasoning are nevertheless very different. Whereas the Globalization Council tends to focus on concrete policy proposals to make the Danish population more fit for global competition in the short term, the Innovation Council is much bolder. It seeks to work out its national strategy in terms of a comprehensive vision of the 'innovation economy' as a new economic age which dramatically alters the terms of economic competition and in which only those nations which can mobilize to reinvent themselves economically, socially and culturally will prosper.

This vision can certainly be criticized as 'epochalist' (du Gay & Pryke 2002). But it also represents an ambitious and fascinating attempt to take this epochalism to its radical conclusion. Basically, this conclusion is, to put it in the words of Huset Mandag Morgen (2005: 35), that 'soft matters are becoming hard values'. Put differently, in the innovation economy those 'intangible' dimensions of social life which have traditionally been viewed as fuzzy and non-economic, are becoming the very driving force of the economy. And the most important of these is, precisely, culture – in the traditional sense of historically sedimented values of national populations.

This centrality of culture springs from the peculiar way the Innovation Council conceptualizes the innovation economy itself. Basically, it functions as a kind of successor term to 'the knowledge economy'. The innovation economy is no longer centred on knowledge as such, but on the ability to apply knowledge, to turn it into economic value faster than the competitors. For this reason the difference between the innovation economy and the knowledge economy resides largely in the crucial importance of speed: 'Competition is no longer so much about having knowledge, but about acquiring and applying knowledge – faster than your competitors' (Innovationsrådet 2004: 9).

What turns out to be the crucial point, however, is that in the innovation economy this logic of speed manifests itself not simply as innovation but also as obsolescence: 'As knowledge is produced ever more rapidly and as new knowledge is diffused ever more rapidly, existing knowledge also becomes obsolete

ever more rapidly' (ibid. 2004: 9). The very same processes of global technological and economic integration which accelerate innovation also accelerate obsolescence through copying. This emphasis on obsolescence and copying entails a paradoxical reversal of the very notion of 'the innovation economy'. The innovation economy is in fact not an economy in which innovation reigns supreme. On the contrary, it is an economy in which the acceleration of copying has turned 'newness' and 'innovation' into highly problematic categories.

Interestingly – though hardly intentionally – this leads to a picture of contemporary global capitalism which is curiously reminiscent of classical forms of anti-capitalist critique. As numerous critics of capitalism have pointed out, even if capitalism feeds on differences and frontiers (it can only reproduce itself by transgressing itself), it eventually turns everything into the same homogenous form: the commodity. This is what Claude Lévi-Strauss famously described as the entropic logic of 'hot societies' (Lévi-Strauss 1968) which recklessly harness all sorts of differences (natural resources, labour, culture) in order to maximize output, but end up dissolving them all into the same lukewarm state of entropy.

In the Innovation Council's account of contemporary global capitalism, this logic of entropy appears in terms of the ever-increasing use made by states of systematic forms of comparison such as 'benchmarking', originally invented as a tool of corporate management. Just as private corporations benchmark themselves against 'best practice' within their field in order to spur change and excellence within, so states increasingly seek to identify 'best practice' within the various disciplines of statecraft (fiscal policy, education, entrepreneurialism etc.) in order to constantly increase their powers compared to other states.

The trouble with this practice of benchmarking³ is, however, that it leads to entropy. By identifying and appropriating best practices, states try to become more competitive *vis à vis* each other. But by the very fact of appropriating each other's best practices they also become more and more similar. In this sense the practice of benchmarking erodes the competitive

advantages that it is itself meant to secure. According to the Innovation Council, this also applies to the strategies in terms of which states compete with each other. Specifically, the model of (neo-)liberal 'macro-economic' governance (fiscal responsibility, business friendly taxation etc.) can no longer provide competitive advantages of any significance since it has already been adopted by all contenders in the global economic race. For this reason the global struggle for competitive advantages has today been displaced to 'the micro-economic framework' of the knowledge economy – education, research, technology and entrepreneurship (Innovationsrådet 2004: 10). But even here, the same entropic logic is making itself felt: 'Most countries focus on strengthening their micro-economic framework on the basis of international benchmarking and in principle they can reach the same relative level of education, research, application of technology, upstarts etc.' Soon, therefore, all this will be 'necessary, but insufficient preconditions for growth and wealth – just as is the case today with good macro-economic structures' (ibid. 2004: 11).

If the basic problem of contemporary 'fast-capitalism' (Holmes 2000) is the almost instantaneous copying of best practices or winning solutions, then the solution must be a matter of copy protecting. In this sense the real strategic challenge of the innovation economy is not just to innovate. It is to work out a copy resistant mode of innovation – a code of innovation which competitors cannot crack.

This is exactly the point where culture enters the picture. Fundamentally, according to the Innovation Council, it is culture – not anti-piracy divisions or patents – which provides the solution to the problem of copying. The cultures of national populations are constituted by unique configurations of values which have formed in particular locales over long spans of time. To the extent that these values are inextricably bound up with specific histories and places they are very difficult for others to appropriate. While other competencies may provide innovations it is therefore the 'culturally rooted competencies' which can provide innovations and competitive advantages 'which are difficult for others to copy'

(2005: 27). This is why the Innovation Council so emphatically identifies culture as the crucial population resource on which the national strategies of the innovation economy must be built. In the emerging global innovation economy the difference between winners and losers is simply the difference between those nations which understand how to identify and sharpen their unique, historically sedimented, 'cultural competencies' and those which do not.

Danishness as a Competitive Model

The global innovation economy depicted by the Innovation Council is therefore an economy in which, to re-phrase Bill Clinton's famous campaign slogan, 'it's culture, stupid!'. The capacity of cultural self-insight and self-realization, of identifying and mobilising national 'core cultural competencies', is emerging as the fundamental precondition for the future prosperity and welfare of nations. It is therefore no wonder that in the competitive model elaborated by the Innovation Council, economic policy becomes largely a matter of identity politics. 'Who are we?', the soul-searching question of all cultural identity, becomes the very key to economic success since the future of Danish competitiveness depends fundamentally on the elaboration of an adequate understanding and mobilization of Danishness.

The definition of Danishness worked out by the Innovation Council is basically derived from what might be labelled 'the new science of national character' – that is the comparative values research which has emerged in recent decades in business studies (Geert Hofstede and others) as well as in sociology (the European Values Study, Ronald Inglehart's World Values Study etc.). This is paradoxical since the whole point of this type of research is to extend the spirit of comparison and benchmarking dreaded by the Innovation Council into the field of culture itself. This paradox is, however, inherent to the competitive ambition of the Innovation Council. Since competition is inherently comparative, culture can only be mobilized for competitive purposes to the extent that it is made objectively comparable in much the same way as other competitive parameters. This is exactly what the comparative values re-

search seeks to accomplish. It systematically surveys the levels of national populations in terms of values ranging from patriotism and trust to happiness and solidarity. Thus, it disentangles national character from the ambiguous (at once self-deprecating and self-assertive) play of stereotyping and makes it reappear as an objective and quantifiable population resource which can be measured cross-nationally and mobilized for the purposes of international competition.

In this sense the invention of a quantitative method of values measurement can be viewed as the very 'technical' precondition for the emergence of national culture as a field of competition between states. It is therefore not surprising that the Innovation Council can only work out its own strategic vision in terms of this comparative and quantitative perspective on culture. Faithful to its criticism of benchmarking, however, it simultaneously seeks to avert the entropic effects of comparison by standing benchmarking on its head – that is, by using benchmarking not as a tool for copying the best practices of others, but as a tool for identifying and strengthening the best practices of Danes themselves. In this sense the Innovation Council basically identifies Danishness with those values in terms of which Danes stand out and excel compared to other nations – in short, with world-class Danishness.

The Danish strategic challenge therefore consists in seeking out and strengthening those values in terms of which Danes are themselves world-class. According to the Innovation Council this world-class Danishness has been shown by recent business research to reside basically in the world-view of Danish humanism: 'Basically, the Danish growth model – the Danish wealth engine – builds on a positive view of humans. Danes do not believe in systems – they believe in people, they believe that the individual person can make a difference' (Innovationsrådet 2004: 21). Thus, the Danish cultural position of strength is 'human competence' – the mutual trust and respect between individuals of equal status (*ligeværdige*). From this human competence derives a unique culture of flat hierarchies and uninhibited cooperation from which Danish businesses have

profited for generations, but which is now becoming an all-important competitive advantage since 'more than others [it] releases creativity which is a key criterion for competing in an innovation economy' (Innovationsrådet 2005: 46). As the very essence of Danish culture this model of cooperation is inherent to the Danish population in its totality and it therefore amounts to nothing less than a 'creative total mobilization of the population in a global economy where competition takes place in terms of good ideas' (2005: 44).

If Danish culture has for a long time worked spontaneously as a competitive advantage, it has, however, not been codified and mobilised deliberately with a view to economic competition. This is exactly what the Innovation Council sets out to do. The ultimate aim of its strategic vision is to release 'the economic potentials of the values-based Danish competencies' (2005: 49). The strategy set forth by the Innovation Council to do this can be summarized in terms of three specific proposals for Danish innovation. The first concerns the mode of innovation which Denmark should cultivate, the second concerns the lines of business on which Denmark should place its bets and the third concerns the very mode of national mobilization in terms of which Denmark should realize the transition to 'the innovation society'.

First, Denmark should focus on user-driven innovation. In contrast to technology-driven innovation which is bound up with 'big science', user-driven innovation focuses on (unacknowledged) user needs and emerges in horizontal and cooperative relationships between firms and users. While more elitist and rigid cultures (such as Sweden!) may have advantages in technology-driven innovation, it is the networking logic of user-driven innovation which can most fully release the economic potentials of the Danish egalitarian and cooperative cultural model.

Secondly, Denmark should place its bets on life quality industries. As conceptualised by the Innovation Council, life quality industries are 'ethical industries' concerned with the Maslowian 'higher needs' of self-expression and self-realization. These values are strong in Denmark (as well as the Nordic countries more generally). But according to In-

glehart's world-values surveys they are also values towards which the rest of the world is moving. As the world is gradually uplifted from 'materialist' to 'postmaterialist' values (Inglehart 1977) the global market for 'higher needs' is constantly expanding. In this sense the Danish competitive advantage is also an evolutionary one. Standing at the summit of cultural evolution, Denmark is in a perfect position to provide innovative solutions to those needs for ethics, welfare and life quality that are presently emerging among new middle classes world wide, but in which Denmark has 'a lead of decades, if not centuries' (Innovationsrådet 2005: 14).

Thirdly, the entire nation must itself be mobilized around this choice of strategy. Since in the innovation economy speed is more than ever the essence, the capacity to swiftly mobilise all national resources and energies around a competitive strategy has become a crucial competitive advantage in itself. Here most Western states are lagging compared to (quasi-) authoritarian Asian states. They simply do not have the capacity for top-down implementation of coordinated strategies that more authoritarian states do (Innovationsrådet 2004: 18). But Denmark, at least, has something even better – not an authoritarian capacity for generating change from above, but a popular capacity for generating change from below.

As evidence for this the Innovation Council cites the familiar history of Danish popular movements from the folk high school and the co-operative movements of the nineteenth century to the labour and welfare movements of the twentieth century. According to the Innovation Council these movements all bear witness to a peculiarly Danish popular capacity to 'respond to new challenges with unique collective social innovations' (2005: 39). This capacity for social innovation must be activated if Denmark is to make the transition to the innovation economy. Thus, the mobilization of Danish popular culture for purposes of competitiveness can only be realized by means of Danish popular culture itself – by means of the uniquely Danish capacities for mobilization and consensus-making. In this sense Danishness constitutes not only the cultural model to be mobilized, but also the cultural model of mobilization itself.

Danish Trust and the Trust of Danishness

If this grand narrative of Danish values as the key to Danish competitiveness was just a peculiarity of the Innovation Council, it could easily be dismissed as being of limited significance. That this is not the case is, however, evidenced by the fact that in the last few years a second and partially rival version of this narrative has been developed and promoted in Danish public debate. This second version – which is the one promoted by the Danish government, and specifically by the Prime Minister himself (Rasmussen 2004, 2005, 2006) – may not be as bold and elaborated as that of the Innovation Council, but at present it is more publicly prominent and politically consequential. Even more importantly, however, it brings out some of the gloomier and tougher aspects of this narrative of Danish culture as competitiveness. In this sense it serves to highlight something which is made invisible by the celebratory vision-speak of the Innovation Council – that is, the cultural costs of turning national values into the very population resource on which Denmark's future wealth and welfare hinge.

This second version of Danish cultural competitiveness is basically structured around two interrelated notions – *konkurrencekraft og sammenhængskraft* ('competitive power' and 'cohesive power').⁴ This conceptual pair features prominently in several of Prime Minister Rasmussen's speeches (2004, 2005, 2006) as well as in the programmatic statements of the Globalization Council (Regeringen 2005, 2006), but in neither instance it is discussed in any kind of detail. Over the last few years, however, the notion of cohesive power has been promoted and discussed abundantly in the Danish public sphere and in the following I shall therefore draw on some of the literature devoted to this concept in order to tease out the meaning of this correlation between cohesive and competitive powers.

The notion of cohesive power was originally invented in the early 1990s by then Social Democratic Minister of Social Affairs Karen Jespersen as a translation into Danish of the communitarian concept of 'social cohesion' and it was promoted in the social policies of the time as a countervailing force to the

exclusionary tendencies of the welfare state (Kristensen 2007). Even if it constituted a break with traditional social democratic approaches to welfare issues (and thus anticipated what was to become known as 'Third-Way politics'), it was still basically concerned with social equality and solidarity and in this sense it had a decidedly social democratic rather than liberal profile.

Today, however, the notion of cohesive power has been entirely appropriated by the Liberal-Conservative government. In the process it has become thoroughly enmeshed with the notion of 'Danish values' which epitomizes the current neo-nationalist agenda (Banks & Gingrich 2006) in Denmark. With the support of the far-right Danish People's Party the current Liberal-Conservative government came into power in 2001 on a wave of anti-immigrant sentiments which had been built up – and cultivated by the Progress Party and later the Danish People's Party – from the mid-1980s. In the years since 2001 this anti-immigration theme has developed into a much broader neo-nationalist platform. The primary vehicle for this has been the so-called *Kulturkamp* ('kulturkamp') launched by Prime Minister Rasmussen shortly after his landslide electoral victory as an attack on intellectuals and experts associated with the previous Social Democratic-Social Liberal government. More specifically, Prime Minister Rasmussen's attack on the 'politically correct' elite ('the arbiters of taste', as he called them) targeted a group of human-rights experts and 'multiculturalists' whose misguided 'relativism' was held responsible for laying the country open to mass immigration and Islamization (which is also why the Danish People's Party constantly compares this humanist elite to the collaborators during the German occupation of World War II).

From this stark populist dichotomy between a wholesome 'people' and an 'elite' corrupted by cultural relativism has emerged an equally stark dichotomy between those who stand firm on Danish values and those who do not. This dichotomy – even strengthened by the 2006 Mohammed Cartoon Crisis during which Prime Minister Rasmussen consistently used it to invalidate any domestic criticism of

his government – has been so successful that today the notion of 'multiculturalism' has virtually disappeared from Danish public debate – except as a term of abuse. To be sure, multiculturalism has never been very strong in Denmark where notions of territorial smallness and ethnic homogeneity have been crucial components of national identity for the last 150 years. Nevertheless, in the 1990s there was a growing recognition of some sort of multicultural society as an inevitable outcome of as well as a functional requirement of globalization. Today even this highly qualified acceptance of multiculturalism has largely vanished and been replaced by a widespread consensus around Danish values to which all political players must show their allegiance in order not to be branded as extremist.⁵

It is, however, important to stress that this obsession with Danish values must be viewed as a reassertion of cultural homogeneity, not a simple relapse into it. Or to put in Banks' and Gingrich's terms, it is indeed a neo-nationalism, not a traditional nationalism (Banks & Gingrich 2006). As in many other European cases (most conspicuously Pim Fortuyn's bohemian Dutchness [Sunier & van Ginkel 2006]) the national values currently asserted are not traditional values, but to a large extent the universalist and individualist values of liberal society – freedom of speech, gender equality, secularism, even tolerance. Furthermore, these Danish values also include solidarity and socio-economic equality and in this sense the celebration of Danish welfare society (embraced, nominally at least, even by the Liberals) constitutes a crucial dimension of Danish neo-nationalism. Finally, Danish neo-nationalism unreservedly embraces capitalist globalization. Whereas nationalism has traditionally been bound up with protected national markets (Banks & Gingrich 2006), protectionism here exclusively concerns culture, not economy. And to the extent that Danish culture is to be protected, it is not against the forces of economic globalization. On the contrary, Danish values are widely viewed as Danish assets *for* economic globalization – assets which must for this reason (also) be protected against the divisive and corrupting forces of immigration and multiculturalism.

It is this understanding of Danish values which today provides the clue to the notion of cohesive power. In contrast to the older 'social democratic' usage, cohesive power today does not primarily refer to policies of social integration and equality. Rather, it refers to a shared foundation of Danish values which ensures the integrity and functionality of the Danish social body. It is therefore also this understanding of cohesive power which underlies the present coupling between cohesive and competitive powers. In some cases the older notion of cohesive power is still discernible as when the Globalization Council assures the Danish people that cohesive power and competitive power go together – that competitiveness will not be achieved at the expense of social equality and security (Regeringen 2005: 5). But basically the two terms have become related in a different manner which does not just express a concern for social equality in the face of global competition, but more fundamentally a concern for the maintenance of Danish values as a source of Danish competitiveness. In this sense the point is not just that competitive power and cohesive power are equally important. It is, rather, that they are inseparable and strictly co-dependent. If cohesive power should be safe-guarded in the turmoil of global competition, it is because cohesive power is itself competitive power. Cohesive power is a uniquely Danish cultural resource which constitutes the backbone of Danish prosperity and welfare, and the safeguarding and protection of this national resource is therefore a matter of the highest national interest.

This understanding of cohesive power has been popularized very effectively by Prime Minister Rasmussen in a series of speeches over the last few years (2004, 2005, 2006). But the notion itself has been worked out most consistently in a book significantly entitled *De lykkelige danskere* (Happy Danes) by the above-mentioned Karen Jespersen (who has today, in an unprecedented career move, become the Welfare Minister of the Liberal-Conservative government) and the political columnist Ralf Pittelkow. While their concept of Danish cohesive power is worked out in terms of Robert Putnam's theory of 'social capital' (Putnam 2000), it is in its basic features highly

reminiscent of the Innovation Council's account of Danish cultural competencies. This applies not only to the content of Danish cohesive power, but also to the methods in terms of which it is worked out. Citing the findings of international values surveys Jespersen and Pittelkow consistently seek out the values in which Danes excel internationally as the key to defining Danish cohesive power. This proceeds through a series of steps. First, they note that in international values surveys Danes are routinely found to be the happiest population in the world. Secondly, they note that Danes are regularly found to be also the most trustful population in the world. Thirdly, these two findings are correlated so as to make trust the very foundation of Danish happiness. The reason for this is that trust – the core category of social capital theory (Putnam 2000; Svendsen & Svendsen 2006) – relieves the anxieties of social interaction. Thanks to trust people feel secure and as a result they can relax their guard and cooperate freely and for mutual benefit with each other. In this sense trust contributes to the dynamism of society as well as to the well-being of individuals.

The final step is to explain the very fact of high Danish trust. According to Jespersen and Pittelkow the explanation basically is that Danes 'hang together well' (*hænger godt sammen*, 2005: 14). They do so, more specifically, thanks to the 'strong popular community of values' (2005: 29) which characterizes Denmark as a nation. In this sense Danish trust is derived from a trust of Danish values. Much like the Innovation Council, they trace these values back to the popular movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which have given rise to a peculiar popular culture – often called *folkelighed* ('folkish-ness') in Danish – centred on the trinity of 'freedom, equality and community' (ibid. 2005: 29). As this curious mix of liberal and communitarian values suggests, Jespersen and Pittelkow basically view Danish *folkelighed* as a culture of 'communitarian individualism'. Danish culture is individualist, but this individualism is not a *laissez-faire* individualism. On the contrary, it is embedded in deeply-rooted shared values such as equality, responsibility and mutual respect. It is because Danes share these values (and know each

other to share these values) that they trust each other – and that they dare to entrust each other with the freedom thanks to which individuals can develop and flourish. In this sense the common adherence to the same set of basic moral and cultural values constitutes, paradoxically, the very precondition of a dynamic and individualist culture.

It is this cultural model which constitutes Danish cohesive power and it is therefore this cultural model which is at the root not simply of Danish happiness, but also of Danish competitive power. As Jespersen and Pittelkow themselves point out (2005: 40), one of the keys to this connection is the notion of ‘flexicurity’ which has for several years been glorified as the very epitome of Danish competitive power. The notion of flexicurity usually refers to the peculiar combination of flexibility (the hire-and-fire model) and social security (generous unemployment benefits) which is the distinguishing feature of Danish labour-market policy and which has in recent years been widely branded as a model for social and economic reform in Europe. The gist of Jespersen’s and Pittelkow’s argument is, however, that the peculiar competitive advantages of flexicurity ultimately reflect the competitive advantages of the Danish cultural model as such. In other words, Danish cohesive power is by itself flexicurity. On the one hand cohesive power consists in the sharing of strong common values. In that sense cohesive power is security. On the other hand the trust which springs from strong common values sets individuals free to experiment, collaborate and be creative (ibid. 2005: 34). In that sense cohesive power is flexibility. Thus, if flexicurity has today emerged as a unique Danish competitive advantage in the global economy it is basically because the cultural logic of Danish cohesive power is by itself flexicurity.

This account of Danish cultural competitiveness dovetails perfectly with that of the Innovation Council in the sense that it roots Danish competitiveness firmly in the history of Danish popular movements and in the cluster of values to which it has given rise. In one crucial respect, however, the two versions differ starkly. This concerns the way in which these values should be maintained and cared

for. Interestingly, this problem is nowhere raised as such by the Innovation Council. The simple reason for this is that the strategy of the Innovation Council is premised on the assumption that history is on the side of Danish values. As poverty recedes on a global scale, Danish values are progressively being embraced around the world. In this perspective concern for the future prospects of Danish values is utterly inconceivable.

In contrast, the concern for the future of Danish values is the very centrepiece of Jespersen’s and Pittelkow’s discussion of cohesive power. Even if *Happy Danes* is, according to its subtitle, ‘a book about cohesive power’, it is in fact a book about the threats to cohesive power. Following an introductory section on the notion of cohesive power, the authors devote the rest of the book to a detailed account of all the dangers threatening Danish cohesive power – from multiculturalism and the EU to excessive individualism and lack of discipline in school. At almost every page the reader is warned that ‘cohesive power is in no way secured once and for all’ (2005: 58), that it is ‘under pressure’ (2005: 24), that it must be ‘protected’ and ‘safeguarded’ (2005: 29).

This obsession with threats to cohesive power is not a pure idiosyncrasy on Jespersen’s and Pittelkow’s part. It saturates the whole Danish rhetoric of cohesive power, but more generally it can be viewed as a logical outcome of the very narrative of Danish culture as competitiveness. It constitutes the gloomier aspect of the national competitive state which disappears from view in the Innovation Council’s optimistic, if not self-congratulatory celebration of triumphant Danish values. What is brought out unambiguously in Jespersen’s and Pittelkow’s rhetoric of protection and defence is that to the extent that Danish values are turned into the source of Danish competitiveness they are simultaneously turned into a national resource of vital importance to the competitive state. As sources of future Danish wealth and welfare they constitute a national treasure which the state must take the greatest pains to uphold and secure in the interest of its own security and strength. To the extent that they unreservedly insist on this point, Jespersen and Pittelkow at least

deserve credit for their intellectual honesty. As I shall suggest in my conclusion, however, they nevertheless fail to acknowledge something equally important – the strange reversal that this securitization of Danish values performs upon the very values which it is meant to secure.

Conclusion: Trust and Distrust in Danish Cohesive Power

One of the interesting aspects of the Danish narrative of cultural competitiveness is the way it contrasts with Richard Florida's well-known account of the creative economy. Whether deliberately or not (Florida is hardly ever mentioned), the Danish folkish model of cultural competitiveness is almost symmetrically opposed to Florida's exaltation of the new cultural and economic elite, the creative class (Florida 2002). According to Florida the future belongs to creative capital, not to social capital. It is not the close bonds of community that make for economic prosperity in the new creativity-driven economy. It is rather the weak and fluctuating ties of cosmopolitan metropolises with their wide diversity of lifestyles and cultures. These – not tightly knit communities with their extensive social control – are the environments in which the potentials of creative individuals can be unleashed and developed.

The folkish Danish model is the very antipode of this bohemian and multiculturalist view of competitiveness. It is built on the premise that social capital *is* creative capital. According to this model it is precisely relations of trust, rooted in shared values, which empower individuals to cooperate and develop their creative potentials. As a national strategy, the advantages of this model should be obvious. Whereas Florida's account privileges a creative elite and offers very little comfort to the unfortunate mass of uncreative people, the Danish model roots the project of creativity and innovation in the life culture of the Danish population as a whole. It thus sidesteps the whole issue of globalization losers. At the national level at least, there can be no globalization losers. Since Danishness is Denmark's core competence in the global rush for competitiveness, all Danes have a part to play and a contribution to offer.

This point, of course, is not just a reassurance but also an obligation. It means that nobody can opt out and act as if the project of national competitiveness did not concern them. To the extent that this project is rooted in Danish values, this also implies that everybody has an obligation to defend Danish values. Here, again, Jespersen and Pittelkow are exemplary. Although their book is allegedly about trust, they are incessantly talking about personal discipline and responsibility accompanied by sanctions against trust violators (2005: 43, 64). Since Danish trust is rooted in shared Danish values, the upholding of Danish trust requires that everybody conducts themselves responsibly according to Danish values. The defence of Danish cohesive power therefore implies a meticulous policing of values to ensure that nobody jeopardizes Danish prosperity and happiness by infringing on Danish values.

In his work on 'paranoid nationalism' Ghassan Hage has pointed out that the 'culture of "worrying" [...] has now become the dominant cultural form of expressing one's belonging to the nation' (Hage 2003). Jespersen and Pittelkow provide an almost tragicomical example of this when they claim that 'we should be intensely preoccupied with questions like: Why are we so happy? What can we do to make sure that it continues in this way?' (2005: 10). By the very asking of this question, happiness is turned into its opposite – worry. Moreover, this strange reversal effected by the culture of worrying does not simply concern happiness. Rather, it applies to the cultural model of cohesive power as such. As should be clear by now, Jespersen's and Pittelkow's celebration of Danish trust is embedded within a discourse completely saturated with distrust. As a crucial national resource for wealth and welfare, trust must be staunchly defended and secured. And this cannot be done by means of trust. It can only be done by means of distrust – that is, by identifying the forces that oppose or thwart it, whether it is fundamentalism, multiculturalism or irresponsible individualism. The very same reversal can be observed in all the other Danish values around which the discourse of cohesive power gravitates. To the extent that these values must be defended, they must be defended against

somebody. By the very act of being defended they are made into boundary markers which serve to single out an outsider who opposes or obstructs them. The consequence is that the inclusive values of Danish cohesive power – equality, respect, solidarity, freedom of speech etc. – are reversed into exclusive values that serve above all to identify the enemies of Danish cohesive power.⁶ In this sense the values of cohesive power are subverted first and foremost by their own defence and Jespersen and Pittelkow may therefore be wrong when they lament that the defence of cohesive power has until recently been neglected by Danish politicians (2005: 15). Rather, it may be the case that this inattention to defending cohesive power was in fact the surest sign of its vitality.

At present the Danish discourse of trust and cohesive power seems therefore to be almost overflowed by its gloomy underside, the discourse of cultural defence and security. In his account of neo-nationalism Gingrich notes the preponderance of neo-liberal economic policies ‘counterbalanced by [...] a strong “security and protection” state for the army, police, border control and the like’ (2006: 40). This interconnection between ‘right-wing political liberalism’ and the ‘security and protection state’ applies very much to the Danish case – but it does so in a way which is even more intimate than the one suggested by Gingrich. Here the ‘security and protection state’ is not just concerned with crime or border control, but no less with the cultural values of the national population. And this protection of national values does not simply counterbalance neo-liberal economic rationality. Rather, the two dimensions, economic performance and cultural protection, tend to become indistinguishable to the extent that Danish values are viewed as the very engine of Danish competitiveness in the global economy.

In this sense the Danish case may be used to suggest that it is no longer necessarily the case that neo-nationalism displays an ‘obvious lack of economic rationality’ (Banks & Gingrich 2006: 22). The Danish coupling of cohesive and competitive powers is exactly an assertion of the economic rationality of neo-nationalism. It is hard to say how far this celebration of the economic advantages of cultural

homogeneity may go. But in recent years a substantial amount of research on the economics of trust and social capital has been produced (e.g. Knack & Keefer 1997) which is currently being appropriated for the purposes of a neo-nationalist version of neo-liberal economic reasoning.⁷ In this sense, Slavoj Žižek’s claim that ‘populism [is] progressively replacing multiculti tolerance as the spontaneous ideological supplement to the post-political administration’ (2006: 199) may also turn out to hold some truth for the relation between neo-nationalism and neo-liberal economic rationality.

Notes

- 1 As when the American Council of Competitiveness declares that ‘[t]he key to America’s future success [...] is to remember who we are’ (Council of Competitiveness 2004: 9).
- 2 Huset Mandag Morgen is according to its web site (<http://mm.dk> – accessed September 24, 2008) ‘Scandinavia’s biggest independent think tank’. Since 1989 it has issued a highly influential *Monday Morning Weekly* that seeks to provide decision-makers in business as well as in the public sector with strategic knowledge of emerging economic, social and political challenges. To the extent that it addresses itself to the Danish political and economic elite, it should come as no surprise that the political stance of Huset Mandag Morgen is decidedly pro-capitalist. But it is so in a way which is simultaneously to the ‘right’ and to the ‘left’ of the Liberal-Conservative government. It is to the right in the sense that it is significantly more market-oriented than the government. Thus it wants private companies to get much more involved in providing welfare services. The reason for this, however, is not the presumed wastefulness of the public sector, but rather that welfare services are a Danish competitive asset which have to be marketized if they are to be exploited on the global market. On the other hand, Huset Mandag Morgen is to the ‘left’ in the sense that it propagates an anti-nationalist and world-embracing version of Danish values more in line with the Danish social liberal (*kulturradikale*) tradition. Thus, in 2006, as a response to the Mohammed Cartoon Crisis – in clear contrast to the government’s stance of ‘standing firm on Danish values’ – Huset Mandag Morgen initiated a high-profile international project called ‘Co-existence of Civilisations’.
- 3 I use ‘benchmarking’ here in the broad sense of ‘tech-

niques of systematic comparison to identify and copy winning solutions within particular fields of activity'. Of course, not all of these would technically qualify as benchmarking.

- 4 This conceptual pair was originally invented by the predecessor of the Innovation Council, the National Competencies Council (Kompetencerådet 1999: 22). In the reports of the Innovation Council it has, however, largely disappeared. The reason for this may be that since then the notion of cohesive power has – as I explain below – become much more politically charged. It should be added that the 'official' translation of *sammenhængskraft* is simply 'cohesion' (Regeringen 2006: 7). In order to keep the symmetry with competitive power – and to underline the performative character of the notion – I translate it here as 'cohesive power'.
- 5 As has happened to the Social Liberal Party, formerly the epitome of the middle in Danish politics.
- 6 The clearest expression of this is probably the poster campaign for 'Danish values' launched by the Danish People's Party in 2007. All accompanied by the text 'we stand firm on our Danish values' these posters each highlighted a single word: 'freedom of speech', 'tolerance', '(gender) equality' (*ligestilling*), 'solidarity', 'permissiveness' (*frisind*) and 'diligence'. It would be hard to imagine more implausible campaign slogans than these completely abstract values. That they are, in fact, highly effective campaign slogans testifies to the degree to which these, by themselves uncontroversial, values have been turned into codenames for their opposites, the forces threatening them – 'freedom of speech' for 'multiculturalist self-censorship', 'tolerance' for 'Muslim fanaticism', '(gender) equality' for 'Muslim oppression of women' etc. This came out unambiguously when, in the run-up to the general election a few months later, the Danish People's Party re-cycled the campaign, this time making explicit the rhetorical structure of the previous campaign. Thus, two posters stated respectively that 'Tolerance is Danish, fanaticism is not' and that 'Freedom of speech is Danish, censorship is not'. The posters are available on the web site of the Danish People's Party: www.danskfolkeparti.dk/Annoncer.asp. Accessed September 22, 2008.
- 7 At present there is much enthusiasm among Danish conservative bloggers (such as monokultur.dk) about a recent article by Robert Putnam (2007). Here Putnam seems to conclude – grudgingly – that ethnic and cultural diversity is harmful to social trust. Since he has argued forcefully in earlier works that trust is crucial to economic performance, this would seem to imply that cultural homogeneity is an economic advantage. Putnam, however, evades this conclusion by arguing that in the long run diversity will give rise to new forms of trust – a conclusion which is of course dismissed by

such conservative bloggers as a sign of his lingering political correctness.

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- Søren Christensen is Associate Professor of Ethnology at the SAXO Institute, University of Copenhagen. His main research interests concern political culture in Southeast Asia and Western Europe. His current work deals with populism, more specifically with the (im)possibility of 'embodying the people'. A recent publication is "A Fair, Not Welfare Society". Velfærd, overlevelse og race i Singapore' in Thomas Højrup & Klaus Bolving (eds.), *Velfærdssamfund – velfærdsstaters forsvarsform?* (2007, København: Museum Tusulanums Forlag). (schrist@hum.ku.dk)