UNIVERSITETET I AGDER

# UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSITION OF AMBASSADORS: THE CASES OF THE FIVE NORDIC COUNTRIES

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**ABSTRACT**

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The transition process between one leader to another has profound implications for an organizational well functioning and survival and must be therefore carefully managed. The transition can allow for a smooth start of a leader's tenure or lead to potentially difficult situations. Few academic studies are looking at the transition of public managers and none looking at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), namely, at the transition between ambassadors.

A key function of the MFA, which is implemented primarily through its embassies, is to establish and preserve good relationships with other countries -their societal and economic actors, as well as helping nationals located abroad. The MFA relies to a considerable extent on the ambassadors to lead and manage the embassies. Ambassadors' transition occurs on a regular base, every two to four years, and they are therefore faced rather frequently with the challenge of acclimating themselves quickly at their new location. Quite surprisingly, however, scholarly research has not explored specifically on this transition process so far.

Therefore, the goal of this thesis is to examine the transitions of ambassadors of the five Nordic European countries and the forces that shape them, by focusing in particular on the most challenging aspect of transferring context specific knowledge and context specific networks. The study does so by describing the role and responsibilities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the host embassy, and the ambassador, and analyzing the elements shaping the transition process through the lenses of new-institutional and bounded-rational perspectives in organizational theory. From interviews with current ambassadors, HR directors at the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and personnel of embassies, this is the first study to investigate this topic, which lies at the junction of the studies on diplomacy and organizational research.

The results show that Iceland and Sweden have a very formal transition process, whereas Norway and Denmark rely on a mix between formal steps and personal initiatives. The transition of Finnish ambassadors is solely based on their experience and initiatives. The results show that the transition process of ambassadors is mostly consistent with a bounded rational perspective on organizations.

Keywords: transition, ambassadors, embassy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, job rotation, succession, transfer of social capital, Nordic, Nordic country

*The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin Originality Check service.*

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## 1. Introduction

This thesis explores the transition of ambassadors from the European Nordic countries and conceives ambassadors' transition as a case of transition process between organizational leaders.

Bilateral relations between countries are predominantly structured around diplomatic missions, namely, embassies and consulates (Malone, Greenstock, & Goff, 2013). The people responsible to manage these diplomatic missions are, with a few exceptions, ambassadors. An ambassador is part of the diplomatic staff sent by a country to another one to manage the daily relations between the two countries and officially represent his/her country. The role of an ambassador is extremely complex; it encompasses both rather routinely tasks such as the gathering of new knowledge, the representation of the country into official events, the management of the consular services as well as the development of the creation and the maintaining of good relationships with the destination country officials, business leaders, scholars, cultural influencers, politicians, and others. In other words, the role of an ambassador is not a merely bureaucratic one but is instead an organizational leader tout court.

A critical aspect in the life of any organization is the transition (succession) process in the apical positions. A failure may have dramatic consequences for an organization. As William Bridges (2003, p.5) claims, a transition is a process that begins with an ending and ends with a beginning. How to navigate correctly between the ending and the new beginning and the preparation of this phase is crucial. Wasserman (2003) states that the CEO succession is such a pivotal moment of the organization's direction and performance, that an unsuccessful transition could be very costly or even fatal (Wasserman, 2003). As a matter of fact, in any organization, whether it is family-run, a multinational company or a ministry, NGOs, sports organizations, schools, government offices, hospitals, as well as Nations and Kingdoms, one of the critical moments in its lifespan – and possibly the most critical moment - is the transition (or succession[1]) from one leader to another. The examples of transition management are often the ones that climax up to a dramatic point that captures the public's attention in business or popular press (Gabarro, 1987, p.2). However, while the transition or succession process is a crucial event in organizational life, yet, it is still one of the

[1] In this thesis, I will use the term transition to talk about the transition or succession. Succession is defined as "a process through which companies plan for the future transfer of ownership and/or top management" (Ip & Jacobs, 2006). Transition is defined as the process of maintaining and acquiring the strategic, operational, and cultural aspects and knowledge as one leader passes the mantle of authority to a successor. That process spans the steps and events from the acceptance by the leader of the company's offer to the point that a critical mass of followers assigns their loyalty to her as the established leader (Ciampa & Dotlich, 2015, p.6). Most scholars and practitioners use both terms indifferently, hence I will use the term transition to facilitate the understanding.

least studied organizational processes (Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008) and transitions are not necessarily problematic.

Most scholars agree that a transition is not a single event, nor a series of isolated that only occur between the moment the incumbent leaves and the appointed arrives (Jarrell & Pewitt, 2007). Preparing the transition consists – among others – in developing protocols at the core of the strategic planning of the organization, which aims for leadership development features aligned with the organization's goals and objectives (Jarrell & Pewitt, 2007). Studies of leader transition have mostly focused on how the new incumbent should behave and what should be his/her actions to prepare for the arrival, while – quite surprisingly - there has been a less scientific focus on how an organization prepares and operationalizes the transition (Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008).

There are multiple magnifying glasses through which one can see and analyze a transition. One can look at it at the personal level, putting the individual at the core of the story in a kind of a heroic script. One can look at the organization level, putting the focus on the organization and how it organizes the transition of its leaders. On the organizational level, one could focus on the cultural elements of the transition like a transition between a leader that comes from one country to a leader that comes from another and someone else could focus on the institutional aspects of the transition.

On the individual level, the transition process is not a recent topic in the academic literature. Struggles and complexities in transitions have been addressed by scientific research, but also in religious texts and literature, such as in the power dispute between David and Saul or Shakespeare's King Lear (Ciampa and Watkins, 1999). This process is dramatic because there is a clear divide between the feelings and emotions the outgoing leader and the incoming one feel. For the latter, there is excitement and a promise of a coming-to-age moment that will allow the individual to shine into the organization. For the former, it is a moment of reflection about the passage of time, of doubting what has been done and questioning the next steps ahead (Ciampa and Watkins, 1999). It can bear a positive or a negative connotation depending on the circumstances.

The story of the transition is not only a story of the individual accessing a new role and another one leaving his/her position. It is also a story of how well an organization is structured or prepared to face challenges. Talking about the transition in businesses, Keller and Meaney (2018, p.2) mention that "by the nature of the role, a new senior leader's action or inaction will significantly influence the course of the business, for better or for worse". According to Keller and Meaney (2018), organizations do not sufficiently emphasize the transition of their leaders through preparation, training, guidelines, or processes that could help smooth the change. The consequences of a failed transition are, among others, less engagement, lower performance, high attrition risk, loss of credibility, loss of partners and stakeholders.

### 1.1 Challenges in the transition process

Why is transition often challenging? In this section, I will explore the reasons why the transition process and especially the transfer of context-specific information and context-specific network is very important but also problematic.

A conceptual distinction can be done about the elements that enable someone to perform well in a given role and that identify the most central and challenging elements to be transferred during a transition process. Most jobs require to a different extent a general knowledge, context-specific knowledge, and the relational network.

By general knowledge is meant the knowledge, skills, competencies that do not have to be transferred because the new incumbent is expected to be already possessing them, either through training and practice, and that work in a similar way across different contexts. For example, being a dressmaker requires training and experience, but the new employee is expected to be possessing the qualifications and be able to work efficiently without too many challenges in the transfer from one factory to another. Hence, apart from learning the new pattern and adapting to the sewing machine, there are not many challenges in the transfer.

By context-specific knowledge means knowledge that cannot be learned through training or experience. It is the knowledge and the data that is specifically created or learned in a specific context, location or posting. This knowledge facilitates the actions of the individuals within the environment (Coleman, 1990). The incumbent leaders (or workers) have acquired their knowledge mostly through informal on-the-job experience (Peet, 2012) as there is "no formal discipline, theoretical base or frames of reference from which to draw upon, the tacit knowledge of these leaders is especially difficult to identify, retrieve and share with others" (Peet, 2012). For example, an automobile factory engineer may take months to adapt to the specific features, conditions, and details of the assembly line if this engineer moves to change companies from an automaker to another. Transferring context-specific knowledge may require additional training or communication between the old and the new incumbent – or supporting staff - during the transition phase.

Finally, most working roles are not performed in isolation but require interaction and collaboration with other people, in and outside the organization. For some roles, developing a good network of relationships, gaining a central network position, is crucial for performing a good job or even a key goal of their job. The context-specific network is the relations and network position that are developed over time in a specific context. It allows for the survival and the functioning of an organization because it creates an environment based on trust, cooperation and a sense of collective action (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). As Polanyi (1966) describes, it is also entirely relational and embedded in people's responses to different contexts and conditions. For example, a travelling salesperson, when changing to another region, may not have all the business connections and the network to facilitate his/her work. Hence, that travelling salesperson must work to recreate a valuable business network that will allow him//her to work efficiently.

For a successful transition – but from the individual and the organizational perspective - both the context-specific knowledge and the context-specific network should be integrated into the transition process management. The goal is to preserve them by "making individual knowledge available within the organization, which then becomes organizational knowledge" (Dalkir, 2011, p.100).

Since the success of the transition is not only defined on the individual level but also on the organizational level and the latter has a large share of responsibility organizing and managing the transition. The transfer of context-specific knowledge and network-relational connections can often make or break the transition of a leader who may have all the capacities and qualities but is lacking the organization's support in transferring these important elements. The potential losses like losing connections with some customers, investors, political connections can hinder the chances of success of a new incumbent and a loss of knowledge, relationships, and position for the organization (Steier, 2001).

In the case of ambassadors, they are employed by the Ministry responsible for international relations of the country, often called the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). They are generally being asked to transfer once every 2-3 years to another location, a transition that is organized by the MFA, by the embassy and by them personally.

If the MFA wants to smoothen the transition for all its ambassadors who are moving around the same time of the year, it needs clear processes and strategies to manage all the moving. Also, most ambassadors have spent years in the Ministry, as analysts, training for the job before starting positions as ambassadors in a foreign country (Hocking & Spence, 2002). They know the general values and practices of the job and once they start as an ambassador for the first time, there are no surprises regarding the tasks and responsibilities. However, they must receive the context-specific knowledge and relational network to continue the development of links and projects between the home country and the host country.

### 1.2 Research Aims

The aim of the thesis is to contribute to the understanding of the transition of ambassadors using the case of Nordic countries' ambassadors in Canada and France. More specifically, to understand the roles of the MFA, the host embassy, and the ambassador in the transition, whether the existing processes facilitate the transfer of the context-specific knowledge, network, and relationships, and to analyze the factors shaping how the transition is organized in every Nordic country.

To understand the context in which the transition is studied, it is important to define the tasks, responsibilities, and connections of the ambassador and specify which of them are generalized between embassies and which are context-specific. Making that distinction allows us to understand why certain aspects are formalized and others not, why certain aspects are shaped the way they are, and more specifically to identify the elements, whether they are networks, connections, or knowledge, of the transition that could become problematic if not properly transferred between the incumbent and the appointed ambassador.

In sum, the thesis explores two main questions that will be researched. First, how the transition of ambassadors is managed? More specifically, how are the transition of context-specific information, and the transition of context-specific relations and networks organized? Second, what factors affect how the transition is organized (rational or isomorphic processes, Nordic traditions)?

Researching how is the transition of ambassadors managed will allow us to understand the differences in the transition for each Nordic country and identify the key components that affect the processes in place. It will also allow us to understand the formal and informal aspects of the transition.

Second, exploring what factors affect how the transition is organized will shed light on the strategic, historical, and institutional factors that have led to the process in place and what are the steps that the MFA has thought of when designing its processes. It will also allow us to understand what are the steps that are put in place due to the individual experience of the ambassadors.

### 1.3 Personal motivations for the choice of the topic

In the spring of 2020, I had the opportunity to discuss with the Norwegian honorary consul in Québec City, Canada, about her role and experience. After nearly 20 years, she was stepping down, but her replacement could not and would not be announced yet because of the sanitary crisis. At the time, there was a lot to discuss how the transition of honorary consuls was organized and even more so, there would be a lot to say about the transition of ambassadors. Moreover, around the same time, I was discussing with my former work manager, then the vice-president of a utility company who announced to me she was going to change to a new organization. She told me that even if she knew all the basic elements of transitioning for a leader, there would still be questions left unanswered on the process and the degree of transferability of non-managerial knowledge.

Reflecting on these discussions, I realized looking at how a transition process is planned, organized, and managed would be interesting due to its complexity. More particularly, looking at the transition of the context-specific knowledge and networks seems particularly insightful to understand the formal organizational processes in place and the informal processes between leaders.

The idea of focusing on the transition of ambassadors was quickly chosen because of the nature of the position, the ambassador being employed by a single entity but moving around the world to different countries in embassies that have the same objectives and goals but differ in the setting.

Moreover, I decided to choose Nordic countries' ambassadors because of the relative similarities in the Nordic countries' bureaucratic organization (Bjurstrøm & Christensen, 2017, p.149). Also, the Nordic countries have a long history of collaboration and adopting each other's policies, hence there might be some similarities between processes that need to be researched.

In this study, I want to outline the criticalities in the transition process of higher management leaders due to the importance of these moments in the life of an organization. Using the case of Nordic countries' ambassadors will allow us to understand the processes, the critical moments and the transfer of the knowledge and networks unique in this position.

### 1.4 Outline of the study

As mentioned earlier, this research looks at five case studies on the transition of ambassadors of Nordic countries. The study is therefore structured to first provide the diplomatic, managerial and theoretical context of the study. It then zooms in on the empirical data and then proceeds to its analysis.

The second chapter of the study explores the concept of transition of a leader, then investigates essential concepts in the diplomatic field, namely the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Foreign Service, the Vienna Conventions and the Protocol Office, the embassy, and the ambassador. This chapter aims at laying the basis for the reader to understand how the diplomatic world is structured and what are the main roles and responsibilities of each actor.

The third chapter of the study first introduces the two main questions of the study. It then proceeds to talk about the management of embassies. Next, there is a dive into three fields of the literature on transition: organizational practices of a transition, the transition of expatriates, and the transition of knowledge.

The fourth chapter on the theoretical understanding first expounds on the important elements making a transition. Then, there is a definition of context-specific information and network, and a definition of the theory used to analyze the empirical data on the transfer of context-specific information and network. Drawing from the latter, there is a conceptualization of the transfer of context-specific information and network. Moreover, there is a dive into the factors shaping the transition process with two different overarching theories: the rational model of decision-making, and the new institutional theory and isomorphism. To finish it off, there is an effort to conceptualize why transitions are shaped the way they are.

The fifth chapter focuses on the methodology used and it is detailing the research design. Then, there is an explanation of the choice of case countries and there are some elements to contextualize their situation. Next, the data collection process and its steps are detailed followed by a delineation of the problems and limitations of the study. The type of content analysis is then described, and the chapter is concluded with a contextualization of the study in the broader Nordic environment focusing on the Nordic bureaucratic system, the variety of Nordic management styles, and the Nordic cooperation.

The sixth chapter explores each Nordic country's transition of its ambassadors detailing the role and responsibilities of each actor. There is an analysis of each country's transition in relation to the research questions. The chapter ends with a comparison of the transitions pinpointing the similarities and differences between the countries and trying to find some recurring elements.

Finally, the seventh chapter concludes the study by answering the research problem and summarizing the key findings. Then, it identifies theoretical contributions and proposes recommendations. The limitations of the study are explored and proposals for further research are put forward.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Explaining the concepts of transition

The transition of leaders has been a crucial moment within the life of any social structure, in all periods of history, sparking controversies, violence, and treason but also opportunities, peace agreements and positive evolutions. This is a pivotal moment in any organization's history and an important moment for an individual transitioning into a leadership position or leaving a leadership position for another. It is paramount to look at the transition of higher management leaders because they have extensive power and as caretaker of the corporate purpose, their capacity "to make sense of the business environment and to craft and articulate the mission and the strategy are central to long-term success" (Bower, 2007, p.3). Hence, focusing on how they transition is very important to understand the successes or failures of some mandates of leaders because a well-designed and operationalized transition puts the leader in the best conditions to succeed.

There are two main terms used to describe this period which are transition and succession, and both terms are used indifferently by most scholars. Each author and scholar have his/her definition of a transition. Ciampa and Dotlich (2015, p.24) describe broadly the transition as "a general system made up of individual, interrelated steps where reaction to one step affects the nature of those that follow." Bridges (2009, p.3) talks about the "process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the details of the new situation that the change brings about". Gabarro (1987, p. 2) describes the transition as "the organizational and interpersonal work necessary to take charge of their organizations". He adds that there are situational and personal factors influencing how managers take charge that also need to be studied. This thesis adopts a definition that combines different elements from the various sources, namely as the *process spanning a certain amount of time and by which an organization and an individual transfer the leadership of the organization from one incumbent to another*. This definition puts the focus on many features. First, the transition is seen not as an event, but as a process that typically takes time (Jarrell & Pewitt, 2007). It is important to reaffirm the importance of the time length because according to several sources, many organizations still consider the transition as an event and not as a series of events structured by processes and a logical order (Jarrell & Pewitt, 2007). Second, the transition cannot be a single event with a single handover of a key and voilà. There are instead multiple things to consider and to transfer such contact persons, context-specific knowledge, network embedding and knowledge. Third, both the organization and the individual have responsibilities and a role to play in the transition. The responsibility cannot be placed on the sole individual transitioning because the organization, whether the transition is internal or external, needs to prepare the leader with the most context-specific processes and information, hence placing the responsibility on the leader only is disempowering the organization from his/her role. Also, the degree by which the transition is planned by the organization determines the degree by which the leader must plan his/her transition.

## 2.2 Diplomatic concepts

### *2.2.1 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Foreign Service*

As government structures and international relations have developed heavily and complexified in the $19^{th}$ and $20^{th}$ centuries, the need for carrying events and developing connections between countries has risen dramatically for foreign relations practitioners (Greenstock, 2013). Such international relations were taken care of by the royalty and some close advisers, but governments and public administration had the will to systematize the relations between the state and others and help make sense of the worldwide events (Greenstock, 2013) and this is the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Typically, the MFA is organized on two bases. The first being based on interests such as economic affairs, trade policies, development aid, security, environment policies, public diplomacy, or services to the citizens abroad. The second is based on geographical locations such as the Latin and South America Department or the East European Department. The organization of the MFA combines both structures which are managed at the top by experienced civil servants (Greenstock, 2013). On a broad scope, the job of those working at the MFA is three-folds. First, they must make sense of the world events, the economic trends, the cultural evolutions, the political debates and other occurrences or transformations, analyze them, comment on them, and report them to the government. The quality of the people working at the MFA will often determine the acuteness of the analysis and the reports produced for the benefit of the government or even businesses. Second, they are the ones contacting other states and advocating for the country's interests whether they are political, economic, cultural, societal, environmental, etc. Hence, the ministry also takes part in defining the national strategic interests. Third, they provide services to the country's nationals living or travelling in other countries (Greenstock in Malone et al., 2013).

Part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the Foreign Service department who is the department responsible for the officers and representatives posted abroad. The Foreign Service prepares diplomats, most notably, ambassadors to live abroad. Malone et al. (2013, p.13) describes the unique lifestyle through which ambassadors go through: "The preparedness to live and work in a series of changing environments, normally with a family, marks the career as different from that of a public servant at home and most countries have established a distinct cadre, with its conditions of service and training, for this purpose". The Foreign Service is the department responsible for operationalizing the MFA's actions outside the borders, but in recent decades, the Foreign Service departments have been under severe scrutiny due to the increased democratization and speed of information which makes the utility of the spread of the foreign service officials and diplomats being questioned.

In that context, some countries have signed agreements to either share embassies, or for a country's (country X) embassy to be responsible for another country's (Country Y) nationals in a country (Country Z). Hence, there are shared costs that reduce the pressure on Foreign Services. For example, the Nordic countries have signed an agreement that allows every Nordic countries' national to use the services of another Nordic country's embassy if his/her country does not have an embassy in the country he/she is in (Norden, 2014). For instance, an Icelandic national with a problem requiring consular help in Morocco could turn to the Norwegian embassy in Rabat.

In general terms, the MFA sets the agenda and the priority while the foreign service prepares for and organizes life abroad in diplomatic missions.

### *2.2.2 The Vienna Conventions and the Protocol Office*

To manage international relations and make sure the representations of countries were operating under the same rules, the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (VCDR) was adopted in 1961 and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (VCCR) was adopted in 1963 by the United Nations (Wouters, Duquet, Meuwissen, 2013). The VCDR codified modern international relations whereas the VCCR laid minimum standards that each country must observe concerning their relations with diplomatic missions on their ground. The VCDR also defines the privileges, immunities, and responsibilities that the diplomatic personnel enjoys (Wouters et al., 2013).

Both treaties also talk about the responsibilities of the receiving state and each country has a protocol that codifies the arrival of diplomatic personnel, their security, the etiquette, and the logistics. This Protocol Office (or Office of Protocol) is also responsible for delivering diplomatic visas and answer questions of the embassy and of the diplomatic personnel (Global Affairs Canada, 2021). The office is responsible for most practicalities around the arrival of ambassadors and is the main contact office for embassies when diplomatic personnel is transitioning.

The VCDR lists the responsibilities of the diplomatic mission: representing the sending state in the receiving state, negotiating with the receiving state, protecting the interests of the sending state and its nationals in the receiving state, diagnosing information and development in the receiving state and send it back to the sending state and promoting business, cultural, societal and political relations between the sending and the receiving state.

### *2.2.3 The embassy*

To put it simply, the embassy is the group of people representing a state in another country (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021a). It is where the official representative of the sending state works. It is often confused with the building that houses the embassy which is called the chancery (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021b). It is in the country's capital of the receiving state. We can distinguish it from the consulate which is not located in the capital city of the receiving country. This is where the offices of the consul are (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021c).

The country and the context in which the ambassador works, and lives are very important and have consequences on the resources and the personnel available and its responsibilities. For example, the ambassador of Sweden in Washington may have substantially more resources and personnel than the one posted in Bhutan. However, since there are more available resources in Washington, the responsibilities of the ambassador may be less varied because there are many people employed to help and to facilitate the work and the management. However, in Thimphu, the ambassador may not rely on a large team to help to accomplish the mission and the set objectives.

The resources that are available to the ambassador are part of a larger network of offices and buildings that are diplomatic missions. These missions have not been created with the arrival of the nation-state bureaucracy in the late 20th century. Malone (2013, p.1) mentions that "The earlier form of temporary diplomatic mission, often with a single purpose of communication or negotiation, developed into a more permanent, resident arrangement in the 15th century among Italy's many, often intensely commercially-minded, polities, spreading north thereafter". The will for a balance of power and competitive advantage led to the growth in the number of resident ambassadors (Malone, 2013). With the advent of the Weberian bureaucracy and after the decolonization process of the 1940s, 50s and 60s, the number of diplomatic missions has grown very rapidly. There is a variety of diplomatic missions such as consulates, permanent missions, or trade offices but the one most recognized and present around the world is the embassy. It is led by an ambassador appointed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and serves multiple purposes. Also, the difference between an embassy and a consulate resides in the roles and responsibilities and their location. The embassy is in the capital city of the host country whereas the consulate is located in the other major cities, but also, the consulates "are primarily preoccupied with trade and other economic matters, as well as the welfare of citizens of the sending country" (Malone, 2013, p.2). Embassies have more activities and are "responsible for state-to-state relationships, with accreditation covering the whole country" (Malone, 2013, p.2) and are often engaged in a large variety of activities listed in the upcoming paragraphs (Malone, 2013).

First, it is the office responsible for political relations with the host country and it is the embassy personnel who is responsible for reporting on political, economical, societal news or projects. Second, the embassy is responsible for creating a form of goodwill through positive projects, advocacy initiatives or the development of cultural links. Third, the embassy pushes the economic interests of the country in the host country through the support of business development or participation in a Chamber of commerce. Fourth, it also aims at promoting trade between countries and helping in the development assistance. Fifth, it also coordinates visa requests and migration matters and sixth, it is the government office responsible for dealing with the official relations with the home government of this country's nationals, in the host country. Finally, the embassy may also host security and intelligence initiatives and personnel to report back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Intelligence service of the home country. Of course, all embassies do not place the same value and do not allocate the same resources for each role depending on the resources available of this country and the priorities of the MFA. With the rapid growth of information technologies in the past decades, some priorities and responsibilities of the embassies have evolved due to the decreasing cost of accessing foreign country's information which has been virtually eliminated, a trend explained in the next section (Cornut, 2015).

### *2.2.4 The ambassador*

The ambassador is an official living in a foreign country who is the senior representative of his/her own country (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021). The ambassador works in the capital city of the foreign country he/she is posted in whereas the consul works in another important city of the foreign country he/she is posted in. The consul is an "official chosen by a government to live in a foreign city, to take care of people from the official's own country who travel or live there, and to protect the trade interests of that government" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021d).

As a part of a public administration not located in the home country and with distinct international rules that regulate its functioning, the literature about international relations and diplomacy focuses more on the political role of the diplomats than on the actual management of the embassy. The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 itemizes the provisions regulating the status of the embassy and its personnel. The complexity of the management of this branch of public administration is more complicated because of these regulations and because the embassy is at the junction of politics, foreign capital attraction, business development and public administration.

The tasks of the ambassador are numerous, and their numbers often depend on the size of the embassy. Indeed, an embassy can be relatively small, which would make the ambassador more versatile in the daily tasks and responsibilities he or she must take charge of. Also, an embassy can house multiple dozens or even hundreds of people working there so the variety of tasks is more limited because there are so many people taking charge of these tasks.

It is important to correctly define the role of the ambassador and how his/her mandate is defined. In general terms, the ambassador has two main roles, the first being a diplomat responsible for relations with the host government and the second which has a more internal focus, representing the responsibility for the management of the embassy (Dorman, S., 2011, p. 64).

First, he/she is responsible for creating links, networks and promoting the cooperation between the country of the ambassador and the destination country. The ambassador needs to find ways to mediate issues between stakeholders at home and abroad (Constantinou, 2013). He/she also creates knowledge about the destination country and analyzes the issues in the latter in politics, economy, culture, etc. The ambassador is responsible for offering services to the citizens of his/her country in the destination country. The ambassador is also responsible, in times of crisis, for assisting the citizens of the country it is representing. For example, all the embassies were busy in early 2020 due to the COVID-19 situation because many travellers or students or families wanted to come back home, hence there were lots of demands for help and assistance.

On the first role, which is concerned about the diplomacy aspect, "the present-day field diplomat is first and foremost an information gatherer who writes dispatches back to her foreign ministry" (Cornut, 2015, p.388). Their role is to not only represent the home country in another country but also, produce an important amount of data and information for the benefit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and they "remain primarily knowledge producers, using their craft to understand and represent a situation as well as possible" (Cornut, 2015). This role is the most known and discussed role because it is the one, we associate the role with. There is a problem arising from this role which is how to transfer these pieces of information, bits of knowledge, and networks from the outgoing to the incoming ambassador. Indeed, depending on the personality of the ambassador, he/she can develop some personal connections with business leaders, scholars or politicians and these personal connections can make a difference in securing contracts or developing cultural links for example. However, the question is how does the ambassador transfer these personal connections and networks to his/her successor? The latter facilitating the transfer because the tasks are generally the same in every position and the training has provided the ambassadors with the knowledge and ability to perform these tasks. Both these scripts are part of the ambassador identity which raises many questions on the transferability of some elements and to what extent the ambassador position should be considered part of the bureaucracy or have a personal role in the development of the embassy's activities.

On a historic note, due to multiple factors such as the decline of the prestige of the role, diplomats' role and perception of them has evolved and they may no longer be seen by everyone as essential actors of a country's image (Malone, 2012). This is also caused by the relatively free cost of information and the internet rendering an immense quantity of information easily accessible from all around the world. Moreover, due to the increasing use of new technologies of communication, ambassadors must master new skills like social media communication (Malone, 2012), for which the negative consequences of bad communication can be detrimental or the positive consequences of good communication, very profitable.

The ambassador has not only a role of representation but also a role of a manager, namely, to plan, organize and control, as well as lead their workforce (Joyce Muthani Mbaya, 2017). The ambassador manages the embassy backed up by professionals handling everything from press briefings to security (Dorman, S., 2011, p. 9). However, "diplomats acknowledge that aspects of their work are bureaucratic and accept the factual correctness of being termed bureaucrats" (Neumann, 2005, p.80). At the same time, there is increasing pressure for evaluations and reports on day-to-day activities for all employees (Neumann, 2005) which puts more managerial pressure on the ambassador and gives more information to report to the home-based Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Adding to the task is the personnel management and there are two types of people working on the premises. The diplomatic staff is nearly always from the sending country and the local staff, who are often responsible for a large degree of the success an embassy can claim, because of their local knowledge of how things get done (Malone, 2012). This mix of personnel allows reducing the risks of what Hedley Bull describes as "diplomats often have difficulties going beyond short-term evolution of the political situation and sometimes become disconnected from the local population, influencing their analyses" (Cornut, 2015, p.388). On that second role, the same question about the transferability of connections, networks, and context-specific knowledge, as the lead manager of this administration the ambassador needs to be able to transfer to his/her successor all the necessary information and do so in a manner that reduces the probabilities of mistakes. He or she must apply the processes put in place by the MFA and make the embassy personnel operationalize the tasks listed in the processes.

There are two types of appointments for diplomats. The first one, which is the rarest one in Western countries, is the political appointment. In this case, the Minister of Foreign Affairs appoints for political purposes an individual often closely linked to the political party in control of the government or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These appointments can be motivated by the will to reward an individual for their help or by the foresight that an individual not currently employed by the MFA could be a better fit in some postings due to that person's political or economical connections (Haglund, 20215). Thus, the individual needs to receive some kind of accelerated training to prepare him/her for the distinct function and responsibilities of the ambassador's function (Haglund, 2015). The second type of appointment is internal: the ambassadors are appointed after many years working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), hence they are properly trained to take charge when appointed ambassadors (Tsai, 2020). Also, before being named ambassador, most of them would have already spent time abroad in embassies working as analysts or having managerial positions below the ambassador. Therefore, they have been learning by doing and by seeing how the ambassador works and the tasks he or she must accomplish (Tsai, 2020). Learning these tasks whether by experience or by proper training in the MFA headquarters is something rather straightforward when the HR department is well-organized. Nevertheless, these pieces of knowledge are not the only parts that need to be learned to adapt to a new position of ambassador. A large part of the critical information required for an ambassador to perform in the country in which he/she is posted to, comes from the networks and the relationships that are context-specific. These context-specific networks and relationships and how, in some countries, the personality and the connections of the ambassador can provide vital support in the development of the bilateral relations, is an important aspect to transfer when the ambassador who had all these connections leave for another posting and another one comes in. David Malone (2013) expresses the fact that making connections is a vital necessity of the job to fill your capital of personal goodwill. This capital then generates dividends when hard debates are on the agenda or circumstances develop negatively. The most successful diplomats in negotiations are those cultivating others.

## 3. Literature review

To understand the transition of ambassadors and how it is organized, some key actors need to be correctly defined and contextualized. In this section, three actors will be defined and contextualized to form a concept map. The purpose of the concept map is to illustrate the key concepts and their relation to each other as well as their role in the transition process of ambassadors. Only the concepts that are deemed conceptually important for the development and understanding of the studied phenomenon will be described in this chapter. Other concepts to understand the theory will be described in the theoretical part.

Focusing on the actors involved in the transition, even though both the embassy and the ambassador bear some responsibilities, those responsibilities are the ones that were given to those actors by the MFA. Since it is the MFA that sets the procedures and processes, the degree by which the ambassador and the embassy can make his/her own decisions and contribute to the transition process depends on the MFA's decisions. Therefore, most of the theory that will be explored in the next chapter will be focusing on the MFA's role as the organization that puts everything in place whether it has a very prescriptive approach to the transition or a hands-off approach where the ambassador's experience determines the way the transition is handled.

Two main questions need to be asked when talking about the transition process of an ambassador. First, how is the transition managed by the three levels of actors which are the MFA, the embassy, and the ambassador? On this question, there is a descriptive focus on the interactions between the actors, the roles and responsibilities of each actor and their tasks to complete the transition. More specifically, how is the transition of context-specific relations and networks is organized? On this question, there is also a descriptive focus on the processes in place to transition this data and these connections to the appointed ambassador. Second, why is the transition process organized the way it is? This question needs to be analyzed with many different outlooks whether they stem from organizational focus to cultural background, to individual choices and rational decisions. These two questions are distinct and require distinct outlooks and theoretical contents to explore.

To answer the first question, it is the empirical data that will give some clear answers to the question, but some theoretical elements that will be looked into to have an idea of what the transition process could look like in the Nordic countries MFAs' context. Theoretical elements such as the bureaucracy, the steps of the transition, the Nordic countries' collaboration or some more personal traits of leaders will be looked at in the upcoming sections. Moreover, there will be an exploration of knowledge transition theories.

To answer the second question, the theories will be used to explain why the processes are shaped the way they are. Discussing organizational theories and concepts such as isomorphism, a concept that will explain why some transition processes look the same because of the adoption of tactics and processes used by similar public administrations after comparisons with them. Other theories talking about the Nordic countries' management style or bureaucracies will offer some insights into the distinct organizational and managerial aspects that structure these countries' public administrations. Theories about the management of expatriates or the management of transitions will also provide more details about how organizations manage their employees and the tactics used to facilitate the transition process. Finally, in the management of transition theories, personal factors and sociological aspects will be explored to analyze their relevance and how they shape the transition and may determine its success.

In the next sections, a selection of literatures will be explored. First, various aspects of the literature on ambassadors and the management of embassies will be explored. Second, numerous elements in the literature about the transition of higher management will be explored. Third, the dynamics of isomorphism will be briefly investigated.

### 3. 1 The Sociology of the MFA

Diplomats have a unique job that allows them to travel and live all around the world. Doing this, their counterparts, and the people with whom they have daily interactions while being abroad are often also diplomats. Diplomats are "a community of professionals working within understood codes of conduct" and there is a legacy of an aristocratic class that has evolved into a meritocracy (Hocking, 2015, p.332). In his study of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ivan Neumann (2005) talks about the distance diplomats put themselves and the terms bureaucrats and bureaucracy. He argues that the codes of the Weberian style of bureaucracy that is the dominant form in Nordic countries are not particularly adopted by the diplomats and that they have a tendency not to self-identify to be a part of the state bureaucracy even though they recognize part of their job is considered bureaucratic. Hence, if the diplomats do not associate themselves with the traditional bureaucracy, there is a question on the degree of difficulty to implement reforms and changes in the process due to the sociology of the MFA. Also, how processes and procedures are received and implemented by ambassadors is another important question.

### 3.2 The management of embassies by ambassadors

The literature on ambassadors or the management of embassies focuses on the services and their structures of the embassies. Klein (2010, p. 205) talks about the structure of embassies saying they differ in size, organization, and the way they operate. In large embassies, there are numerous departments from political, economic, security, cultural diplomacy, development services to consular services. The possibility of employing specialists and reporting on a variety of issues to the home country is greater in a larger organization. The head of mission, the ambassador in nearly all cases, often has the prerogative to structure the embassy he or she feels best even though they do not have any leverage over the hiring or the transfer of the diplomatic personnel working with them, but they still have leverage over the hiring of local personnel (Klein, 2010, p.207).

As emphasized by Dorman (2011, p.9), an embassy needs a wide variety of profiles to make it run smoothly, from press briefings to security; and from keeping the lights on to visiting home country' nationals imprisoned.

The literature on the management of embassies mostly focuses on the distribution of roles and responsibilities between all the staff but the extensive literature review carried out has not permitted to observe any concern about the transition of ambassadors on the part of scholars.

### 3.3 The transition of leaders

In this section, there will be an exploration of the literature on the transition of leaders. Organizational practices are being prospected as well as the factors facilitating the transition of expatriates. Also, looking into the management of knowledge will help to understand the transition of non-explicit knowledge from the individual leader to another one or to the organization in an endeavour to codify and institutionalize knowledge that cannot be transferred through official processes.

#### *3.3.1 Organizational practices*

The organization of orientation activities is a key element for a successful transition before arrival. As developed by Gabarro (1987, p.73), most managers use the orientation period to make an initial evaluation of what is happening in their new department, but the most experienced managers also use this period to identify repeating schemes, identify obvious issues and think of problems that need further research. In the case of embassies, MFAs and the embassy provide reports and briefings at the embassy. The MFA may also allow the ambassador to visit its new posting a few weeks or months before his/her arrival. It is an important moment because since the ambassador transfers for 2-3-4 years, allowing a visit before the official moving permits for personal matters to be settled before the arrival.

Second, there is a development of shared expectations between the manager transitioning, the superiors and the employees. Hence, in the cases of the ambassadors' transition, the Ministry, the ambassador, and the local embassy must define the objectives, goals and means by which everybody involved will work. Gabarro (1987, p.81) argues that team-building work is made easier when the transitioning manager enters a cohesive organization where the manager already believes they have the right goals and priorities. In that sense, the MFA provides boundaries and a framework that allows this relationship to grow and to be aligned. The MFA defines the goals and priorities. Gabarro (1987, p.82) continues by saying that transition failures are often caused by still unclear or vague expectations after many months of the posting or due to the managerial lack of confrontation and work through differences in expectations with key people.

Third, building a cohesive management team is also critical in the success of a transition (Gabarro, 1987, p.83). A returning characteristic of a failing transition is the perception by employees and superiors that the manager has failed to create a cohesive managing team. The MFA is partly responsible for the cohesiveness of the team at the embassy because it is the one choosing the diplomatic staff; hence they are responsible for creating a cohesive managing team in the local embassies. The ambassador is responsible for the hiring of local people therefore, both the MFA and the ambassador are co-responsible for that factor. To increase the chances of implementing a cohesive management team, the MFA can train and educate its ambassadors about management strategies and the management of personnel.

Finally, inadequate preparation and training before the posting (Enderwick and Hodgson, 1993). If there is under-investment in the preparation and training by the MFA or if there is not enough time dedicated to training between the selection of the candidate and his/her entry in position, it can lead to a perception of poor support system by the Ministry while being posted.

### *3.3.2 The transition of expatriates*

One of the kinds of literature that have the most to say about transition is the literature concerned with expatriates because of the importance of the right person being in the right position and the potential negative consequences, economical or organizational, that may arise if the right employee is not chosen for the expatriate position and if the transition is not properly organized.

The first factor is an inappropriate selection of the candidate due to an inability to adjust to an abroad setting. Most of the candidates for expatriation come from an internal list, it is the confidence in one's technical ability that influences expatriate adjustment, but the simple equation of domestic success doesn't automatically equal an ability to adjust to the abroad setting (Enderwick and Hodgson, 1993). There are clear personal attributes that identify those more likely to adjust successfully like high levels of cultural flexibility, social orientation, willingness to communicate and collaborative conflict resolution orientations. However, one could argue that in the case of the transition of ambassadors, this factor is less relevant since most of the ambassadors have been posted abroad in other missions before becoming ambassadors, there is a skimming process already in place at the MFA level.

The second factor in this category is the stress associated with expatriation and how things are organized to reduce it (Enderwick and Hodgson, 1993). If the organization implements processes and guidelines that reduce the potential stress factors, such as issues with the partner's ability to work, school registration or visa problems. There can also be some experiences that affect the stress level like "culture shock, differences in work-related norms, isolation, homesickness, differences in health care, housing, schooling, cuisine, customs, sex roles and the cost of living" (Anderson, 2005). Moving the family can also pose difficulties on the partner or the kids such as "marital strain, managing servants, servants and children, loss of privacy and identity, children's education, a new culture, the local environment, security requirements and uncertain infrastructure" (Anderson, 2005). On that note, the Ministry must set clear guidelines to the local embassies on these practicalities to reduce the stress associated with the relocation. Also, there must be a form of training and preparation to live in these conditions.

### *3.3.3 Transfer of knowledge*

Diving into the transfer of knowledge is an important element of the study because it is a crucial element of the success of an organization. Dalkir (2011, p.99) mentions the importance of capturing and codifying knowledge in a way that it can become part of the existing knowledge base of an organization. This knowledge, which has become part of the organization's growth and evolution combined with tangible data and with employees' experience becomes the organizational memory.

The well functioning of an organization depends on the ability to correctly transfer the knowledge created by the incumbent (Mbaya, 2017). Mbaya (2017) also mentions that the culture, the processes, and the structure of the organization influence the ease of the transfer of knowledge. To facilitate knowledge transfer, an organization should be able to store, retrieve and use that knowledge, especially the tacit knowledge that is ingrained in the organization's workforce. The use of that knowledge is also a factor in the creation of new knowledge, contacts, and data. (Andriopoulos and Dawson, 2011). This is a form of virtuous circle that allows any organization to grow, thrive and become a reference in its field. If explicit knowledge is transferred through formal training, the transfer of implicit knowledge or the knowledge that is context-specific can be stimulated through programs of instruction, mentoring, narration, or anecdotes (Micić, 2015). Also, as part of the knowledge transfer process, there are virtues attached to being a mentor, a coach, or a tutor to a junior or a newly-appointed employee or manager (Corporate Finance Institute, 2021) and one can become a better leader or employee by helping others in the transfer of knowledge.

Many elements can prevent the efficient transfer of knowledge from an individual to another or an organization (Dalkir, 2011, p.168). The first one being the idea of knowledge as property and ownership as a tool of power. Hence, on that idea, if knowledge is owned then it is important to receive proper recognition for the creation of it. Moreover, there is a distinction between the networks and knowledge created by an individual and the ones created by an organization, the distinction relies on the feeling of ownership of these networks and information (Inkpen and Tsang, 2005). The ones created by the organization can be considered as the public goods of the organization and can be more easily used by all members of the organization (Inkpen and Tsang, 2005), but these organizational context-specific pieces of information and networks are also built on the individual's context-specific information and networks. Nevertheless, most scholars tend to agree that the more the knowledge is shared, the more opportunities it creates (Dalkir, 2011, p.168) and rewarding individuals that are engaging in knowledge-sharing help reducing the sense of lost ownership. The second element that can hinder the process of knowledge transfer is the doubt in the head of the knowledge provider that the receiver will completely understand and correctly make usage of the knowledge transferred or if the recipient is not sure about the credibility of the knowledge that is being transferred to him/her (Dalkir, 2011, p..169). However, these concerns are vacated in the context of a community with an organized structure that can verify information or testify to the validity of it. The last element that can hinder the transfer of knowledge is the organizational culture. An organization that rewards collective work creates an environment nurturing a climate of trust (Dalkir, 2011, p.169) whereas an environment celebrating individual success or social status may hinder knowledge-sharing due to the idea that the ownership and the privacy of the knowledge have made these successes possible. Knowledge exchanges can only occur in a receptive environment created by the organizational culture.

## 4. Theoretical understanding

As previously evoked, the thesis explores two main questions. The first one asks how is the transition of Nordic countries' ambassadors managed and organized and more specifically the transition of context-specific knowledge, relations, and networks? The second question asks about what factors affect how the transition is organized?

### 4.1 The organization of the transition process

There is a form of tacit contract between a society and the organizations representing them such as ministries or public agencies. Indeed, these organizations need to develop resiliency to weather any changes in the environment, the cultural or the business landscapes that may affect its long-term viability. However, as explored in previous parts of this essay, the human factor still matters considerably as the strategies and decisions are still made by the managers with their knowledge, their unavoidable biases, and the data they have at hand. Hence, the faith of organizations still relies on human decisions and the consequences of a failed transition of leaders can have devastating effects on the short-term and long-term viability of the organization (Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008) (Gabarro, 1987) (Bridges, 2003). In a transition process, there are formalized activities but there can be unformalized activities depending on the scope of the formalized process and the experience of the leaders making the transition. As evoked earlier, the transfer of context-specific information or network can be informal if the processes do not account for the transfer of these important elements. Moreover, some elements are difficult to integrate into a formalized process due to their nature. The philosopher Charles Taylor, in his work (1989), made the distinction between two types of work scripts, the bureaucratic script and the heroic script. For him, the bureaucratic script "concerns decency of everyday life, by which he means doing all the little things that are being expected of you in a wide range of different contexts" (Neumann, 2005). This script is concerned with the things that people are trained for to 'do the job' or optimize their performance. In the context of the ambassador, it is concerned with the routine tasks, meetings, processes, and responsibilities the ambassador has prepared to master during years of training. On the opposite, the heroic script focuses on the individual qualities or achievements of the individual (Neumann, 2005). The two scripts exist in diplomatic life and the question is how to make them cohabit and what are the moments when ambassadors are using them. In the case of the transition, both scripts are useful because the formalized steps could be associated with the bureaucratic script whereas the unformalized aspects that could correspond to the context-specific information or networks are more likely to be products of the heroic script.

The training offered to most ambassadors cover the transfer of general practices such as the paperwork or the tasks leading to the entry into the position, but it does not give the context-specific information and networks that, for example, help to maintain the relationships between some important contacts developed by the outgoing ambassador and the incoming one.

### 4.2 Understanding the transfer of context-specific knowledge and networks

To answer the sub-question about the transfer of context-specific knowledge and networks, it is valuable to consider the framework proposed by Lloyd Steier (2001, p.60) to study the transfer to next-generation entrepreneurs of social capital, which he defines as "the actual and potential resources individuals obtain from knowing others, being part of a social network with them, or merely from being known to them and having a good reputation". There are benefits attached to being a member of a network or a structure. For organizations that have long-term perspectives and objectives, recognizing its value requires the social capital to be correctly managed and transferred. Steier's framework is looking at the transition of family businesses and there are some differences between these and the transition of ambassadors. The first one being the goal of the organization since family businesses are not only concerned about the long-term viability of their operations, but whether the business is turning a profit or not at the end of the year. This is not a concern for an embassy. Also, the framework does not take account of the international nature of an organization such as an MFA and its embassies, but since the focus is on context-specific information and context-specific networks, then each embassy is itself a mini-organization which limits this caveat. Moreover, in large bureaucracies such as a ministry, the chances of having processes and procedures are more important than in small or medium family-owned corporations so the transfer of context-specific information or network has more chance to be well-organized due to the formal and bureaucratic overarching supervision. His framework (Steier, 2001) details four different modes of transferring social capital in the family transition process: i) unplanned sudden succession; ii) rushed succession; iii) natural immersion, and iv) planned succession and deliberate transfer of social capital.

An *unplanned sudden transition* happens when an unanticipated event like an episode of illness or death requires that another member of the family or another member of the higher management takes the position within a matter of few hours or few days. In this type of transition, there is not any time or possibilities to manage the transition and for the outgoing leader to transfer the social capital to the incoming leader.

A *rushed transition* occurs when unannounced events force precipitated changes in the management. Although rushed, the transition still allows for a period of transition when social capital can be transferred in meetings or calls between the transitioning leaders.

A *natural immersion transition* is a process whereby the incumbent mentors the heir or the successor to the position for a certain period. In this mode of transition, the role of the successor grows over time to gradually assimilate the social capital. However, the mentorship scheme starts after the entry into the position of the new leader so there is a period where the new leader is mentored by the leader that has just left the position.

Finally, in a *planned transition and deliberate transfer of social capital*, there is a deliberate and long-term effort to pass the network and the connections on. In this mode of transition, the social capital is being transferred before the entry into the position of the next leader which allows the leader to be fully functional at the start of the position.

Between these four modes of transferring social capital and in our case, transferring context-specific information and networks, there are differences in the organizational structure of the transfer as well as how much time and resources the outgoing and the incoming leader both have.

*Table 1 - Modes of transferring context-specific information and networks (Adapter from Steier, 2001)*

| **Modes of transferring context-specific information and networks** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Duration of the transfer process** | **Timing of the process** | **Unplanned transition** | **Planned transition** |
| **Short period** | | Unplanned sudden transition | Rushed transition |
| **Long-period** | **Before entry into the position** | | Planned transition and deliberate transfer of social capital |
| | **After entry into the position** | | Natural immersion |

### *4.2.1. Conceptualizing the transition of context-specific information and networks*

In our case, the Nordic countries possess many similarities in the structure of their civil service systems. They all have a strong tradition of well-established central agencies and relatively high mutual trust between the political and the administrative establishments (Hansen, Laegreid, Pierre and Salminen, 2012; Bjurstrøm and Christensen, 2017). Hence, due to the bureaucratic nature of Ministries of Foreign Affairs, there is a larger probability of a planned transition and a deliberate transfer for the context-specific information and networks. Moreover, since ambassadors are appointed few months in advance of their entry into the position, the probability of a planned transition and deliberate transfer is higher. Moreover, there is still the question on the degree of formalization of the transition, is it part of a structured process that is defined by the Ministry as an element of the tasks transitioning ambassadors should take charge of deliberately or does the transfer is part of a tradition between ambassadors with are no formalized steps to it. In our cases, we could expect that the transition process will be formalized in every Nordic country.

## 4.3 Factors shaping the transition process

In relation to the second question, about what factors influence the transition process in each country, pivotal assumptions regard the organizations' degree of rationality and the main drivers of their behaviour (Scott, 2004). The following paragraphs discuss how the different assumptions that have been made by organizational theories over these aspects, will influence our expectations about what factors shape the transition processes of ambassadors.

### *4.3.1 Bounded rationality in decision-making*

Over the 20th century, organizational theories departed from a strict assumption of rationality that characterized early approaches of scientific management (Taylor, 1989).

Herbert A. Simon (1979, p.510) talked about the numerous alternatives to a classic theory of the firms. For him, the quantity of descriptive data but also the notion of reality being bounded invalidate the prescriptive nature of previous theories because they were too simplified to account for the "complex boundary conditions imposed by the environment and by the very facts of human long-term memory and the capacity of human beings, individually and collectively, to learn". Hence, the decisions made to respond to their environment and the human experiences are more appropriate to the organization, because they are based on facts and not on a prescriptive theory. In the context of bounded rationality, organizations and individuals can nevertheless learn from experiences and base their decisions on such limited rationality.

One form of organizational learning through improvements gained by the activities and the experiences of individuals is described by Edmondson and Moingeon (2008) as the participatory learning organization. For them, making critical information available, accessible, and transparent within the organization increases the probability and the possibility of efficient problem-solving processes. Stimulating employees' participation and encouraging them to contribute to the betterment of the organization's processes, procedures and tasks, increases the organization's efficiency.

### *4.3.2 New institutional theory and isomorphism*

Expectations about organizational rationality are even more relaxed in the context of the new institutional theory (Scott, 2004). According to the literature of new institutional theory, the survival of an organization does not only depend on technical efficiency and, in the case of private companies, on the ability to be profitable, but it also depends on the perception of being legitimate in the organization's network and by its constituencies (Suchman, 1995). According to him (1995, p.574), an organization has legitimacy when there is a "generalized perception or assumption that the actions of [the organization] are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions". Moreover, legitimacy is socially constructed as it testifies to the behaviours of the organization in comparison to the shared beliefs of the social group the organization belongs to. Hence, to be perceived as being legitimate, an organization must comply with the influences and constraints that are shared by other actors or institutions in the environment. Those institutions create an environment that constrains organizations in three different institutional pressures: regulative, normative and cognitive. The regulative institutional pressure derives from the rules and regulations overseeing and framing the activities and the status of the organization (Suchman, 1995; Oliver, 1991). The normative institutional pressure derives from what is considered as the norms of the environment, and judges whether an organization's behaviours and practices are aligned with what the environment expects from its actors (Suchman, 1995). The cognitive legitimacy pressure comes from the mere acceptance that an organization may be "necessary or inevitable based on some taken-for-granted cultural account" (Suchman, 1995, p.582). In this type of institutional pressure, the organization is perceived to be legitimate just because it is perceived as necessary or that there may be no alternative to it.

Following institutional pressures is not necessarily a rational process because it simply requires adopting the practices and the behaviours that have been assumed as rational. Meyer and Roman (1977) talk about the importance of norms of behaviours and practices as organizations that follow these formers are perceived to be legitimate beyond the judgment of an individual or another organization. Moreover, by mapping out a structure coherent with the prescribed values, practices and behaviours of the institutional environment, an organization demonstrates "it is acting on collectively valued purposes in a proper and adequate manner" (Meyer and Roman, 1977, p.349). Therefore, new institutional theory predicts three main kinds of isomorphic forces within the same institutional environment which make organizations more similar to another over time: coercive, normative and mimetic isomorphism. As described by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), coercive isomorphism results from the dynamics between formal and informal pressures applied on an organization by the other actors of the environment, and by the cultural expectations of the society. It is a form of response to regulative institutional pressures. Mimetic isomorphism processes occur when an organization evolves on uncertain ground and models its practices, behaviours and structure on other organizations believed to be efficient or effective (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). It is a cost-effective way to acquire a form of legitimacy in its environment. It is a form of response to cognitive institutional pressures. Normative isomorphism practices stem from professionalization (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and result in organizations being modelled on what is perceived to be the norm in the environment of the organization. It is a form of response to normative institutional pressures because there is a willingness to align to the shared norms and values to be perceived as legitimate.

However, over time, new institutional theory has recognized elements of rationality in the organization. The need to adopt strategic responses and cope with competing pressures has forced organizations to partly move away from traditional isomorphic strategies (Oliver 1991) towards a more practical approach. Oliver (1991) says that institutional framework can accommodate a variety of strategic responses to the institutional environment when certain constraints and situations requiring adaptation arise or when there is a need to navigate between competing logics. Some organizations "do not blindly comply with institutional prescriptions" (Pache and Santos, 2013, p.994), they selectively adopt institutional logic when they feel it is appropriate.

While there are remarkable differences in the institutional environment of public and private organizations, e.g., the first arguably being subjected to more extensive and pervasive regulative institutional pressures, Frumkin & Galaskiewicz (2004) argue that, overall, there are no major differences between private and public sector organizations in their responses to institutional pressures. Hence, public sector organizations are expected to respond to the environmental and sectorial forces at least as strongly as private organizations do. In their study on the effects of isomorphism on governmental institutions, Frumkin & Galaskiewicz (2004) conclude that public managers, when subject to external oversight or when embedded in a professional network, tend to break from the internal pressure to bureaucratize their operations. There might be a confrontation between internal pressures to bureaucratize and professional norms to liberate structural transformations. As described earlier, the ambassadors already tend not to identify themselves as bureaucrats which adds to the possible confrontation between internal pressures and the forces of the profession to do things their way. Also, Greenstock (in Malone et al., 2013, p.4) talks about the scrutiny the MFA faces because of the questioning of the diplomats' real utility and the distinctiveness of their work being blurry, hence questions have been raised about the size and the spread of the foreign missions "when economic pressures make themselves felt" and this corresponds to what Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004) describe when talking about the lack of important differences between private corporations and public sector organizations in their response to neo-institutional theories. The MFA, just like other ministries or important corporations is subject to scrutiny and structural pressures when there are economic pressures to reduce costs.

With the conventions and the practices set by the VCDR that only a few states do not abide by, there are forms of normative expectations structuring the organization of embassies and consulates. Since MFAs abide by these conventions, there are limited ways by which the organizations of the transition process of ambassadors can be organized but there are still differences due to the rationally-made decisions tuning the process in light of the experiences of the ambassadors, the capacities/wills of the MFA and the characteristics of the receiving country.

#### *4.3.3. Conceptualizing why transitions are shaped the way they are*

Looking at the Nordic countries' tradition to collaborate, and share information and best practices, there is a probability of seeing isomorphic practices due to the need of legitimizing the role of the MFA in response to scrutiny. Hocking (2015, p.337) argues that it is a "rational political-administrative response to ever more complex policy milieus but as a means by which MFAs seek to defend their roles and positions" because they are challenged by other bureaucrats. Coordination has been a defining attribute in policy environments, and it also is an effective bureaucratic strategy in response to financial pressures to do less with more but also organizational changes addressing changing global agendas (Hocking, 2015, p.336).

Moreover, the long-lasting tradition of cooperation and collaboration between Nordic countries is a vital part of understanding isomorphic practices. Besides the consular assistance, there is a cooperation between the MFA in other fields such as foreign policy, defence policy, and development cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2021). The dialogue between Nordic countries is based to a large extent on experience sharing, informal networking and joint action (Strang, 2016). The meetings provide occasions of socialization between actors and promote informal contacts on daily basis (Strang, 2016). Through formal and informal structures, the collaboration between Nordic countries has helped to harmonize political and administrative agendas (Strang, 2016). According to the previously mentioned studies, we could expect that that there will be sharing of best practices between Nordic countries that will lead to a form of mimetic isomorphism which will make the transition processes similar.

In their study about isomorphism practices in public sector organizations, Frumkin & Galaskiewicz (2004) mention that managers embedded in a professional network, such as diplomats living and moving all around the world, tend to bureaucratize their operations according to the norms of the network as a kind of normative isomorphism practice. Hence, based on the aforementioned studies, we could expect that most transition processes will look the same due to the norms set by diplomatic practices.

However, since building on experiences from ambassadors and making critical information available, accessible, and easy to use by all, as suggested by Edmondson and Moingeon (2008), is also an element that should be considered in understanding the transition and this would suggest there is also a rational element which shapes the processes.

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1 Research Design

The research method chosen for this thesis consists of five case studies of the five Nordic countries' MFA. Case studies are methodologically appropriate to address how and why questions, e.g., about procedures and processes, when the researcher has no control over the behavioural events and the focus is on contemporary and not historical elements (Yin, 2018). This method is suitable for this research because it allows studying, evaluate, and compare how the transition of ambassadors is designed and operationalized. Using case studies will allow us to compare and try to explain the different transition processes and identify the similar patterns and the differences in how each country approaches the transition of its ambassadors. Applying a case-oriented approach to comparative social science aims at utilizing theory to interpret organizational, societal or historical factors that help navigate the cases and how each of them was constructed (Ragin 1989, 34-35.). Units of analysis can be understood differently in comparative social science. According to Ragin (1989, 8), there is a division between observational units and explanatory units. The former is used to collect data and for the analysis, whereas the latter is used to explain results. When conducting comparative public administration research, Jreisat (2005, p.237-238) insists on choosing a clear unit of analysis. By doing so, it facilitates in determining the scope of the study and sets clear limits for the study and provides a baseline for cross-national analysis. This study focuses on both the meso-level analysis and the micro-level of analysis because it focuses on the institutional processes in place in each MFA, but also on how individuals are dealing with the transition. Thus, the observational units are both the institutional processes put in place and the individual actions, and the explanatory units are the institutional processes and context-specific information.

#### *5.1.1 The choice of case countries*

The choice of the five Nordic countries' MFA comes from the desire to isolate variables in comparable settings. According to the method of difference theorized by John Stuart Mill (1843), for instance, when two instances are chosen that have the same characteristics except one, we can then isolate the variable and see if it is an effect or a cause of the phenomenon. More specifically, the indirect method of difference consists of applying the same analysis to two or more cases and reject competing explanations through paired comparisons (Goedegebuure and van Vught, 1996). The chosen countries are rather similar but have differences that will allow us to explore the topic and the variables linked to the transition process. Also, the focus of the program being the Nordic countries and the management of public administration, looking at the five Nordic countries' embassies seems like a natural choice. Moreover, all the Nordic countries are rated highly in many indexes and rankings such as the Human Development Index (HDI) or the Democracy Index score so they provide some interesting basis for comparison.

Table 2 illustrates some of the main characteristics of the countries and respective MFA which are the object of the case studies.

*Table 2 - Summary characteristics of the case studies*

| | **Iceland** | **Norway** | **Denmark** | **Sweden** | **Finland** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Population (2020)**[2] | 341 243 | 5 421 241 | 5 792 202 | 10 099 265 | 5 540 720 |
| **Year of independence** | 1944 | 1905 | 1849 | 1523 and 1905 | 1917 |
| **Form of government** | Parliamentary republic | Constitutional monarchy | Constitutional monarchy | Constitutional monarchy | Parliamentary republic |
| **Member of the European Union** | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **Democracy Index score (World ranking)**[3] | 9,37 (2) | 9,81 (1) | 9,15 (7) | 9,26 (3) | 9,20 (6) |
| **GDP/capita (2019)**[4] | 66 944$ | 75 419$ | 60 170$ | 51 615$ | 48 782$ |
| **Human Development Index (HDI) rank (2020)**[5] | 4 | 1 | 10 | 7 | 11 |
| **Year of creation of the MFA** | 1941 | 1905 | 1770 | 1791 | 1918 |
| **Budget of the Foreign Service** | N/A | 251M Euros (2021)[6] | 248M Euros (2019)[7] | N/A | 235M Euros (2019)[8] |

[2] Source: Worldometer (2021)

[3] Source: The Economist (2021)

[4] Source: World Bank (2020)

[5] Source: United Nations Development Programme (2021)

[6] Source: Udenrigsministeriet (2020)

[7] Source: Finansministeriet (2020)

[8] Source: Ulkoministeriö (2019)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Number of embassies** | 21 | 81 | 78 | 80 | 71 |

There are numerous similarities between the Nordic countries. Three out of five have between 5 to 6 million nationals with Sweden being nearly twice as populous as Denmark (the 2nd most populous) and Iceland having just over 6% of the Norwegian population. Moreover, out of the five Nordic countries, only Norway is not a member of the European Union. Also, Sweden and Finland are not part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but they are close allies to this cooperation alliance. Apart from Iceland, all Nordic countries have a similar number of embassies and according to the publicly available data, Finland, Norway and Denmark (who have a close number of inhabitants) have a similar MFA budget. Historically, Sweden and Denmark have had the longest tradition of sovereignty and foreign relations because the three other countries were part of either country up until the early 20th century for Norway and Finland, and the mid 20th century for Iceland.

Other elements are making each country interesting on their own.

Despite a rather small population, Norway managed to be elected as one of the members of the U.N. Security council in 2020, so one may assume the diplomatic corps is well prepared and trained for their job presenting their country. Also, with the development of maritime routes in the Arctic ocean, its coastline will become the topic of increased scrutiny. Sweden is interesting because it is a country with multiple foreign policies aims like promoting Women's rights all over the world or promoting public health initiatives in Africa, but Sweden also sells warplanes and other weapons to other countries, so its ambassadors must be prepared to answer to these potentially conflicting objectives. Finland has enjoyed a unique position during the USSR period sharing a long border with the communist country, hence having to keep very good relationships while maintaining its sovereignty and developing links and connections to other nations. Denmark is also interesting because the territory of the Kingdom is much larger than the other countries due to the Faroe Islands and Greenland whose natural resources will be an increasing target of foreign investments and covetousness. Finally, Iceland having the youngest Ministry of Foreign Affairs and being the smallest in the population of the five countries has a unique location in the Atlantic Ocean and is at the core of NATO's global strategy between Europe and North America.

## 5.2 Data Collection

### *5.2.1 Means of Collection*

To collect the necessary information and understand the transition process and the factors affecting it, multiple sources have been used.

First, there was a gathering of information through official or internal documents detailing the transition process. This was useful to have an initial assessment and understanding of how the transition in each Ministry was organized. However, only the Norwegian MFA provided an official document they are using to transfer context-specific information and network and the document was provided after all the interviews were conducted. The Norwegian transfer note (Overføringsnotatet) is a 3 pages document that the Norwegian MFA sends to every outgoing ambassador to leave notes and contact details of all the context-specific information and network to know for the incoming ambassador while arriving at the position. In this document, the outgoing ambassador can describe what he/she is currently working on, the information that is useful to know to start the position, the contact information of the important people at the position, and other useful information.

Due to secrecy concerns, no other MFAs have agreed to provide an official document on the transition of their ambassadors.

Second, eight semi-structured interviews and three written interviews have been conducted with the people responsible for the transition in each Ministry, ambassadors, and the personnel of embassies. Since each group has its views on the transition, the strategy of interviewing as many actors as possible helps unveiling a more comprehensive portrait of the transition process. The interviews lasted between 20 to 50 minutes depending on the availability of the interviewee and the questionnaires used, which are displayed in the appendix. Semi-structured interviews are planned to have several questions prepared by the interviewer before the interview (Wengraf, 2001, p.5). However, those questions are designed to be open enough that the next question cannot be planned and have to be carefully improvised by the interviewer with the theory in mind (Wengraf, 2001, p.5). They offer a good equilibrium between structure and flexibility. The written interviews were made by sending a list of questions to the interviewees. That type of interview does not allow for a dynamic interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Also, it does not allow for quick further clarifications if the questions were not understood.

The first contact was made to the MFA of each country to ask them about any documents detailing the transition process. By contacting the MFA, the documents gathered would have been our primary source of information to compare all other answers received during interviews with ambassadors and embassy' personnel. The aim of gathering the official or internal documents about the transition was to have a precise look at the organization of the transition, the steps, the roles, and responsibilities of each actor. No MFA have answered positively to the request for the written processes and mostly due to their internal nature, but some of the personnel at the HR department accepted to being interviewed on the topic by email. The people at the HR department who accepted to answer questions on the topic were asked about the steps and the tasks of the transition, the changes that occurred in the process and why these changes have been implemented. Moreover, they were asked if there are differences in the transition between countries and what characteristics of the receiving country were to be considered if there are differences. Some examples of questionnaires are added in the appendix part.

Then, all embassies of Nordic countries in Canada and France were contacted for two semi-structured interviews: one with a person working on the transition of the ambassadors and one with the ambassador. The Nordic embassies located in these two countries were chosen because as a native French speaker and as having dual citizenships, it was easier to communicate with them and they were more receptive in answering my questions, being a national of the country they are located in. One ambassador per country accepted to answer my questions during a phone call or a video call. The ambassadors were asked about the steps of the transition, their perception of the transition, their experience on the transition and about the differences between their transition in France or Canada, and in the other countries, they have been posted in. They were also asked about the changes over time the transition process has faced. The embassy personnel were asked about the tasks and the steps of the transition as well as the administrative support offered to the incoming ambassador or the MFA organizing the relocation. If there was a second interview from one country (i.e. interviewing the embassy personnel then interviewing the ambassador), the questions were based on the answers given in the first one to complement the understanding of the process. An example of a questionnaire to an ambassador is included as an appendix.

*Table 3 - Summary of the people interviewed*

| | **Role** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Country** | *Head of HR - MFA* | *Ambassador* | *Member of the embassy's personnel* |
| *Iceland* | x | x | |
| *Norway* | x | x | x |
| *Denmark* | x | x | x |
| *Sweden* | x | x | |
| *Finland* | | x | |

***5.2.2 Problems and Limitations***

There were some issues during the data collection, which were due to the specific characteristics of the setting studies.

First, except in the Norwegian case, much information on their transition process was considered internal and it was considered something that should not be publicly available. Hence, I was not able to access the documents that I would have used to compare with the answers gathered during the interviews. For example, in the Icelandic case, the information on the transition is a section of the 300 pages manual for ambassadors on how to be and what to do as an ambassador. Despite these initial challenges, I conducted 11 interviews to gather any form of information, and these were my sole sources of information. In the Norwegian case, the document arrived at a later point, after the interviews, so I was able to compare the answers given to the internal document that was produced.

Second, a few interviews were conducted through email, and there was no possibility of rephrasing a question or explaining a question to which the answer was not satisfactory or to which the understanding was different than the intent. In these cases, I conducted a second interview with another actor of the transition for the same country to clarify the answer. Also, since the interviewer and most of the respondents do not have English as their mother tongue, there were sometimes moments of miscommunications in some questions or some answers, therefore the need for clarifications.

### 5.3 Information analysis and confidentiality

Once collected all the information, I analyzed each transition process looking at the different periods and steps as well as the distribution of tasks and responsibilities amongst actors.

To comply with the confidentiality agreement, I anonymized the interviewees providing no information on the sources met and no information that could identify the person answering the questions.

The gathered qualitative data was analyzed through a content analysis which is commonly used in qualitative research (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, p. 1277). There are three types of content analysis (conventional content analysis, directed content analysis and summative content analysis) and two have been used in this study (conventional content and directed content) (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, p. 1278). The conventional content analysis starts with the empirical data and it is typically used to describe a phenomenon. The categories and names typically emerge from the empirical data and there is no pre-conception of how the data should be framed because most questions are open-ended. This is the method I started with the interviews because there were no documents on the transition available, there were only vague ideas on how the process could be structured and what factors could influence it.

Then, with more empirical data being gathered, it became clear that some theories could be applied to understand the transition process and especially the transition of context-specific information and networks as well as the factors influencing how is the transition shaped. There was then a directed content analysis whose goal is "to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory" (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, p. 1281). First, alongside my thesis supervisor, I identified variables, themes and questions that appeared relevant to the research questions. Then, with the empirical data gathered, some categories of variables and answers appeared which helped me compare and contrast the different transitions. This process resembles the one described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005, p. 1281), as "using existing theory or prior research, researchers begin by identifying key concepts or variables [and these] allow to test or extend conceptually the theory and see if the reality that is being described confirms or invalidates the theory that is being tested". This method was used to analyze the transition of context-specific information and networks with the usage of Steier's theory on the transfer of social capital in family businesses. It was also used to analyze the factors shaping the transition because of both rational decision-making and isomorphism practices.

### 5.4 The Context of the Study: Nordic countries, bureaucracy, and leadership

This section examines the collaboration between Nordic countries as part of the development of the socio-political national institutions and as a regional bloc will be explored as well as the main characteristics of Nordic countries' bureaucracy and leadership.

#### *5.4.1 The Nordic bureaucratic system*

This section briefly discusses the Nordic bureaucratic model to embed the MFA's actions and organization into the broader, surrounding institutional context.

The Nordic countries' structures of bureaucracy are rather similar as there is a "relatively high level of mutual trust between the political and the administrative executives (Bjurstrøm & Christensen, 2017). Also, the Nordic countries have long fostered a tradition of a very structured state favouring centralized government and a large public sector (Bjurstrøm & Christensen, 2017). Adding to that, the large number of political parties in each country has led to frequent minority governments. These minority governments do not help in designing and implementing bureaucratic reforms because there is always some tug-of-war between parties on the analysis of the problem, what needs to be done, at what pace and by whom.

Beyond their overall resemblance, there are some notable differences between these systems. Historically, there are two major models, the West Nordic model shared between Iceland, Norway and Denmark and the East Nordic model shared between Sweden and Finland (Bjurstrøm & Christensen, 2017). These differences come from historical events because it was the Danes who shaped the first Icelandic and Norwegian bureaucracies, and it was the Swedes that shaped the first Finnish bureaucracy (Bjurstrøm & Christensen, 2017). In terms of ministerial responsibility and agency independence, all the Nordic countries have similar models of responsibility where it is the individual that is at the core of the cabinet. The only exception to this model is Sweden, where there the responsibility lies in the cabinet. Moreover, there are some differences in how reforms are implemented and the state modernization pace. As mentioned by Bjurstrøm and Christensen (2017), Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway have had a similar, quite slow pace of reforms and a certain reluctance to "modernize". Again, Sweden has a different model and has built an organization more suitable for reforms because of the active stance on reforms and an objective of efficiency put on reforms (Bjurstrøm & Christensen, 2017). Furthermore, Sweden has looked outside the Nordic countries' sphere, for ties with international bodies and other regional blocs, much more than its Nordic counterparts. The five countries have implemented New Public Management (NPM) reforms from the 1980s, whose principles are to some extent at odds with the Nordic model. However, the so-called Nordic model has managed to keep a distinct image and it is well structured to be at the forefront of post-NPM reforms that will be more inclusive of civic participation and the co-definition with citizens of government priorities, implementation processes and evaluations (Bjurstrøm and Christensen, 2017).

The collaboration between Nordic countries has allowed the development of national institutions and a form of united Nordic posture on many international issues but it is still unclear if there's a form of collaboration between bureaucrats of the Nordic countries' MFA to compare practices and/or emulate or adapt the best ones.

### *5.4.2 Nordic Management styles*

There are some elements of the Nordic leadership styles that may influence the management of the transition. Since the ambassadors could be considered the managers of their embassy, some links can be made between the managerial literature and how ambassadors are managed. Research done by Smith, Andersen, Ekelund, Graversen and Ropo (2003) explains the similarities and differences between each Nordic country's style of management. An argument could be made that the style of management of each country gives an outlook on every country's transition process. In the Danish case, the reliance on subordinates was significantly higher in Denmark than in the remaining four nations (Smith et al., 2003). Moreover, the Danish managers have a low reliance on superiors and formal rules. Also, their research mentions that Swedish managers reported "significantly higher reliance on rules than the other four nations" and that "Swedish organisations are often encumbered with rules concerning procedures to be followed if changes are to be introduced". The data about Norwegian and Swedish managers suggests "greater reliance on values presumed to be consensual within their wider cultural context" (Smith et al., 2003), hence if the 'wider cultural context' is the Nordic countries foreign affairs' environment, an argument could be made that both countries are the most likely to engage in isomorphism practices. In the Finnish case, Smith et al. (2003) suggest "a greater predominance of tacit rather than explicit understandings of what is to be done within an organisation". Finns also ranked the highest among the five Nordic countries on the reliance on one own's experience and training (Smith et al., 2003). Finnish also rank highly on reliance on internal guidance to the organization which may lead to less comparative practices with other Nordic countries. This reliance on internal guidance is also a feature in the Icelandic context (Smith et al., 2003). Not only do those Icelandic managers also have a stronger reliance on co-workers than other

Nordic countries, but they also have a stronger reliance on their superiors than their Nordic colleagues.

From each Nordic country's management style, we can reflect how ambassadors, who are the leaders of their organization, are managing their embassy and if there are differences in their approach. For example, are there differences in the relationships between the ambassador and the embassy employees in terms of relying on the latter in extraordinary events such as a transition? Are there differences in the ambassador's perception of processes set by the MFA which would influence how the transition is managed?

#### *5.4.3 Collaboration between Nordic countries*

The cooperation between Nordic countries is a well-researched theme. Historically, there have been close relationships between Nordic countries starting in the 19th century (Kettunen, Lundberg, Österberg and Petersen, 2016, p.71), most notably between professional groups and governmental institutions. After the independence of Finland and Iceland (1917 and 1918 respectively), the cooperation continued and there was a sense that a united Nordic appearance on the international scene would be important to create credibility in front of other world actors (Kettunen et al., 2016, p.71). Developing this idea of a united Nordic model created a reference for the modernization and the development of the social-political institution and the understanding of social politics in every Nordic country.

The Nordic cooperation has both external and internal purposes. On the external side, the collaboration serves to negotiate a 'Nordic stance' on international debates or in some international institutions (Strang, 2016, p.9). On the internal side, it facilitates "exchanges of experiences and best practices between the countries". When looking for foreign models, the Nordic countries have looked to their Nordic neighbours and also have turned to their counterparts when looking at how non-Nordic ideas have been adapted to the Nordic context (Strang, 2016, p.9). Each Nordic country is rather small in population, the collaboration also has served to discuss some ideas or economic models with a larger pool of scholars, economic leaders, cultural influencers, or politicians.

Kettunen et al. (2016, p.86) detail why there are so many links between Nordic countries. First, they argue that it is a region with dense networks and highly institutionalized connections between countries. Second, the historical links between the Nordic countries' elites have allowed building a strong sense of Scandinavism or Nordism. Third, rather limited geography makes it easier to study the cooperation between the countries. Finally, the establishment of a transnational epistemic community within the welfare and the social policy areas have influenced greatly “the construction of the Nordic model as an idea and as institutional convergence.

Nevertheless, there are caveats to the idea of Nordic collaboration. The institutional legacies must be taken into account when looking at learning from other countries and best practices cannot be duplicated without diving into national differences (Kristensen, Lilja, Moen and Morgan, 2016, p.201).

## 6. Empirical data and analysis

This section describes the transition process for each country and then moves on to try to analyze the reasons why the process is the way it is. Each country will be explored from west to east. As previously mentioned, the data has been gathered through interviews with ambassadors, embassy personnel and/or people working at the HR department of each country's MFA. The analysis focuses on the two central questions of the thesis: how is the transition organized, and in particular the transfer of context-specific information and network? and why is the transition process organized the way it is?

### *6.1 Iceland*

#### *6.1.1 The ministry level*

Among the five Nordic countries, Iceland has the smallest number of embassies and ambassadors due to having the smallest population between these countries and the smallest MFA. In countries where Iceland does not have an embassy, those either seeking assistance or those who need information from the Icelandic embassy need to contact the Icelandic honorary consul or directly contact the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Ministry has set clear guidelines and processes for ambassadors that in a single manual for all ambassadors. This manual is not public and explains most of the work and processes in the MFA and a part of it is dedicated to obligations and rights regarding posted diplomats.

On the Ministry level, guidelines about the transition process are explained in a 300 pages *manual* written by the Ministry about all elements which are deemed essential to be an ambassador for Iceland. This manual is revised and updated every five years to reflect the technological and societal changes that have occurred and that will be trending in the upcoming years. The updates are identified by both the ambassadors and the MFA through the ambassador's experience abroad and the priorities set by the government in terms of adaptation to technological evolution. The manual has been published since the creation of the Ministry at the beginning of the 1940s. The formalization of the transition process in the manual was a way, in the early ages of the Ministry, to have a standardized procedure for the newly appointed ambassadors. The practices and processes in the manual have been included because of two rationales. Past experiences have provided valuable information on what to do/not to do which help to define the instructions.

In addition to the manual, the MFA provides the appointed ambassador with the specific *country report/practice* manual produced by the incumbent ambassador and the embassy personnel. This document lists all the important information on the country, whether it is administrative information, political and economic situation, links with Iceland, etc.

Moreover, there are some *meetings or calls with other Nordic countries' head of administrative services or head of HR* at the initiative of the MFAs. In these meetings, the best practices are discussed and shared to improve the transition. When relevant, the HR department also uses best practices from Canada, the UK, Germany, and France and adapts these practices to the Icelandic context. One of the interviewees mentioned that differences in size and available resources between Iceland and these other countries make sometimes the adoption of these practices difficult.

Another aspect of the transition is the *training* that is offered to the ambassadors. In the Icelandic case, the focus is not so much on training the ambassador nor explaining to him/her the political context in which the destination country is in, but on the improvement of managerial skills such as finance, human resources, or documents management. Language classes of the destination country are also offered if necessary, to provide the relevant skills to the appointed ambassador.

The peculiarity of the Icelandic MFA is that it is responsible for the *application for the agrément* in every country it sends its ambassadors in. In the other Nordic countries, it is the local embassy that takes this procedure in charge which may be caused by the fact that Icelandic embassies are very small compared to other Nordic countries' embassies. Centralizing this activity may facilitate and speed up the process as some civil servants can be specialized in obtaining the agrément.

### *6.1.2 The embassy level*

As just mentioned, one of the most important functions of the transition, namely, the application for the agrément letter from the protocol office of the host country, is taken care of by the MFA, which reduces the amount of work necessary for the transition.

The follow-up steps are being taken care of by the embassy up until the ambassador receives approval from the Head of State of the host state. The embassy has the responsibility of *assisting the new ambassadors in practical issues*, such as finding a house, the schools for the children if necessary, etc. Information about the living conditions and the city are provided by the embassy as well as moving arrangements. Also, alongside the civil servants of the MFA, the local embassy produces a *location report* that details all the important political, economical, and sociological information about the country which helps the incoming ambassador getting accustomed to the host country. The embassy is also responsible to give access to its internal database to the incoming ambassador once he or she is appointed. This database is the informatic system used to store and access information used and gathered by each embassy.

Since most Icelandic embassies are rather small, there is not much difference between the transition in one or another. The most important difference between a transition to the embassy in Washington, for example, and the one in Lilongwe in Malawi, would be in different programs regarding, e.g., vaccinations, preparation on safety and security. Only in Brussels, there is a much broader transition because people from other Icelandic ministries are also posted to assist in the work done at the European Union. This transition needs, for the ambassador, to be better prepared for the management of these other services that are not working for the MFA.

The embassy personnel can also help the ambassador *producing the 'in-country report/practice manual'* that the latter is responsible for.

#### *6.1.3 The ambassador level*

On the ambassador level, there are many initiatives that both incoming and outgoing ambassadors take to facilitate the transition.

It is in the formalized steps that the *incoming ambassador contacts the outgoing ambassador* to discuss the dossiers and cases s/he is working on. This initiative helps facilitate the transfer of important information and knowledge and gives an outlook on how things function in the host country and the local embassy.

Although it is not formalized, it is common practice for the *incoming ambassador to call the ambassador of the host country in Iceland*, to learn about the challenges and opportunities for collaboration between the two countries and set some common objectives and tasks. For example, the Icelandic ambassador that will arrive in his/her posting in France will call the current French ambassador in Reykjavík and inquire about a common area both countries are working on. However, these initiatives are personal and are not formalized in any manner, so there is room for changes and every transition may have different personal initiatives from the incoming ambassador depending on the acquired experience or the context in which the transition is happening.

In addition to these initiatives, the ambassador is responsible to *design and set objectives for the annual strategic plan* of the embassy that is submitted to the MFA. This plan has three aspects. The strategic plan explains the objectives set by the ambassador and the local embassy; the financial plan details how the financial resources will be allocated, and the travel plan sets out all the planned travels into the host country and between Iceland and the host country. These annual plans are approved by the end of January each year by the MFA, and the incoming ambassador participates in the drafting of the strategic plan once s/he is appointed and even before his or her arrival.

The outgoing ambassador also produces an '*in-country report/practice manual*' that gathers all the context-specific information and contact information on the networks. Moreover, it contains some specific content such as the political situation in the country, the state of the Icelandic-host country relation, etc. This report is then sent to the MFA which may add more information to it. The MFA is then responsible for sharing the report with the appointed ambassador and the diplomatic staff that will be sent to the country.

Furthermore, the MFA does not have a *mentorship scheme* between junior and senior ambassadors, but due to the rather small size of the Icelandic diplomatic corps, junior ambassadors are invited to contact directly other ambassadors if they have questions or in need of advice.

### *6.1.4 Analysis of the Icelandic case*

In the Icelandic case, the transition of ambassadors is a formalized process put in place by the MFA and executed by the MFA, the host embassy and by the ambassador. The Icelandic MFA has a very hands-on approach to all things related to its ambassadors and even though there is an offer for training for ambassadors (depending on their postings), all the information required are clearly defined and written down in the manual so there are no mishaps in the transition of ambassadors.

Focusing on the transfer of context-specific information and network, these are mainly transferred through two ways: communication between the outgoing and the appointed ambassador and through the 'in-country report. Due to the size of the Icelandic diplomatic corps, it appears more practical for ambassadors to call and transfer these pieces of information directly between them. The use of a written document to help transfer the context-specific information and networks creates a formalized process that the MFA can be built on with each ambassador transitioning, to create a more comprehensive set of data on the country. Using Steier's framework, the Icelandic approach has the characteristics of a planned transition and deliberate transfer of social capital since there the transition is planned and is held before the entry into the position of the ambassador with designated time and resources allocated to the transfer of context-specific information and networks. As evoked earlier, the Icelandic embassies, due to their size, have limited capacity and resources. This puts more pressure on the MFA to have a proper process dedicated to the transfer of context-specific information and network and to the transitioning ambassadors to follow this process.

Because the process is formalized and there is a deliberate will to transfer correctly all the information and network, the characteristics of a form of planned transition and deliberate transfer of social capital are met. The Icelandic transition process seems effective because it has everything planned out and all possible challenges are answered in the manual. However, no interviewees told me about the possible individual decisions made by the ambassador to respond to a certain context that was not planned in the manual like in the case of the current COVID-19 pandemic, which has no doubt changed the way the transition of ambassadors has functioned.

As evoked earlier, the Icelandic model of management relies heavily on internal guidance and superior's advice (Smith et al., 2003). It then comes as no surprise that the guidelines on the transition laid down in the internal manual are mostly the results of past experiences of senior ambassadors and that the updates on the manual mostly come from what have been the successes and the mishaps in previous transitions. Edmondson and Moingeon (2008) talk about the importance of making information available, accessible, and transparent for the organization to learn and this is exactly what the Icelandic transition is all about since every few years, adjustments on how the transition should be handled are made according to not only on rational decisions which increase the organization's efficiency but also on the experience of other MFAs, especially Nordic countries.

This twofold approach in improving the formal process, in identifying experiences that have led to successes or failures in the transition and the adopting of practices from other countries could be described as both rationally motivated and a result of mimetic isomorphism where the practices set by the other MFAs, mould the transition process. We can then argue that the Icelandic transition has been constructed on mimetic isomorphism practices and is now evolving through rational decisions. However, these decisions are being made in the context of a bureaucratic path dependency because no interviewees questioned, in the interviews, the model in place.

To conclude, in the Icelandic case, the transition process has been carefully formalized and is improved periodically. It facilitates the transition because all the steps and processes have been laid down into a single manual and the context-specific information and networks are also written down in a specific report. The changes in the transition process result of past experiences of Icelandic ambassadors and, according to the interviewees, to the best practices from other Nordic countries but these experiences are then adapted to the Icelandic context since the country does not have the resources to have as many embassies, ambassadors, and personnel as other Nordic countries.

## 6.2 *Norway*

### *6.2.1 On the ministry level*

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was created on the same day the union between Sweden and Norway was dissolved in 1905. It operates 81 embassies and 9 permanent delegations around the world. The MFA has not produced official processes or guidelines that apply to all embassies. Each embassy relies on its personnel and on the internal processes set by the embassy to facilitate the transition. However, the MFA provides extensive *training* for transitioning ambassadors and *mentorship* that helps less-experienced ambassadors.

The Ministry does not have guidelines or any manual that details all the steps in the transition process. However, the MFA organizes many activities and training for ambassadors during their transition. First, after the postings have been decided – usually in December, the MFA offers *preparatory classes* for all its heads of mission in January and February. In preparation for the transition, but also for ambassadors in the middle of their posting, these training classes include leadership development classes as well as security management (personal and information), crisis management, media training and strategic communication. There are also classes on certain aspects relevant to the country of the posting, e.g., the free trade agreement between Canada, the USA, and Mexico if the posting is in one of these three countries. Also, in August, a week-long *Heads of Mission conference* takes place where dialogue between incoming and outgoing Heads of Mission is a key part of the experience-sharing aspect of the transition. The MFA is also initiating *mentorships* between more experienced ambassadors and junior ambassadors. The junior ambassadors are assigned mentors, among colleagues in the region, who would be the go-to person for advice in the early stages of their postings.

The Norwegian ambassadors' transition process is also very similar from one destination country to another. The main difference between the transitions lies in the degree of readiness and time to prepare the incoming ambassador has. The time to prepare varies greatly between an ambassador moving from an embassy to another one for example and an ambassador moving from a position at the Ministry's office in Oslo to an embassy. The latter has more flexibility to prepare for his/her new position, hence there is less catching up once the mandate starts.

The MFA also provides a template for a *transfer note* (Overføringsnotatet) to all its outgoing ambassadors. This template must be filled out with all the relevant information and network for the incoming ambassador.

### *6.2.2 On the embassy level*

The embassy is responsible for making the arrangements to *obtain the agrément* from the protocol office of the host country. Also, once the ambassador has been named, the embassy will start to send all the information, reports, news, briefings, and activities to the incoming ambassador to make sure he or she is updated on what the embassy is working on. Due to the turnover of personnel at the embassy, the embassy is responsible for *creating clear guidelines and processes* for the transition period. The embassy can also *facilitate the organization of meetings between the incoming ambassador and the embassy's stakeholders* like the Norwegian-Host country Chamber of commerce or the associations of Norwegians nationals in that country.

### *6.2.3 On the ambassador level*

In the case of Norwegian ambassadors' transition, both the incoming and the outgoing ambassadors have a role to play. During the Heads of Missions meetings of August, they can sit down and discuss the important aspects to know about the host country and the embassy. Also, it is the outgoing ambassador that determines the nature of the relationship of the embassy with the appointed ambassador and decides on how much the appointed ambassador will be involved. However, the incoming ambassador cannot meddle in the outgoing ambassador's job. Furthermore, as made mandatory by the MFA, outgoing ambassadors write a *transfer note* to their successor describing ongoing processes, useful networks and contacts, a description of all aspects of the job that would be relevant to know for the successor. The document is in the appendix section.

Appointed ambassadors also can take the initiative to *visit their next posting* and meet future colleagues, discover their future offices and official residence. It is the ambassadors that are responsible for planning the relocation and register their children to school (if necessary). Furthermore, once the ambassador is appointed, he/she must *start following the political/economical/cultural news* of the destination country and learning about the history of the country by him/herself.

Moreover, the ambassador needs to *produce a brief about their objectives, priorities, and goals for this posting*. Then the embassy and the ambassador define their plan in the Fall season for the next year. Also, if there are consuls or honorary consuls in the country the ambassador is being posted to, the incoming ambassador includes these in the process of transition. For example, the ambassador may organize meetings and will include them in the plans he/she is making for the job and the embassy.

Another informal aspect is for the ambassador to *organize meetings with the embassy's stakeholders* such as corporations or NGOs doing business in the host country or the investment promotion agency or associations of Norwegian nationals.

Moreover, in terms of transitioning the context-specific information and network, the *transfer note* is an important tool. The outgoing ambassador fills it out and the incoming ambassador takes note of the information left by his/her predecessor. In this document, the outgoing ambassador can describe what he/she is currently working on, the information that is useful to know to start the position, the contact information of the important people at the position, and other useful information.

Furthermore, a major difference exists between someone appointed while currently working at the MFA in Oslo or someone being appointed currently working as an ambassador elsewhere, the amount of time to prepare is vastly different. In the experience of the Norwegian ambassador met, it is easier to transition from a position at the MFA in Oslo than as an ambassador because the latter needs to focus on two postings at the same time and there is less time to learn the language or learn about the host country.

#### *6.2.4 Analysis of the Norwegian case*

In the Norwegian case, the transition of the ambassadors is both formal and informal depending on the tasks. The ambassadors have the experience to manage their transition in a very informal manner, without any specific tasks or procedures listed by the MFA. However, the transfer of context-specific information and contact details has been formalized through an official document asking the outgoing ambassador to detail everything that is important to know for the Norwegian ambassador. It is the MFA that has built the transfer note on the impulse of younger ambassadors that wanted a standardized process that would provide the same experience and level of readiness to incoming ambassadors. The MFA sends the note to the outgoing ambassador for him/her to fill out. This is a recognition by the MFA that there is a difficulty in transferring context-specific information and network from an incumbent to an incoming ambassador and they have listened to the younger ambassadors who wanted a more systematic approach.

The transfer process of context-specific information and network is written down and formalized through a *transfer note* that has been added to the formal process of the transition of Norwegian ambassadors during the gathering of the empirical data for this study. Adding to the transfer note, the transfer is made either through calls or during the meetings held in the summertime with all ambassadors gathered in Oslo for training. It will be interesting to see, in future years, how much this new procedure will be adopted by ambassadors and if it will facilitate the life of incoming ambassadors and jump-starting their start in the new position. To specifically answer the question on the transfer of context-specific information and network and using Steier's framework on the transfer of social capital, Norwegian ambassadors transition has the characteristics of a form of planned transition and deliberate transfer of social capital.

Looking at the transition process for Norwegian ambassadors, there seems to be a reliance on the experience of senior or past ambassadors. The experience of ambassadors leads then to adjustments being made and shared during the summer training with all ambassadors being together. The MFA offers all the necessary training and preparation for its ambassadors but leaves to them the details on how they should be organizing their transition since there is a greater reliance on the professionalism and the experience of ambassadors that have had, for most of them, other positions in the Norwegian diplomatic corps before being appointed ambassador. This is a form of rational learning on the part of the MFA who is willing to make decisions and adapt according to new information provided by the ambassadors. Another example of this rational-learning on the part of the MFA is how they have come up with a formalized process to transfer context-specific information and network on the advice of the younger ambassadors who saw an issue in how these important elements were not properly transferred by outgoing ambassadors and asked the MFA to come up with a solution.

Another element to consider and to question is the similarity of the transitions. In postings in larger countries or countries where personal connections are more important, there seems to be no increased transition period to prepare the incoming ambassador. An increased transition period could help the outgoing ambassador present the key people in his/her network to his/her successor. Also, in postings with large embassies, it could help the incoming ambassador meeting more people of his/her personnel and learn about everyone's tasks and responsibilities more thoroughly before entry into position. Looking at the data collected and according to the interviewees, transition practices do not appear to be largely shaped along other systems, professional networks, nor by state-public administration rules, which in turn suggest limited influence of isomorphic pressures and forces overall.

To conclude, since the Norwegian MFA has not clearly defined the transition process, it is relying on the experience of its ambassadors and of the personnel of its embassies. This way of doing things seems to be working smoothly and according to the embassy personnel I have discussed with; the MFA provides enough information and support to the embassies for the transition process to go according to the expectations. The process that has been formalized is the transition of context-specific information and network as a desire of the MFA to support the incoming ambassador, in the form of transfer notes, which accelerates him/her becoming effective in the new position. However, as previously mentioned, public managers - when subjected to external oversight or when embedded in a professional network - tend to break from the internal pressure to bureaucratize their operations (Frumkin & Galaskiewicz, 2004). Since there is a willingness from the MFA to standardize the process in response to the younger generation's demands, then there might be a potential issue with more senior ambassadors who are used to being autonomous. Interviewee report that the younger generation of ambassadors that are demanding for a change for a more systematic approach, compared to the more informal process preferred by the "old" generation. In some way, this may represent a form of clash similar to the one evoked by Neumann (2005) in his study of Norwegian ambassadors, between the heroic script and the bureaucratic script. Namely, the transition has always been a centered around personal initiatives and experience and it is now confronted with a willingness by the younger generation and the MFA to standardize some of the processes in place.

### 6.3 *Denmark*

#### *6.3.1 The ministry level*

The Danish MFA is responsible for the foreign affairs of Denmark. The country has 78 embassies all around the world and several consulates and missions.

The MFA provides each ambassador with two lists of things to do to limit some risks in the transition of the ambassadors. The first *list consists of practical steps* to get accustomed to the country (e.g., visa information, driving license, etc.) and the economical and administrative elements to know and consider before moving. The second *list regards the security features* of the country and the embassy. It also lists the security clearance requirements. These lists are jointly built by the local embassies, the ambassadors and the MFA and are constructed on lessons learned by these actors.

Also, to prepare ambassadors and train them throughout their careers, there are *mandatory courses* offered such as language training, security training, financial management or consular services. These classes are offered in June in Copenhagen before the arrival in position in August. This training is offered for every ambassador, whether in the middle of a mandate or transitioning into a new position. It also offers updates on the information systems used by the MFA or on the foreign policies pushed by the government.

Finally, each ambassador has a contact person at the HR department of the Ministry in Copenhagen to answer all questions regarding their status, transition or any other issues that may arise. There are three people at the HR department dedicated to helping ambassadors facilitate their transition.

#### ***6.3.2 The embassy level***

The personnel of the embassy are responsible for formal and practical issues.

The embassy asks the home country's protocol office to *obtain the agrément*. It is also responsible for the *relocation and for organizing the visit of the appointed ambassador* before he or she starts the job. This visit, organized 3 months before the arrival, allows the appointed ambassador to visit potential schools for children (if necessary) or the official residence. Also, there is a form of collaboration between Nordic countries to share the contact information such as the best services offered in the host city (moving company, management of the chancellery, etc.). The organization of the transition depends heavily on the host country. For example, in a country with few connections with Denmark, no Danish chamber of commerce or Danish associations, the *preparatory meetings with stakeholders* are not easy to organize hence there is more work to do after the arrival to get to know the country and the Danish interests in that country. Hence, the work of the embassy to prepare the field for the arrival and keep the connections with the host country's business, political and cultural actors is even more important.

#### ***6.3.3 The ambassador level***

The transition is also based, to a considerable extent, on the personal initiatives of the incoming ambassador. For example, the *appointed ambassador can call the outgoing ambassador* to inquire about the ongoing tasks and objectives. They can also share information about contacts, local politics, the economical situation, or anything related to the management of the embassy. It is up to the outgoing ambassador to determine the extent to which the incoming ambassador is involved in decision-making before his/her arrival. There is an ongoing tradition for the outgoing ambassador to *leave a letter* to the incoming ambassador, detailing the files and projects that the latter could be focusing on during his/her mandate. This letter, an informal process, also talks about the things that are left to be done by the embassy and the ambassador to tighten relationships between Denmark and the host country.

An important moment of the transition before the arrival or at the beginning of the posting is the *organization of meetings with the embassy's stakeholders* such as the Danish companies based in the host country, the local Danish Trade Council, the Danish – Host country Chamber of Commerce or the Danish nationals' associations. It is the ambassador that asks the embassy personnel to organize the meetings. These meetings allow the ambassador to understand a part of the nature of the relationship between Denmark and the host country. Ambassadors also *draft a part of the yearly strategic plan* that is asked by the MFA in the autumn. This plan details the priorities of the embassy and the lists of tasks that the embassy will work on. It is also a plan built with the collaboration of other ministries like the Ministry of Culture or the Ministry of Energy, Utilities and Climate. This collaboration depends on the elements included in the strategic plan.

### *6.3.4 Analysis of the Danish case*

In the Danish case, the transfer of ambassadors is both formal and informal as the MFA provides two lists of things to do, one for administrative purposes and one for security purposes. However, the transfer of context-specific information is informal as there is no formalized procedure linked to it. For Danish ambassadors, there seems to be a greater reliance on the Danish embassies' personnel since they are responsible for organizing meetings with the embassy's stakeholders, hence they are responsible for maintaining connections and helping the appointed ambassador get accustomed to the context-specific information and network. As previously discussed, Danish managers rely more heavily on their subordinates (Smith et al., 2003), and rely less on superiors than other Nordic countries do and this is interesting in the case of the transition of ambassadors because this contextualization looks very appropriate since through all interviews done, the Danish were the ones who emphasized the importance of the embassy personnel the most.

The transfer process for context-specific information and network is not written down and formalized since it is mostly up to the transitioning ambassadors to determine how the transfer will be made. However, according to the interviewees, the tradition of leaving a note is so standardized and understood by all ambassadors that we can say that there is a distinct amount of time and resources dedicated to the transfer which is also done before the entry into position. The transfer is made either through calls between transitioning ambassadors or during the meetings held in the summertime with all ambassadors gathered in Copenhagen for training. More importantly, it is made through notes left by the outgoing ambassador to the incoming one. These notes not being mandatory, it is up to the initiative of the outgoing ambassador to write them. To answer the first question on the transfer of context-specific information and network and using Steier's framework on the transfer of social capital, Danish ambassadors have a form of a planned transition and deliberate transfer of social capital. Even if there is a form of a planned transition of the context-specific information and network, there is no formal process to do so in the Danish case and the question needs to be asked about the sharing of knowledge and the organizational culture. As mentioned by Dalkir (2011, p.169), the organizational culture rewards collective work and creates an environment nurturing a climate of trust and the distribution of roles and responsibilities in the Danish context is interesting to look at because, according to the data, it is the country where ambassadors rely the most on the embassy personnel and trusting them for organizing meetings and the transition in general. Hence, by relying more on the embassy personnel, there may be a greater trust between all actors which nurtures a favourable environment where people may not need any formal process for transitioning context-specific information and network since there is greater confidence that the transfer of all context-specific information and network will be correctly dealt with by all parties involved.

To answer the second question, the transition process is shaped the way it is on the experiences of past or senior ambassadors. The MFA, as a learning organization, created the two lists of procedures they are sending to the ambassadors in the transition. This is an example of an organization, the MFA, which acts as a learning organization because the MFA is willing to adapt to new circumstances and information provided by the MFA, to make sure it responds as adequately as possible to the needs of its ambassadors. As in the Norwegian case, the element of the similarity of the transitions is to consider because there seem to be no distinctions made in the transition in a country with a larger embassy, or where the context-specific network is more important or when people should be met face-to-face. For these countries, there is no increased time for transition which would help the outgoing ambassador present the key person in his/her network to his/her successor.

To conclude, according to the data gathered, the Danish ambassadors' transition looks very decentralized compared to the other Nordic countries' ambassador's transition. There was an insistence on the part of every actor that contributed to this thesis, to talk about the importance of the quality of the embassy staff and how ambassadors are relying on them and their professionalism for a smooth transition. The formalization of the process through to-do lists underlies a will to make sure there are no errors or hiccups in the transition, but there is still an informal tradition to leave a note for the transfer of context-specific information and network that must be considered. Moreover, according to the data, the Danish case is the only one studied where the embassy had a major role in the transition as the number of tasks they were responsible for was far greater than in other Nordic countries. This distribution of responsibilities has consequences for all parties involved. For the MFA, it has a reduced number of tasks to help transitioning ambassadors. For the ambassador, he/she has a reduced number of responsibilities and can focus on learning about the country, its links with Denmark, keeping up with the context-specific information and developing the context-specific network. Finally, for the embassy, it places a higher burden on them to facilitate the transition, organizing meetings and maintaining the context-specific network updated with the changes at the embassy, and they must know how to execute the transition steps better than their Nordic counterparts.

## 6.4 *Sweden*

### *6.4.1 The ministry level*

The Swedish MFA has been formed in 1791. It operates 80 embassies and 7 consulates-general all around the world. If a Swedish citizen is in a country where there is no Swedish embassy, the citizen can be served by another Nordic country embassy. The transition process is detailed in an *internal manual* developed by the Deputy Director of HR at the MFA. This manual is not available for outside researchers, but it contains the processes and tasks that need to be considered while transitioning.

The MFA *sets clear guidelines and processes* for the ambassadors and for the embassies to follow. Also, once the ambassador is appointed, the MFA provides the ambassador with a *plan of mandatory readings* about the country that must be done, the meetings that must be attended and the training that needs to be done before the arrival. For the MFA, this is a way to standardize the transition process and make sure all ambassadors are well-prepared for their new position. In that sense, the process set by the MFA is the same for all embassies regardless of the size of the embassy or the country. Nevertheless, there is still special training depending on some aspects like security or relations with Sweden. However, in the manual, there are no words about possible problems while transitioning, especially, if there are conflicts or difficult situations that arise during the transition. The documents are constantly reviewed over time to consider the ambassadors' and other managers' viewpoints and experience, as well as experience and opinion on behalf of the employer.

For other diplomatic personnel, the MFA also has a formal checklist when organizing the transition between Stockholm and the embassies abroad.

The MFA also *organizes courses* for every ambassador and there is some compulsory content (e.g., finance, management) as well as voluntary content depending on the country (e.g. security, Humanitarian NGOs). There are also language courses that can be taken but only 20 hours are offered. Contrary to some other Nordic countries, there is no mentorship scheme between experienced and junior ambassadors.

In the past years, considering exchanges between the MFA and the ambassadors, there has been an acknowledgment that the transfer of context-specific information and networks was crucial and that it was not given enough attention. Hence, there has been a formalization process to facilitate the sharing of these aspects, in a form of a *briefing note*. The formalization of the process has come from the realization that certain elements were not transitioned properly from the outgoing to the incoming ambassador. Previously, the transition of some context-specific information and network was not necessarily a priority as the outgoing ambassadors were maybe already focusing on their next posting rather than thinking about their successor and what they had to know to facilitate their entry into position. At the Swedish MFA, an ambassador can end a position on Friday evening and start a new position on Monday, hence there was not necessarily a dedicated time to transfer this information. That iss the reason why the MFA, with the ambassador's input, decided to formalize the writing of these notes that provide all the information needed for the incoming ambassador in terms of context-specific information and network.

### *6.4.2 The embassy level*

The staff of the embassy is responsible to *provide information to the appointed ambassador and guide him or her during the first visit* to the mission. They are also responsible for *assisting in practical issues* such as finding schools or preparing the official residence for the arrival.

### *6.4.3 The ambassador level*

The ambassador *is responsible for doing the prescribed readings, attending the training offered and following the guidelines set by the internal manual*. He or she is *responsible for organizing the relocation* with the help of the embassy.

Also, before the official arrival, the ambassador *makes the first visit to its new posting* to meet future colleagues, visit the city and schools (if necessary).

It is the appointed ambassador that *contacts the current ambassador* and the collaboration between the two can last even after the switch has been made. It is an informal procedure and there are no fixed rules on the nature of the relationships between the ambassadors. However, the outgoing ambassador must write a *briefing note* to the incoming ambassador with the most pressing issues of the embassies, of the relation between Sweden and the receiving country and the note also details all the country-specific knowledge that the outgoing ambassador has gathered and the network he/she has woven.

Before departure, the appointed ambassador is also responsible for *organizing meetings with the embassy's stakeholders* like the Swedish Chamber of Commerce, Swedish companies based in the receiving country, the receiving country's ambassador to Sweden or think tanks. For the ambassador, it is a way to gather important country-specific knowledge and start building his/her network.

One important aspect that has been mentioned as a difficult feature of the transition is the time between the two postings. The MFA does not allow the ambassadors to prepare for their relocation and there is no buffer period between positions. For example, one could stop working at the MFA in Stockholm on Friday night and start being the ambassador in another country on Monday morning.

### *6.4.4 Analysis of the Swedish case*

In the Swedish case, the transition process is formalized by written down processes put in place by the MFA, for which each actor has some responsibilities and tasks to work on. The transition is planned similarly for all destination countries, but there is still room for adjustments depending on some context-specific elements such as security issues, the nature of the relationship with Sweden or the objectives Sweden wants to pursue in that country (economical, international cooperation, etc.). However, with the preparatory readings and the standardized processes in place, there is a will on the MFA part, to offer a consistent transition experience for its ambassadors. This still raises the question of the similarity of the transition into a larger country or a country with higher importance placed on personal connections, because apart from specific pieces of training for these countries, the transition period time is not extended to facilitate the transfer of connections and information.

On the question on the transfer of context-specific information and network and using Steier's framework on the transfer of social capital, Swedish ambassadors have a form of planned transition and deliberate transfer of social capital. Contrary to Denmark and Finland, Sweden has a formalized and written down way of transferring context-specific information and network through the mandatory briefing note left by the outgoing to the incoming ambassador. According to the interviewees, the introduction of this mandatory note was made in the mid-2000s when the MFA recognized there were some challenges in the transfer of context-specific information and transfer after some ambassadors felt they did not receive enough information and all the contact details to start their posting in the best possible way. The MFA, as a learning organization, adjusted its process to respond to the requests by the ambassadors and this process of learning through the participation of the employees was described earlier by Edmondson and Moingeon (2008). They were describing a participatory learning organization as an organization that made critical information available, accessible, and transparent. By doing so, the probability and the possibility of efficient problem-solving were increased for the ambassadors who felt they needed a proper formal process to make information more available and accessible. This was maybe a critic of a generation that arrived in ambassador's positions in the mid-2000s and recognized there was an issue with the transfer of context-specific information and network. Furthermore, as described in Smith et al. (2003), it is normal for Swedish managers to consult the subordinates and not just superficially as decision-making is particularly participative. Also, the MFA prescribes mandatory readings to its ambassadors and there is an argument to be made that past experiences have led the MFA to shape the transition in reaction to what was perceived as failed transitions. The process has been moulded over time using inputs from ambassadors themselves, in a way catering to the evolving needs of incoming ambassadors, which hints at a learning capability on the MFA's part.

Nevertheless, the ambassador is initiating the organization of meetings between him/her and the embassy's stakeholders, hence there are still elements of the transfer of context-specific information and networks that may be planned and deliberate, but not formalized by the MFA, and that are still the initiatives of the incoming ambassador.

Furthermore, as mentioned by Smith et al. (2003) in their study on Nordic managers, there is a significantly higher reliance on rules for Swedish managers and procedures are very important to organizations in tackling any changes. In that context, it does not look like a surprise that there are very specific rules that Swedish ambassadors must follow for their transition.

To conclude, the Swedish transition process appears very organized and there is a will to make it as updated as possible. The main concern of the transition seems to be the well-being of the ambassador and his/her family and how easy is the relocation, the school registration (if necessary) and the other practical aspects of the transition. According to the interviewees, the introduction visit, before the formal entry into the position, appears to be particularly important in implementing a successful transition especially looking at the short period between positions. Also, recognizing the importance of the information and contacts gathered during the posting, there is a particular focus on the transfer of the context-specific knowledge and network from the outgoing to the incoming ambassador.

## 6.5 *Finland*

### *6.5.1 The ministry level*

With the most eastern capital of the Nordic countries, Finland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was built after the country's independence in 1918. It has 89 diplomatic missions all around the world and some of the Finnish ambassadors are labelled as roving ambassadors. These roving ambassadors are based in Helsinki and are serving a group of countries by going there 3-6 times per year. No specific guidelines or manuals are detailing the transition process for Finnish ambassadors.

On the ministry level, the first thing that is done is to inform the embassy of the appointment of a new ambassador. The Finnish MFA is organized by departments for each region, i.e. the Latin and South American Department or the Middle East department. These departments are responsible to brief and provide the appointed ambassador with some guidelines about the posting and information about the country. Moreover, the MFA provides some language lessons to its appointed ambassadors but since ambassadors have often been part of the department of the region they will be posted in, they often have some basic understandings of the language they will encounter in the host country. The transition of ambassadors has been one of the elements that have been improved by the MFA over the years. To answer some concerns about the formation of ambassadors, the MFA has started offering multiple courses, that span over 4 months, for the appointed ambassador. These mandatory courses talk about rules of accounting, managing, how to face difficult issues, how to deal with problems of your employees in your postings, etc. These are general pieces of training whereas an ambassador can receive country-specific training, which varies depending on the country the ambassador will be posted to. For example, the ambassador posted to a country with a focus on development aid will receive specific training on development initiatives. An ambassador posted to a country that is known to be spying on diplomats or foreigners will receive supplementary security briefings.

The MFA wants its ambassadors to be as updated as possible in these fields and to be ready to tackle any internal challenges that may occur. To help the appointed ambassador settling into his or her new position, the MFA also organizes a trip to the host capital for 3 days. This trip, which is paid for by the MFA, allows the ambassador to visit his or her official residence, prepare the relocation, meet the staff, and visit schools if necessary. Finally, there is no mentorship scheme between junior and senior ambassadors, but in the institutional process to become an ambassador, an individual must become a director of one of the regional departments of the MFA and there's a mentorship scheme for a younger director.

### *6.5.2 The embassy level*

The embassy is responsible for making the arrangements to obtain the agrément as well as organizing the visit of the appointed ambassador.

### *6.5.3 The ambassador level*

Once the appointment has been made, the ambassador is responsible for learning about the host country and takes the initiative of reading books that are suggested by the MFA or from personal interests about the history of the country, its political debates, and its economy, starting the month he/she is named as the next ambassador. The ambassador also gains access to all the reports that have been produced on the host country and therefore can follow and monitor what is happening before his or her arrival. An informal aspect of the transition is the contact between the appointed ambassador and the outgoing ambassador. It is at the personal initiative of one of those to contact the other one to share information about the posting. During these meetings, the ambassadors share tips, references, and information on potential State visits. The content that is shared depends on the size of the embassy and the number of connections between the host country and Finland. If the country is well-known for Finnish people or the appointed ambassador, there might be less shared information due to previous knowledge of the country. The outgoing Ambassador writes a "final report", where he/she sums up the most important developments during his/her tenure, as well as recommendations for the incoming Ambassador. There are usually also phone conversations between the two before the handover. There is also an unwritten norm that the outgoing Ambassador leaves a list of the most useful connections in the country.

One of the important aspects of the transition in Finnish embassies is the series of meetings that are organized between the appointed ambassadors and the host country embassy's stakeholders. For example, the embassy will organize a meeting between the Finnish departments of local universities or the Finnish-Host country Chamber of Commerce or the local Business Finland office (Business Finland is the public organization responsible for innovation funding and trade, travel and investment promotion). By doing that, the appointed ambassador, the embassy and the embassy's stakeholders design common objectives, goals and processes for the upcoming years, but it also allows the ambassador to be introduced to the Finnish or Finland-interested organizations in the host country.

Another personal initiative from the ambassador is to meet every employee individually to construct a personal relationship with him or her and ensure that he or she is comfortable in the job and in the roles and responsibilities he or she may have. Even though it is a personal initiative by the ambassador, it is also linked to the MFA's desire to create a nurturing and comfortable environment for all its employees.

Moreover, within 6 months of the arrival, the ambassador must present a strategic plan for the duration of the stay (4 years normally). This plan is built on the inputs of the embassy's personnel as well as on the meetings with the embassy's stakeholders. The plan details the objectives and goals that the ambassador and the embassy team will pursue.

#### *6.5.4. Analysis of the Finnish case*

In the Finnish case, the transfer of ambassadors is unformalized because there is no standardized set of rules and procedures for them to follow. The transition relies on the experience and initiatives of each ambassador and is then handled differently depending on the individual as well as the context of the transition. Nevertheless, the training offered by the MFA to the ambassadors is a way to standardize the practices and the knowledge for all ambassadors. For the MFA, this is a form of rational decision makings since it is leaving the ambassadors to manage their transition according to their preference and to what suits the context the most. Going back to the managerial element of the ambassador position, another important aspect that was emphasized was the importance of the well-being of employees and ambassadors must make sure the employees are well-taken care of and there are specific measures to quickly assess any potentially difficult situation an employee may experience during a transition period. It is the only country that evoked the importance of the well-being of everyone participating in the transition process.

Regarding the transfer of context-specific information and network, the transition is unformalized as there is no specific process or mechanisms to allow a proper transfer of this information and networks, as there is only the unwritten norm to leave a letter with all the contact details of the network and a phone call that is at the initiative of the outgoing ambassador. The transfer of context-specific information and network and using Steier's framework on the transfer of social capital, the Finnish ambassadors' transition has the characteristics of a form of planned transition and deliberate transfer of social capital because there is a will to transfer the context-specific information prior to the entry into position and ensure the incoming ambassador has all the tools, network and information needed to be fully functional quickly.

Drawing from the interviews on the Finnish case, it appears that experience is the most important element, and that rules and processes are a bit obsolete in dealing with the transition process. The reason for that is seemingly that ambassadors have been diplomats before, and they have worked long enough at the MFA to know what to do once they are transferred in an ambassador position. Hence, in the Finnish case, the transition process is largely based on the individual experience and initiatives. This may lead to more adaptation by each ambassador in the way they are handling some peculiar transitions like in larger countries or in countries where personal connections and meeting face-to-face is more important. Also, since prior to being appointed the ambassadors work in the department specializing in the host country, it is easier for them to integrate and put forwards his/her personal initiatives. In a sense, Finnish ambassadors do not need adapting to a standardized transition process.

Furthermore, as mentioned by Smith et al. (2003) in their study on Nordic managers, Finnish managers rely much more on tacit understandings than explicit ones and they are the managers, in Nordic countries, that score the highest on the reliance on one own's experience and training. Also, they are the ones who comparatively speaking, desire a low frequency of interactions with their superiors (Smith et al., 2003). In that context, it does not look like a surprise that there are very specific rules that Finnish ambassadors prefer to rely on their experience and initiatives in dealing with their transfer than on norms and processes set by the MFA.

As evoked by Frumkin & Galaskiewicz (2004), when public managers are subject to external oversight or when embedded in a professional network, they tend to break from the internal pressure to bureaucratize their operations and it looks like particularly applicable in the Finnish case as they are the most reliant on their experience and personal training, and not on a formal process.

To conclude, in the Finnish case, the transition process is not clearly defined through an official manual or guide. Since all ambassadors have worked at the MFA HQ for a long period and have dealt with ambassadors when they were working for the regional departments, they are well-aware of what they must do once they are appointed. It is through experience that the transition process is run but there must be enough time between the appointment and the entry in position to make sure there is enough time for the ambassador to follow the prescribed courses, to meet all the stakeholders and to create a positive working environment. From the case of Finnish ambassadors, we can learn about the importance of experience and personal initiatives and it appears crucial that all ambassadors must have worked in other diplomatic positions before learning about the details of the transition to a new posting. Also, it raises the question of the transition of political appointment of ambassadors, that if these were to happen, would not be able to rely on prior diplomatic experience.

### 6.6. Comparing the transition of Nordic countries

To compare the transition process of each Nordic country, the next figure summarizes the roles and responsibilities of the MFA, the embassy, and the ambassador. Also, it details how the context-specific information and network is transferred as lists the factors influencing the transition. Through comparing the 5 cases, the aim is to identify some recurrent patterns and elements that differ from a country to another.

*Table 4 - Cross country comparison of transition practices and responsible level*

MFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Emb: Embassy; Amb: Ambassador

| Role/Responsibility/Task | Iceland | Norway | Denmark | Sweden | Finland |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Training sessions (accounting, management, security issues, HR, etc.) | x (MFA) | x (MFA) | x (MFA) | x (MFA) | x (MFA) |
| Language lessons | x (MFA) | x (MFA) | x (MFA) | x (MFA) | x (MFA) |
| Production and diffusion of transition section in the ambassador's manual | X (MFA) | | | | |
| Making the arrangements to get the host country's agrément | x (MFA) | x (Emb) | x (Emb) | x (Emb) | x (Emb) |
| Assist in practical matters (relocation, find a school) | x (MFA) | | | x (Emb) | |
| Organizes the relocation | x (Emb) | x (Amb) | x (Emb) | x (Amb) | |
| Organizes a meeting for ambassadors to share experiences and update ambassadors on new processes or foreign policy issues | | x (MFA) | x (MFA) | x (MFA) | x (MFA) |
| Mentorship scheme between junior and experienced ambassadors | | x (MFA) | | | |
| Sets guidelines and checklists on the transition | x (MFA) | | | x (MFA) | |
| Provides a dedicated contact person at the MFA for all questions | | | x (MFA) | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Proposes a plan of essential readings about the country | | | | x (MFA) | |
| Organizes the trip of the appointed ambassador to visit next posting | | x (Amb) | x (Emb) | x (Emb) | x (MFA and Emb) |
| Produces reports on the host country for the incoming ambassador | x (Emb) | | | | |
| Sets embassy's guidelines to welcome incoming ambassador | | x (Emb) | | | |
| Organizes meetings between ambassador and embassy's stakeholders | | x (Emb) | x (Emb) | x (Amb) | x (Amb) |
| Initiates calls with outgoing ambassador to share information | x (Amb) | x (Amb) | | | x (Amb) |
| Calls the alter ego (receiving country's ambassador in home country) | x (Amb) | | | | |
| Writes the embassy's strategic plan | x (Amb) | x (Amb) | | | x (Amb) |
| Self learning about the country | x (Amb) | x (Amb) | x (Amb) | x (Amb) | x (Amb) |
| Takes account of the information left by the incumbent | x (Amb) | x (Amb) | x (Amb) | x (Amb) | x (Amb) |
| Organizes individual meetings with employees | | | | | x (Amb) |
| **Transfer of context-specific information and networks** | **Iceland** | **Norway** | **Denmark** | **Sweden** | **Finland** |
| In-country report written by the ambassador and shared by the MFA to the appointed ambassador | x (Amb and MFA) | | | | |
| Phone meetings between the transitioning ambassadors | x (Amb) | x (Amb) | x (Amb) | x (Amb) | x (Amb) |
| Meetings between transitioning ambassadors during summer conference | | x (Amb) | x (Amb) | | |
| Outgoing ambassador leaves formal note to the incoming one with all information and contacts | x (Amb) | x (Amb) | | x (Amb) | |
| Outgoing ambassador leaves informal note to the incoming one with all information and contacts | | | x (Amb) | | x (Amb) |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Meetings with the embassy's stakeholders | | x (Amb) | x (Amb) | x (Amb) | x (Amb) |
| **Mode of transfer (Steier's framework)** | **Iceland** | **Norway** | **Denmark** | **Sweden** | **Finland** |
| **Scale: X = Informal process XX = Formal process** | | | | | |
| A form of planned transition and deliberate transfer of social capital (formal process) | xx | xx | x | xx | x |
| **Factors affecting the transition of ambassadors** | **Iceland** | **Norway** | **Denmark** | **Sweden** | **Finland** |
| Scale: X = Influences XX = Strongly influences | | | | | |
| Inputs from ambassadors | x | x | x | x | xx |
| Sharing practices with other countries | x | | | | |
| Technological changes at the MFA | x | x | x | x | x |
| Characteristics of the host country (e.g. size, importance, security issues, focus of the relation with Nordic country) | x | x | x | x | x |
| Rules and processes | xx | x | x | xx | |
| Adopting solutions from other "role-model" countries | x | | | | |
| **Drivers shaping the transition** | **Iceland** | **Norway** | **Denmark** | **Sweden** | **Finland** |
| Personal efficiency learning, rational decisions | x | x | x | x | xx |
| Organizational efficiency, rational decisions | xx | x | x | xx | |
| Legitimacy - isomorphism | x | | | | |

Overall, the five Nordic countries have a rather similar transition process regarding the main steps, practices, and roles and responsibilities of MFA, embassy, and ambassadors. The diplomatic norms and rules set in the Vienna conventions are leaving a narrow path for the transfer of ambassadors in terms of administrative elements that the sending and the receiving country need to negotiate. However, it appears that the transition processes are quite similar not because of isomorphic practices and the sharing of best practices, but because rational decisions have made them very efficient.

The main differences in the transition processes lay in the degree of formalization of some tasks. For example, for Denmark and Finland, it is only a tradition for an outgoing ambassador to leave notes on context-specific information and networks to the incoming ambassador, it is not a mandatory procedure. In comparison, in the three other countries, there is a formal process. In Sweden and Norway, this process is formalized through contacts between the transitioning ambassadors, but in Iceland, the formal process includes the MFA as the actor receiving the information from the outgoing ambassador and sending it to the incoming one. Another difference in the Icelandic case is that there are more administrative tasks attributed to the MFA than for other countries and this is due to the smaller size of the Iceland embassies, which can not take charge of every aspect of the transition by themselves.

All transitions, except the Finnish one, had some formal processes in place with checklists for administrative purposes, detailed processes, or templates for the transfer of context-specific information and network. The explanation for this peculiarity of the Finnish case may be due to the managerial habits of Finnish managers who prefer to rely on their experience rather than rules or formalized process (Smith et al., 2003).

Moreover, in the Danish case, there was an important emphasis on the role of the embassy to facilitate the transition as no interviewees from other countries have mentioned such reliance on the embassy personnel in the transition.

The overarching similarity in comparing the transition is the importance placed on the experience of ambassadors as adjustments are made to the formal process or the informal process according to the experience. Looking at the five Nordic countries and from the interviews made, there is a sense that the transition processes have been gradually changed to a large extent following suggestions and inputs from the experience of ambassadors. The Icelandic case is the only one of the five where meetings with other Nordic countries for the sharing of best practices in the transition have been evoked, even if these practices are adapted to the Icelandic context. However, this was not an event that other Nordic countries' heads of HR deemed worth mentioning even though they acknowledge that there were forms of sharing of best practices between Nordic countries and other countries such as Germany or the UK. Also, an element worth mentioning about the rational decision-making made by the MFAs is that the rationality in decisions leads to two different paths. In the case of Finland, the rational decisions that are made leave the ambassadors handling all the practicalities and the transition up to their experience. For them, rationality suggests the ambassador being able to handle everything in the informal transition process. In the other countries, the rationally motivated decisions result in modifications to the transition process set by the MFA. For them, rational decisions are a way to improve the formal transition process. These two outcomes are rationally motivated but are different in their approaches and how they come about.

Adding to that, for all five countries' transition, the interviewees did not mention any increased time or increased resources for ambassadors transitioning into a larger embassy (in terms of the number of personnel) or in a country where personal connections are more important in which the transition requires more personal contacts between the network and the transitioning ambassadors.

Adding to the analysis, I would argue that the transition of ambassadors of each Nordic country partly reflects the distinct management style of each country described in Smith et al. (2003). In the Swedish case, the authors talk about the high reliance on rules and formal steps of Swedish managers, and the way decisions are collectively made with subordinates to reflect the will of everybody involved. The transition of Swedish ambassadors is a testimony to this reliance as most of the steps have been formalized in process and decisions, like the one to bring forward a formal process to transfer context-specific information and network after a collective recognition that there was an issue with this element, have been collectively made and applied by everyone. In the Finnish case, Smith et al. (2003) talk about the low reliance on formal rules and on superiors and this is exemplified by the transition of their ambassadors where there is no formal process framing the operations. In the Danish case, Smith et al. (2003) describe the managers as having a high reliance on subordinates and low reliance on formal rules. In this case, our data does not fit the characteristics because even though the process itself is quite informal, there are formal checklists of things ambassadors must abide by. However, the high reliance on subordinates is confirmed as it is the country out of the five whose embassy personnel have the most responsibilities. In the Icelandic case, being the smallest country in terms of the size of the MFA, there is a higher reliance on colleagues than for other countries. Since most Icelandic embassies are smaller in size, there is a higher reliance on coworkers and to ensure the quality of the services offered by everyone, the manual is a formal process that helps to delimit the responsibilities of every actor, thus explicating the expectations for everyone. For Norwegian managers, Smith et al. (2003) talk about the greater reliance on values presumed to be consensual within the cultural context. In our case, the values presumed to be consensual could be linked to a form of isomorphic practices and especially normative isomorphism and this is an element that may have pushed the younger ambassadors to demand standardization of the transfer of context-specific information and network as they may have seen that this transition was better handled by other organizations like theirs. To conclude on this link between each country's management style and the transition of ambassadors, I would suggest there is an argument to be made that cultural practices and expectations for managers have a greater impact than neo-institutional practices than expected.

# 7. Conclusion

## 7.1 Answering the Research Problem and Summary of Key Findings

This study lies at the junction between research on diplomacy and research on organizational behaviour, and of transition between organizational leaders. The transition of leaders and top management positions is a pivotal moment in the life of an organization. Most instances of transition discussed in media are failures of transitioning leaders, managers, or CEOs that either lead to a state, public administration, party, or company's decline or that provoke internal discontent that led to difficult times in the organization.

Thus far, no research has explored the transition of ambassadors. This study is a first step in describing and understanding this process and the forces that shape it, by looking at the role and responsibilities of the ambassadors, the embassy personnel, and the MFA.

The first aim of the thesis was to describe the transition process of the five Nordic countries, with a particular focus on the degree of formalization of the steps and the responsibilities of each actor. Each step can be formalized or not depending on the processes in place, and the MFA, the host embassy and the ambassador have a different role to play in the transition. Looking at the degree of formalization of the five processes, we can distinguish three main categories. In Iceland and Sweden, there is a high degree of formalization since most steps are written down in a manual or in a formal procedure that describes each action that must be taken by whom and how, and few are up to the initiative of the ambassador. In Denmark and Norway, there are both very formal elements and informal ones as some tasks are specifically listed and explained in some checklists or transfer notes, and others are up to the initiatives of the transitioning ambassadors. In the Danish case, their embassies have the most responsibilities in the transition out of the five case countries. In Finland, the transition is very informal as there is no specific process in place to oversee the transition, and everything is up to the initiatives of the ambassador.

The second aim of the thesis is to understand how is it organized the transition of context-specific information and network. This knowledge has been acquired mostly through informal on-the-job experience (Peet, 2012) and has the characteristics to be difficult to learn or to train for, and to be difficult to share since it is very specific to a location. To analyze the empirical data, Steier's model of transferring social capital in family businesses which divides into four typologies of how social capital is transferred has been used. From the empirical data, the analysis suggests that there are elements of a deliberate and planned transfer of the context-specific knowledge and network. In the five countries, the transfer of context-specific knowledge and network was planned and operationalized before the entry into the position of the ambassador. However, there were still differences as the Finnish and the Danish transition of context-specific knowledge and network were informal because they relied on traditions rather than a formal process. In the three other countries, the transition was formalized with a specific briefing note in Sweden, a transfer note in Norway and an in-country report in Iceland.

The third aim of the study was to explore the reasons why transitions are shaped the way they are for the five Nordic countries' ambassadors. There is a major debate in the organizational field on the extent to which organizational behavior reflect a (bounded) rational nature, pursuing efficiency in a conscious way and through learning, either by "perceived rational" and "taken-for-granted" choices driven by the pursuit legitimacy and leading to isomorphic behavior, as discusses primarily by new-institutional theorists. The study then looked through both lenses at the transition of ambassadors. The results show that the transitions have been mostly shaped upon the bounded rationality of the ambassador's environment and experience. In most cases, the experience of ambassadors and the context in which they operate provide feedback to the MFA which, as a learning organization, adapt its practices and processes periodically to respond to the feedback provided, the technological evolutions, and the changes in the foreign policy's objectives. The only exception is Finland where the experience may be shared by ambassadors between each other, but it is not institutionalized at the MFA who could then use the knowledge to formalize the process. It could be argued that the transition of the Nordic countries' ambassadors is shaped by the ambassadors' experience but whether this experience is being institutionalized at the MFA level depends on the country. The size and objectives of the embassy and the host country's characteristics have also a role to play in shaping the transition, but they are not the most important factors. At the same time, some elements in the way the transition is shaped do seem to reflect isomorphic forces. As an example, the Icelandic ambassadors' transition has been shaped, according to its MFA, partly by following best practices shared with other Nordic countries or close partners to the Island. More generally, even though there are not specific isomorphic forces targeting the internal management of the transition of ambassadors, the diplomatic environment still has norms and rules that frame what can be done. These may have an underlying effect on how MFAs organize the transition of their ambassadors.

In addition, the Thesis analyses the transition process through the lenses of different national managerial cultures, and in particular as discussed by Smith et al. (2003), which described the key characteristics of each Nordic country's specific managerial culture. As suggested by the data, most of the transitions described in the study have elements that correspond to their country's managerial culture. For example, Finland managers' low reliance on formal rules and superiors corresponds to what we see in the transition of Finnish ambassadors or Danish managers' high reliance on subordinates is also highlighted in the transition of their ambassadors as their embassies have the most responsibilities out across the board. The Swedish transition is organized around formal rules and this reliance on rules and formal process is a characteristic of the country's managerial culture. In the Norwegian managerial culture, there is a willingness to adapt to values presumed to be consensual in the environment, and the new formalized transfer note desired by the younger generation may be an example of this evolution in how ambassadors perceive their responsibilities as managers. Finally, the Icelandic managerial culture has a higher reliance on coworkers. By having a detailed manual clarifying the role and responsibilities, it may explicate the expectations for everyone, and help building trust between coworkers.

### 7.2 Contributions to literature

This is the first study to examine the transition of ambassadors, how they are organized and why they are shaped the way they are. It describes and analyses the transition of the ambassadors of the five Nordic countries. As such, it combines and aims to be of interest for studies on diplomacy, and organizational research examining the transition of leaders and top managers.

The study contributes to diplomacy studies by describing the transition of ambassadors and by assessing the roles and responsibilities of each actor. Depending on the country, the MFA may be very important in setting the process and the steps, but it may also give great autonomy to its ambassadors. The host embassy may have an important role in organizing the transition of important information and network to the incoming ambassador or it may have more of an administrative role in supporting the incoming transition in the relocation process. The ambassador may have great autonomy in initiating the steps and projects he/she wants to put forward for the transition or he/she may only have to follow the detailed steps laid out by an MFA's process or manual. These elements have never been studied in the diplomatic literature and this study is a first step in understanding this important moment for an ambassador and an embassy.

The thesis contributes to the understanding of leaders' transition as well. In this context, it appears that isomorphic forces are of minor importance. In terms of mimetic isomorphism, the transition of ambassadors generally does not seem to be impacted by these forces since it has not been evoked by the interviewees and since the MFAs rely on the experience of their ambassadors to tell them what is efficient. In terms of normative isomorphism, there are no specific norms that define how the transition should be organized by an MFA, hence there is no pressure for the organization to adapt its processes. In terms of coercive isomorphism, there is no formal or informal pressure from the environment to adopt a particular setting on the MFA to adapt the transition process of the ambassadors. Adding to that and as evoked by Neumann (2005), bureaucrats tend not to identify as bureaucrats, so they are less prone to adopt practices or norms as a response to pressure from the environment.

The findings also highlight the role of the national managerial culture in forming the expectations of some ambassadors regarding the distribution of roles and responsibilities across the actors involved. As an example, the Finnish managerial culture has a low reliance on superiors and formal structures and the transition of Finnish ambassadors testifies to that culture. Another example would be the Danish one where there is a high reliance on subordinates, and this is exactly the case for Danish embassy personnel who are the ones with the most responsibilities out of all the Nordic countries in organizing and operationalizing the transition of its ambassadors.

Moreover, due to a recognition that there were some problems in the transition of some ambassadors like in the transfer of context-specific knowledge and network, there has been an objective by most ambassadors and MFAs to increase the process efficiency. One of the favoured ways to increase efficiency was for the MFA to adapt their processes according to the ambassador's feedback and according to elements of the bounded rationality, ambassadors were experimenting. Hence, it could be suggested that elements of rational decisions built upon bounded rationality had a larger influence in shaping the transition of ambassadors.

The study also contributes to the literature by looking at the degree to which rational decisions and experience can be institutionalized in a learning organization or be left to the manager's toolkit as he/she transitions to the next job. It suggests that this integration by the learning organization may be a result of the national managerial culture or the context of the posting.

Additionally, the study suggests that the transfer of context-specific knowledge and network from transitioning leaders, as crucial as it can be, can be operationalized in different ways even in situations with a deliberate and planned transfer. The data suggest that both a formal and an informal transfer of context-specific knowledge and network can function if expectations on how-to-do-it and what-is-important are shared between transitioning managers. The cases of Sweden and Finland are good examples: Swedish ambassadors expect to have all the information and contact details formally to facilitate their entry into position. For Finnish ambassadors, their expectations on the actions for the transfer of context-specific knowledge and network are different since there is no formal process to do so.  In both cases, there are shared expectations on what to do and the deliberate nature of the transfer of context-specific knowledge and network even if it is not operationalized the same way. A failure to develop shared expectations on these matters can lead to a willingness by the organization, in response, to formalize the process which would reduce the risks of misunderstandings.

Finally, the empirical data suggests that national managerial cultures are important to understand the perception and expectations of a transition for managers as a transition process may not work if it is not adapted to the national managerial culture. The study by Smith et al. (2003) provides key components in understanding each Nordic country's managerial culture and the empirical data contributes to reinforcing some of the study's conclusions.

### 7.3 Recommendations

- For the heads of HR at the MFA, there is a need to recognize the importance of context-specific information and network, and to implement processes and well-understood steps for transitioning ambassadors.
- For the MFA, a mentorship scheme between experienced and junior ambassadors could help the latter with advice and tips on how to handle the transition.
- For the MFA that do not have any formal transition process, a more detailed process for the embassy personnel, to assist them in preparing and facilitating the arrival of the incoming ambassador and the departure of the outgoing ambassador.
- For the countries with no formal transition process, a list of important tasks to accomplish for the transitioning ambassadors would help them not forget any steps.
- In transitioning to countries with a larger embassy or in countries with more complex security issues for example, the transition process should be tailored accordingly to give more time or resources to the incoming ambassador for preparation.

### 7.3 Limitations of the study and the generality of the findings

Some limitations of this study should be discussed.

From the five countries, I only had access to one document regarding the transition of ambassadors. This document was useful to understand the transfer of context-specific information and network in the Norwegian context, but the secrecy around the documents concerning the tasks of ambassadors made it difficult to challenge what interviewees were telling me or contrast what they were saying. Also, since the study was qualitative rather than quantitative, it relied on the personal inputs of the interviewees and even if the heads of HR at the MFA had a broader overview of the process, all interviewees gave their impression of the transition and they could only talk with their own experience. However, the aim of the study was not to ask all ambassadors' opinions on the transition process. It was to understand how it is shaped, why is it shaped the way it is and how the transfer of context-specific information and network is done. Providing a first understanding of the transition process is an objective, that I feel, was achieved with this study.

Moreover, since the Nordic countries have a rather similar bureaucratic system, no MFA had a different approach in how things should operate or function and then, it would be impossible to generalize the results to other countries such as bigger ones from Europe (i.e the UK, France, Germany), bigger ones from elsewhere (i.e the USA, China, India) or some with a different bureaucratic system (i.e African countries, South American countries, etc). Using Mill's method of difference would not be applicable with a country from outside the ones because they operate with a different bureaucratic system than the ones from the Nordic countries and using the Nordic countries allows identifying the elements that are specific to a country. Hence, the results can not be generalized to other countries, but they can serve as a starting point for future studies to evaluate the transition process of other countries' ambassadors.

One peculiarity of the interviewees from the heads of HR departments of the MFA was that most of them were recently recruited or had previously been ambassadors or diplomats, hence they were very knowledgeable and up-to-date about how the transition went about. However, there was maybe an element of historical context that was lacking in the sense that they did not know why the transition was shaped the way it was before their arrival, thus before the early 2000s for most of them.

### 7.5 Concluding remarks and suggestions for further research

Being the first of its kind, this study opens many possibilities in the fields of diplomacy, public administration management and leaders' transition.

As mentioned earlier, there is not a lot of research focusing on the management of embassies as most of the research focused on the role and responsibilities of the ambassadors, on the diplomatic tasks and the prestige attached to the position than on how, daily, they work and what are the management principles guiding their action. Thus, this study contributes to understanding a small portion of the management of embassies as well as contributes to understanding how the transition of managers in public administration is shaped and what are the elements shaping the transition. However, future research will be necessary to fully grasp the transition process in other settings such as ambassadors from another country or other types of diplomats transitioning. Also, future research could focus on the management of leaders by public administration like in the case of hospital managers or school principals.

Trying to combine many kinds of literature on the topic, the study encompasses many focuses and therefore, further research could use the ambassadors' case in their literature. For example, researchers on knowledge management could investigate the systems used to gather data in embassies and transfer the knowledge and the networks of ambassadors, and how these systems have evolved in the past few decades with the development of new technologies and the risks linked to these. Researchers on expatriates' management could look into ambassadors as cases to investigate the psychology behind the choice of a particular leader for a particular position. Also, scholars on the management of embassies could explore the transition of ambassadors to further study the definite characteristics of managing an embassy and which elements one should consider while managing such a distinct administration.

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## APPENDIX

## QUESTIONS FOR OFFICIALS AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

1. On a general level, how would you describe the transition process between ambassadors?

2. Starting from the official appointment, what are the steps in the transition?

3. To what extent are these steps elaborated and laid down by the Ministry of Foreign Affair? By the receiving embassy? The Ambassadors?

4. What are the elements that have not been added to the formal procedure?

5. Is the transition process adapted depending on the characteristics of the host country? What characteristics matter? How is it adapted? What kind of characteristics of the receiving countries matter?

6. Are you aware of any changes occurred over time in the transition process? (For example - has it become more flexible or standardized?) and why? (for example, if the process has been standardized/become more flexible- what factors do you think determined this change?)

8. To what extent is the transition process affected by rules that regulate transition of leaders in other organizations in the public sector?

9. Are there any unwritten rules about this transition?

11. What kind of role/tasks does the MFA have in the transition?

12. What kind of role/tasks does the ambassador play in the transition?

13. What kind of role/tasks has the receiving embassy's personnel in the transition?

14. According to you, what are the factors that determine the success of a transition between ambassadors? What are the factors that could "make or break" a transition?

15. In your opinion, what could be improved in the transition of ambassadors?

16. Is there any documentation about this topic? Do you know other people I should contact about this topic?

**QUESTIONS FOR AMBASSADORS**

1. On a general level, how would you describe the transition process between ambassadors?

2. Starting from the official appointment, what are the steps in the transition?

3. To what extent are these steps elaborated and laid down by the Ministry of Foreign Affair? By the receiving embassy? The Ambassadors?

4. You have been posted before in other countries, are the steps similar in all the countries you have been posted in? What characteristics matter? How is it adapted? What kind of characteristics of the receiving countries matter?

5. Are you aware of any changes occurred over time in the transition process? (For example - has it become more flexible or standardized?) and why? (for example, if the process has been standardized/become more flexible- what factors do you think determined this change?)

6. If the process has been standardized, from your experience, do you know if it is due to past experiences? Or does it come from the best practices in other Ministries or other countries that have been adapted to the embassy context?

7. Are there any unwritten rules about this transition?

8. Does the MFA offer, during the summer or prior to your arrival some training? Language classes? Management classes?

9. Starting from your appointment, what are the connections and links you have with the current ambassador? And what kind of experience-sharing with your predecessor helps you prepare for your next posting?

11. Prior to your arrival, do you have any informal or formal meetings with the embassy's stakeholders?

12. Is there a mentorship scheme between more experienced and less experienced ambassadors?

13. According to you, what are the factors that determine the success of a transition between ambassadors? What are the factors that could "make or break" a transition?

14. In your opinion, what could be improved in the transition of ambassadors?