# SCANDINAVIA AND FORMER YUGOSLAVIA TERRITORIES ACCORDING TO THE HARTSHORNE MODEL: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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***Abstract***

*Today, there are more and more studies combining the disciplines of political geography and International Relations. This study is based on the model of Richard Hartshorne, one of the pioneers of political geography, which deals with the factors that hold states together or pull them apart. Hartshorne's physics-inspired model of centripetal forces - those pulling states closer to the centre and centrifugal forces - those pulling states away from the centre, is adapted to the regions of Scandinavia and the former Yugoslavia. In this framework, religion, language, ethnicity, economic structure, geographical location and history have been analysed as unifying factors in one region and divisive factors in another. In the end, it is concluded that the importance of the raison d'être element in Hartshorne's model, which has been present in Scandinavia since the beginning, has been lost over time in the countries of the former Yugoslavia.*

***Keywords:*** *political geography, Hartshorne model, Scandinavia, former Yugoslavia, European Studies*

# HARTSHORNE MODELİ ÇERÇEVESİNDE İSKANDİNAVYA VE ESKİ YUGOSLAVYA COĞRAFYALARI: KARŞILAŞTIRMALI BİR ANALİZ

***Öz***

*Günümüzde siyasi coğrafya ve uluslararası ilişkiler disiplinlerini bir araya getiren daha fazla çalışma yer almaktadır. Bu çalışma, siyasi coğrafyanın öncülerinden Richard Hartshorne'un devletleri bir arada tutan ya da ayrıştıran*

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*faktörleri ele aldığı modeline dayanmaktadır. Hartshorne'un fizik terimlerinden esinlenerek yarattığı centripetal forces – merkeze yakınlaştıran ve centrifugal forces – merkezden uzaklaştıran faktörler, İskandinavya ve Eski Yugoslavya bölgelerine uyarlanarak incelenmiştir. Bu çerçevede din, dil, etnisite, ekonomik yapı, coğrafi konum ve tarihin bir bölgede nasıl birleştirici ancak diğer bölgede ne kadar ayrıştırıcı olduğu ortaya konmuştur. Son olarak Hartshorne'un modelinde yer alan raison d'être unsurunun ne kadar önemli olduğu, başlangıçtan günümüze İskandinavya'da var olmakla beraber, Eski Yugoslavya ülkelerinde zamanla kaybedildiği sonucuna varılmıştır.*

***Anahtar Kelimeler:*** *siyasi coğrafya, Hartshorne modeli, İskandinavya, Eski Yugoslavya, Avrupa çalışmaları*

## Introduction

Geopolitics, which holds a significant place within the field of International Relations, is briefly defined by Yves Lacoste as "the study of the territorial rivalries of powers" (Lacoste, 1993:587). While the origins of geopolitical studies date back to the 19th century, the closely related discipline of political geography receives comparatively less attention within international relations literature. This is mainly because political geography is considered a subfield of human geography (Flint & Taylor, 2018:1). Like human geography, political geography is seen as a more objective and less interpretative discipline (Flint & Taylor, 2018:1). Specifically, political geography focuses on how power is distributed among actors based solely on their geographic locations and conditions (Rosiere, 2007:24). Political geography investigates how the geographical characteristics of a given territory may bring about advantages or, conversely, disadvantages for states. Put simply, it aims to explain the natural factors involved. For this reason, compared to geopolitics—which focuses on analysing the balance of power in the international system and how power is exercised (Rosiere, 2001:35)—political geography receives relatively less attention within the discipline of International Relations. However, the majority of experts in geopolitics and political geography work across both fields and draw inspiration from the same foundational works. For instance, pioneers such as Friedrich Ratzel and Karl Haushofer from the German school, or Alfred Mahan, John Mackinder, and Nicholas Spykman from the Anglo-Saxon school, continue to serve as key references for scholars working in both geopolitics and political geography today. Nowadays, there is an increasing trend toward interdisciplinary research in political geography and international relations. "To many political scientists, (…), geography means physical geography, and political geography means the influence of the physical environment on politics" (Jones, 1954:112).

This study centres on the model developed by Richard Hartshorne, a leading figure in political geography, drawing inspiration from physical laws. By

focusing on the factors that unite or separate societies, Hartshorne's work has significantly contributed to understanding state sustainability in international relations. Hartshorne's model, which explores the integrative and disintegrative (centripetal and centrifugal) forces within states, will be employed here to conduct a comparative analysis of two European regions: Scandinavia in Northern Europe (comprising Denmark, Sweden, and Norway) and the region encompassing the successor states of former Yugoslavia in Southern Europe. The central puzzle of this article is why these two regions demonstrate such sharply contrasting trajectories of territorial cohesion and fragmentation. The article explores how centripetal and centrifugal forces, as conceptualised by Hartshorne, help explain this divergence. Among the broader set of integrative and disintegrative factors identified by Hartshorne, this study focuses on six forces that are most central to his conceptualisation of state cohesion. These six forces were selected because they capture key political-institutional, socio-economic and socio-cultural dimensions of cohesion and fragmentation, and can be meaningfully observed and compared in both Scandinavia and the former Yugoslav space. Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative, theory-guided comparative design in which these six centripetal and centrifugal forces are operationalised to trace and interpret the patterns of territorial cohesion and fragmentation observed in the two regions. Through the comparative analysis of these cases, this study seeks to provide valuable insight for European and regional studies.

In this respect, the initial section of the study will provide a brief overview of Richard Hartshorne's contributions to political geography and his development of the Hartshorne model, and will discuss the reasons for its applicability to the discipline of international relations. Subsequently, six fundamental centrifugal and centripetal forces that form the core of the model will be selected to comparatively analyse and interpret the current positions and social dynamics of the Scandinavian and former Yugoslav territories.

**Richard Hartshorne's Approach to The Political Geography**

From the point of view of Flint & Taylor, Richard Hartshorne approached the discipline of political geography from a functionalist perspective and brought it back to a "respectable" position during World War II (Flint & Taylor, 2018: 6). Political geography, is described as "the science of political areas, or more specifically, the study of the state as a characteristic of areas in relation to the other characteristics of area" (Jones, 1954:113). Hartshorne does not see international politics merely as power relations (Dussouy, 2006:180). The most influential work by Hartshorne, which also forms the foundation of our study, is his 1939 book, *The Nature of Geography* (Martin, 1994:484).

Hartshorne's regional approach to geography significantly contributes to the field of International Relations, particularly at the level of state analysis. Viewing a geographically defined area—such as a state's territory—from a holistic perspective, in other words, taking into account each component or element of the whole, facilitates an understanding of that state's unique behavioural patterns in both domestic and foreign policy. The same applies to efforts to explain the dynamics of a clearly bounded region, such as a regional cooperation initiative. In this sense, Hartshorne's approach to political geography closely intersects with the discipline of International Relations, especially regarding the levels of analysis.

***The Hartshorne Model***

The model developed by Richard Hartshorne, which helped revive interest in political geography after World War II, is now recognized as a "well-constructed and long-standing theory" (Remenyi, 2012:130). Today, it is still widely used to analyse different countries and regions across time and space. The model has been applied in various contexts, including studies on Asia and the Caucasus (Cornell, 2023), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Remenyi, 2012; Kappler, 2012), Macedonia (Háry & Novák, 2017), Kermanshah in Iran (Amir, 2021), Canada (Roy, 1980; Sénéchal, 1989), the Visegrad Four (Hashimoto & Wójcik, 2021), Africa (Kaplan, 2016), and the European Union (Szapáry, 2021). These examples indicate that the model can be applied to many types of actors in the international system, regardless of their location or time period. Although it originated in the field of geography, the model has also been utilized across multiple disciplines, from international relations to economics, and has thus evolved into an interdisciplinary framework.

"According to his model, the major subject of analysis in political geography is the state or other regions with state-like nature. The main task of the analysis should be to examine how the state can organize the different regions under its sovereignty to form an effective and integrated unit of them. In his approach the emphasis is on the integrity and the effective performance of the state thus it is highly functionalist" (Remenyi, 2012:130). According to Hartshorne, the most critical factors in establishing "a single organized unit" are the maintenance of law and order in internal politics, the development of constructive control mechanisms in social life (such as family organization, class structure, religion, and education) despite regional differences, and the achievement of coherence in both domestic and external economic relations (Hartshorne, 2011:67). Beyond these internal factors, Hartshorne emphasizes that the foremost duty of a state is to guarantee the security of its society (Hartshorne, 2011:68).

As explained by Hartshorne, except for a few exceptions, similar challenges are encountered in almost every country: "regions that are more or less separated

from each other by physical or human barriers; regions that in greater or lesser degree diverge in their relations with outside states; and regions that differ among themselves in character of population, economic interests, and political attitudes" (Hartshorne, 2011:68). The resolution of these challenges and the attainment of greatest cohesion can only be achieved if the central authority constructively manages and diminishes the social differences existing among different regions. Such differences may originate from solely physical factors, such as living in mountainous versus coastal areas, or from more societal factors, including linguistic, social, and economic differences (Dussouy, 2006:221). Hartshorne's framework, which analyses the centrifugal and centripetal forces at the regional and local levels within a state, has been widely regarded by many experts as a "genetic approach" (Lacasse, 1974:189). In this context, Hartshorne defines the forces that unify a state or region as centripetal, while those that divide it are termed centrifugal forces.

***Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces***

According to Hartshorne, the long-term viability and success of a state rely on balancing two fundamental forces: *centrifugal forces*, which can lead to fragmentation, and *centripetal forces*, which help maintain unity (Flint & Taylor, 2018:6). For a state to endure, these opposing forces must remain in equilibrium.

Geographer Hartshorne's model is inspired by the physical concepts of centrifugal and centripetal forces, which are central to this study (The Institute of Geographical Studies, 2018). Originally introduced by Isaac Newton, centrifugal means "moving or directed away from a centre or axis," while centripetal means "proceeding or acting towards a centre or axis" (Merriam-Webster, 2025). Hartshorne argued that there are no sharp distinctions between geophysics and spatial sciences; - which includes geography - as all are focused on time and space (Hartshorne, 1958:10). This perspective prompted Hartshorne to place centrifugal and centripetal forces at the heart of his analysis. The adaptation of centripetal and centrifugal forces to the discipline of international relations can be summarized as factors that keep states together or pulling states and societies apart.

When discussing centrifugal forces—those that push societies away from the centre or create regional divisions—Hartshorne first points to physical geographic conditions. Forested, mountainous, or desert terrains hinder inter-regional transportation and communication, thereby creating "human barriers," which are essentially uninhabited or sparsely populated areas. These empty spaces, in turn, further impede interaction between communities. For Hartshorne, distance itself may even be considered a centrifugal force (Hartshorne, 2011: 69). Another centrifugal force, in his view, consists of regions located near the borders of neighbouring states. Such regions may establish closer ties with external

powers—particularly for commercial and economic reasons—rather than with their own national centre, thus weakening central cohesion (Hartshorne, 2011:70). However, Hartshorne underlines that modern technological advancements can overcome physical obstacles or border problems (Hartshorne, 2011:71).

For Hartshorne, the primary and most powerful centrifugal force is the "social character of different regions." He asserts that "The attempt to produce unity may intensify disunity" (Hartshorne, 2011:71). One of his key examples, which is also the focus of this study, involves the territories of the former Yugoslavia. Hartshorne maintains that social structure encompasses factors such as religion, language, ethnicity, culture, education, living standards, race, economic status, and development (Hartshorne, 2011:70–72; Hartshorne, 1950:106–108). Diversity in these domains may disrupt the harmonious structure that Hartshorne describes, thereby driving societies further apart.

Remenyi, who argues that centrifugal forces predominate over centripetal ones in much of the Balkans, identifies the key factors as "a fragmented state area, unstable borders, a heterogeneous society (in terms of ethnicity, religion, and language), large socio-economic differences between regions, and the lack of a state idea" (Remenyi, 2012:130). Cornell divides centrifugal forces into internal and external categories: internal centrifugal forces arise from class differences and divergent ideologies, while external centrifugal forces stem from the political and economic influence of other states (Cornell, 2023:14). Simply put, external factors and actors may also drive societies apart. According to Szapary, who studies the EU, immigration and fiscal politics act as centrifugal forces within this supranational organization (Szapary, 2021:120). Likewise, Kappler, adopting an external perspective, argues that foreign aid and interventions during the post-war peace-building process in Bosnia-Herzegovina created feelings of exclusion among different social groups—meaning that the peace-building process led to fragmentation and thereby produced a centrifugal force (Kappler, 2012:615).

In contrast to centrifugal forces, which draw societies away from the centre, centripetal forces possess qualities that bring societies together and strengthen their unity. Centripetal forces keep citizens united. As pointed out by Hartshorne, centripetal forces essentially summarize how a state can overcome its challenges (Hartshorne, 2011:72). As with centrifugal forces, Hartshorne begins his discussion of centripetal forces with geographical and physical conditions. In his view, the unification of Italy was achieved successfully despite the physical barrier posed by the Alps in the country's central region (Hartshorne, 2011:73). The state-idea, or *raison d'être*, is the basic centripetal force and today is synonymous with nationalism. Furthermore, Hartshorne proposes that in order to identify the state-idea that unites a nation, one must first examine the historical

process through which those territories have passed (Jones, 1954:114). In essence, history can be defined as a centripetal force because it reflects the purpose of a state's survival.

Apart from the concept of a shared state or societal identity, the existence of a strong political and economic centre—referred to as the core area—is considered one of the key centripetal forces. In the context of our study's focus on the Scandinavian region, Norway stands out as a successful example of core-area formation, due to its national unity and the development of a modern state (Hartshorne, 1950:116). Correspondingly, Dussouy identifies Sweden, another country in the Scandinavian region, as a successful example of a core area (Dussouy, 2006:223).

Remenyi claims that possessing compact territories—a feature long regarded by geographers as advantageous (Rosiere, 2007:36)—constitutes an important centripetal force (Remenyi, 2012:130). Remenyi also identifies other centripetal forces, including stable borders, an ethnically and religiously homogeneous society speaking one language, and minimal regional economic cleavages (Remenyi, 2012:130). From this standpoint, shared language and ethnicity—essentially, common social characteristics—are seen as factors that encourage closer ties between societies. In a similar vein, similar levels of economic prosperity across regions are considered advantageous. Border security, on the other hand, enhances a sense of territorial attachment among societies seeking greater security.

Ultimately, Cornell distinguishes between internal and external centripetal forces, identifying internal factors such as state borders, state institutions, education systems, military bodies, law enforcement, national identity, and patterns of ethnic settlement. External factors include *de jure* recognition of the state, membership in international organizations, and foreign aid (Cornell, 2023:11). Analysing these hypotheses highlights the integrative role of institutional structures—such as law, education, the military, and political systems—while emphasizing the importance of national identity. Whereas Hartshorne's framework considered external influences primarily in the context of neighbouring states, Cornell's classification adopts a much broader perspective. Even integration into international organizations can act as a centripetal force, as seen in the emergence of a supranational identity through EU membership, a point illustrated by researchers specializing in the European Union, such as Kappler and Szapary. Indeed, Szapary asserts that the 'shared identity' fostered by EU membership also creates a 'European identity', which itself functions as a centripetal force (Szapary, 2021:120). Conversely, during the Brexit process, this supranational identity transformed into a centrifugal force (Gromyko, 2022:277).

History, as Roy (1980:110) states, can be seen as a struggle between the unifying and divisive forces that determine state survival—what Hartshorne refers to as centrifugal and centripetal forces. While centrifugal forces slow the process of integration, centripetal forces foster attachment to territory and promote unity. With integration, centripetal forces further accelerate development and modernization (Sénéchal, 1989:314). Achieving a balance between centrifugal and centripetal forces is essential for political coherence, stability, and long-term viability (Flint & Taylor, 2018:6). Furthermore, Dussouy (2006:222) argues that centripetal forces must ultimately prevail over centrifugal ones.

What, then, holds a state together if centrifugal forces outweigh centripetal forces? What continues to bind a society despite these challenges? Like many other geographers, Hartshorne answers these questions with the concept of the state-idea, or *raison d'être*. A sense of purpose, historical heritage, and shared social values are crucial for both the state and its society, and the state-idea engenders loyalty and strong nationalism independent of time and external influences (Hartshorne, 2011:73-74). The state-idea can serve as the founding purpose of a state; if this purpose is lost, the state may persist for a time, but without forming a new state-idea, its continuity will be threatened by both internal dissent and external pressures (Hartshorne, 2011:74).

In the second part of this study, the same forces will be analysed for former Yugoslavia and Scandinavia, centripetal in the latter and centrifugal in the former. While the dominance of centrifugal forces will be discussed in one region, the analysis will also address how these very forces manifest as centripetal in the other. The forces examined will be *geographical position, history, economy, language, religion, and ethnicity.* The selection of these six forces is based on Hartshorne's classification, which forms the theoretical foundation of this study. The theorist addresses the impact of these forces in nearly all of his works. As this research delves into where and why these forces prevail in each region, it will also investigate the presence of Hartshorne's additional hypothesis, *the raison d'être,* in both geographies.

**Centrifugal And Centripetal Forces in Scandinavian and Former Yugoslavia Countries**

Although both regions are located in Europe, the historical and contemporary experiences of the countries that make up Scandinavia and the former Yugoslavia differ significantly. Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, situated in the Scandinavian region, are often perceived as distant, isolated, and cold societies. In contrast, the successor states of former Yugoslavia—namely North Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, and Montenegro—appear as more open, regionally engaged, and culturally warmer societies, reflecting traits

commonly associated with southern Europe. The peaceful and calm atmosphere in Scandinavia is the exact opposite of the conflict-ridden environment once experienced in Yugoslavia, especially the war crimes committed against Bosniaks. In this part of the study, the dynamics of these two regions—despite being on the same continent—will be discussed through Hartshorne's methodological perspective. This study will explore how factors such as geography, shared history, economic conditions, language, religion, and ethnicity have functioned as centripetal forces—that is, unifying elements—in the Scandinavian context, while acting as centrifugal forces—that is, divisive elements—among the countries that emerged from the former Yugoslavia. Within this framework, the analysis will also seek to identify the reasons behind the distinct paths followed by these two regions, representing Northern and Southern Europe.

### *Centripetal Forces in Scandinavia*

#### *Physical Geography*

As a geographer, Hartshorne prioritizes *the geographical position* and physical conditions of states in his model. The Scandinavian Peninsula geographically includes Norway and Sweden, along with Denmark's Jutland or Jylland Peninsula, and numerous islands such as Greenland and the Faroe Islands (Kraft, 2025). While the terms Nordic and Scandinavian are often used to refer to Northern European countries, geographically and culturally, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway are considered the Scandinavian countries. When Finland and Iceland are included, they form the Nordic five. Demographically, as of 2025, Denmark has a population of about 6 million, Norway 5.5 million, and Sweden 10.5 million. Greenland's population is approximately 57,000, and the Faroe Islands have about 55,000 inhabitants (Nordic Statistics, 2025).

"The geography of Scandinavia features diverse landscapes, including rugged mountains, fjords and numerous islands, with a climate that varies from mild coastal conditions to colder alpine regions" (EBSCO, 2025). "The Scandinavian Peninsula measures roughly 1,245 miles (2,000 kilometers) north to south" (New World Encyclopedia, 2025). "Long coastlines, deep forests, mountains, meadows and river valleys – from the Arctic tundra of the north to the warm, temperate parts of the south, Nordic nature is unique. (…) The Nordic region is surrounded by sea from the Baltic in the south to the Arctic Ocean in the north. Ever since Viking times, the sea has been both a major transit route and source of food for the people of the Nordic region. Most Nordic people live in coastal areas" (Norden, 2025).

In light of the Hartshorne model, the harsh climatic and physical conditions discussed above would typically be expected to exert a centrifugal force. As stated in the model, Hartshorne argues that vast, unused lands can alienate

societies. However, in this instance, the physical conditions have not harmed Scandinavian unity. Instead, for the nature-friendly Scandinavians, harsh climate conditions have become a centripetal force. As noted by Aurell (2021:6), "The harsh environment that we live in also united us – in the snow, in the darkness, in the amazing light and in green nature". Water has turned into an important economic resource, and the techniques developed to meet transportation needs have driven technological advancement. The emphasis on nature and environmental policies has positioned the Scandinavians as leaders of *soft power* in the international system. The large stones and unusual tree shapes of Northern Europe's landscape, even ancient mounds, runic stones, and monoliths, have united societies through cultural heritage (Olwig, 2005:5). Additionally, Denmark's concept of *hygge*, creating a cozy atmosphere by candlelight, Norway's *friluftsliv* philosophy promoting outdoor life, and Sweden's *fika* culture of coffee breaks with cinnamon buns (Rayborn, 2021:9-10) have transformed Scandinavia's harsh climate into a tool of cultural diplomacy. In sum, Scandinavian countries have turned challenging geographical conditions into advantages even in public diplomacy.

*History*

Shared history is one of Scandinavia's strengths and a key factor explaining the region's stability. Vikings, dominant from the 8th to the 11th centuries, form the roots of all three Scandinavian countries. This warrior and explorer society contributed significantly to the technological and economic development of the region. Although known for their fierce war tactics, the Vikings laid the foundations of modern Scandinavian civilizations. The discoveries of Greenland and Iceland were also made by the Vikings (Crofton, 2011:37-39). "Vikings were Scandinavians who attacked, traded with, or settled in territories throughout Europe, east into Russia, south to the Mediterranean, and west to North America. Relying on superior technology (boat building), a high degree of organization (such as legal codes and rules of engagement), and sheer physical strength, Vikings are associated with power to the present day" (Ingebritsen, 2006:5). Based on a wide range of sources, the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066 marked the end of this era. The known histories of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway are associated with kings and queens tracing back to the Viking era. Gorm the Old became the first known king of Denmark in 958, Erik Segersall ascended as King of Sweden in 970, and Harald I Halfdansson began his reign as Norway's first king in 872 (Schnakenbourg & Maillefer, 2010:7-23).

Apart from the Viking era, three pivotal events stand out in Scandinavian history: the Kalmar Union of 1397, the Stockholm Bloodbath of 1520, and the Treaty of Kiel in 1814. The year 1397 marks the beginning of modern political unity in Scandinavia. Under the leadership of Queen Margaret of Denmark, the three kingdoms established their first formal political and defensive alliance,

uniting under a single crown. Dominated by Denmark, this union dissolved in 1523 following the Stockholm Bloodbath in 1520, with Sweden declaring independence while the weaker Norway remained under Danish control. The Kalmar Union marks a historical benchmark of regional cooperation in Scandinavian history (Ingebritsen, 2006:7). The Treaty of Kiel in 1814 symbolized the beginning of the map and borders of the Nordic countries taking shape. Norway shifted from Danish to Swedish control, eventually gaining independence in 1905. Stable borders have served as a significant centripetal force. The alignment of Scandinavian borders with modern boundaries as early as the 19th century emphasizes the importance of security. Stable borders create societies that feel secure and, in turn, strengthen regional cooperation.

"After 1814, Scandinavia no longer initiated armed conflict with neighbouring states" (Ingebritsen, 2006:8). From this perspective, this date holds symbolic significance not only for borders but also as the beginning of a 'conflict-free' era in Scandinavian and Nordic history. The absence of major wars between these states since the 19th century has been crucial for the development of political stability, a welfare state structure, and a peaceful mentality. In this context, it presents a stark contrast to the war-torn Yugoslav region in the 20th century. The North, has not experienced the significant upheavals that have led to major transformations elsewhere in Europe (Schnakenbourg & Maillefer, 2010:249).

Another shared feature of the 20th century is that all three states declared neutrality during the World Wars. Neutrality has been a widely employed principle of international law in the foreign policies of the Nordic countries. The longstanding tradition of neutrality can be said to have ended in the military domain with Sweden's accession to NATO in 2024.

The above discussion implies that the historical roots of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway are deeply intertwined, particularly up until their respective independence. Although these countries have embraced differing foreign policy orientations since the Second World War—especially regarding memberships in international organizations such as NATO and the European Union—their regional unity and peaceful coexistence have persisted. Geographic proximity and shared origins have made the Scandinavian countries a classic case study for scholars addressing the concept of a *historic region*. As Hilson (2015:15) notes, the notion of a historic region rests on the idea that the regional identities of neighbouring societies sharing a common geography and history can supersede national identities. While Hartshorne's model predominantly highlights the state-area concept and does not explicitly incorporate regional identity, the latter remains a central focus of this study. In fact, regional identity serves as a centripetal force in the context of Scandinavia. Beyond geographic proximity and shared history, regional identity is significant because it cultivates a shared

culture and identity. In this regard, self-identification as Scandinavian is a common phenomenon among the peoples of the North.

*Ethnicity, Religion, and Language*

"Scandinavians love being equal. We like having the same car as the neighbour, we like earning similar salaries. We like not having a huge class divide. It means we are all sort of on a level playing field and it makes us content. It is how we preserve harmony and social stability, to an extent". (Aurell, 2021:140). As indicated by this statement, Scandinavians tend to adopt a simple lifestyle and culturally distance themselves from consumerism. Concepts instilled from an early school age—such as equality, environmental consciousness, sustainability, and minimalism—are deeply embedded in Scandinavian culture. These values have also given rise to cultural concepts like friluftsliv and hygge, which were referenced in the preceding paragraph.

The shared Scandinavian culture extends from the Vikings and Norse mythology to the present day. Similarities in ethnicity, religion, and languages also originate from this period. One of the centripetal forces discussed in this study regarding the Scandinavian region is *language*. "Historically, many of the people of the Nordic countries were able to understand each other. This linguistic community transcended borders and helped to bind the region together culturally" (Nordic Cooperation, 2025). "Faroese, Icelandic, Norwegian, Danish and Swedish are all North Germanic languages that stem from the same common tongue spoken by the Vikings. Since then, the languages have grown apart from each other and separated into western and eastern branches, with Danish and Swedish on the one hand, and Norwegian, Faroese and Icelandic on the other. Faroese and Icelandic constitute the island-language group. They are mutually intelligible with what are known as the mainland Nordic, or Scandinavian, languages: Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. This is due to among other things, divergent developments in pronunciation" (Nordic Cooperation, 2025). Although the language has evolved through similar processes within Scandinavia rather than the broader Nordic region from the Viking Age to today, despite current differences in pronunciation and regional variations, it has become a cultural centripetal force. The lack of significant differences in language-related social structures has further created a centripetal force among the peoples. The only notable exception is the Sami ethnic group, which constitutes a large minority in Norway and speaks a Uralic language. In this respect, the Sami are linguistically more closely related to the Finns than to other Nordic groups.

Another centripetal force that began with the Vikings is *religion*. "The native religion of the Vikings was polytheistic and revolved around a pantheon that was anthropomorphic—that is, featuring gods with human characteristics. They perceived the universe to be comprised of a number of worlds". (Encyclopedia,

2025). On the other hand, Christian missionaries initiated their activities in the region from the 9th century onwards. "The Vikings who settled in predominantly Christian areas on the European mainland eventually assimilated Christian customs, lifestyle, and faith, and by the mid-1000s Christianity began to become more firmly established in Scandinavia, continuing through the middle of the 13th century" (Encyclopedia, 2025). That is to say, the transition from Old Norse religion or Norse paganism to Christianity occurred during roughly the same period in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. Traveling merchants and students introduced Lutheran beliefs to Scandinavia. In the 16th century, Gustav Vasa, the ruler of Sweden, supported Lutheran preaching and publications not only in Sweden but throughout Scandinavia. By the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, Lutheranism was fully established in Scandinavia (Schnakenbourg & Maillefer, 2010: 91-106). Today, however, secularism has been on the rise in Scandinavian societies (Furseth et al., 2018:1). The majority of the population sharing similar beliefs since the Viking era and the three countries adopting Christianity and Lutheranism around the same time have again served as a centripetal force among their peoples. Against this backdrop, unlike much of the rest of Europe, the Scandinavian region did not experience major religious wars. As with language, there is also a significant degree of religious homogeneity in these lands.

*Ethnically*, among the Scandinavian populations, where the majority are of Germanic origin, the Danes are considered one of the most homogeneous groups. Historically, the Danish peninsula consisted predominantly of Germanic tribes such as the Jutes, Angles, and Cimbri—classified as Western Germanic peoples. It has also been reported that the Saxons and Frisians, other Germanic groups, once inhabited these lands. Over time, the Angles and Saxons migrated to present-day England, the Cimbri to Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, and the Frisians to what is now the Netherlands and Germany. As a result, the Jutes remained the predominant group in Denmark. To put it differently, the Danes primarily trace their origins to the Jutes ethnic group. Geographically, the peninsula on which Denmark is located is known as Jylland or Jutland, a name derived from the Jutes (Denmark, 2025).

The ethnic origins of the Swedish people also trace back to the Germanic peoples, specifically to the Svear in the north and the Geats or Goths in the south. Over time, the Svear ethnic group gained predominance over the Goths, many of whom largely migrated to Spain and Italy. Historically, Sweden has been referred to as Svearike (the Kingdom of Svea) (Sweden Sverige, 2025). The Swedish population is generally considered to have maintained a relatively homogeneous structure from the past to the present. Lastly, given Norway's ethnic background, its society appears to be more heterogeneous than those of the other two Scandinavian countries. Historically, Norway has been home to two major groups, namely the Nordmenn of Germanic origin and the Sami, who today

represent the country's largest minority. It is believed that the Sami migrated to these lands approximately 10,000 years ago, possibly from Central Asia. Recognized today as a distinct culture with considerable political autonomy, the Sami continue to reside peacefully within Norwegian territory (Larsen, 2015: 14-32).

Today, there is social diversity within the Scandinavian territories. In other words, the populations are no longer as homogeneous as they were in the past. Despite the existing social diversity, it can be observed that the majority of the population in these territories still originates from Germanic peoples, and according to Hartshorne's model, this homogeneous structure functions as a centripetal force.

*Economy*

The last of the centripetal forces addressed in this study is the *economic structure*. The absence of significant economic differences between regions is considered a centripetal force. Regarding the Scandinavian states, the first point to highlight is that these three countries have not faced major difficulties in terms of welfare levels from past to present. For these communities, which have successfully utilized sea routes from the Viking era to the present day, fishing has been one of the most important sources of livelihood — a sector often cited as one of the reasons why Norway chose not to join the European Union. In addition, "the immense forests and mines provide raw materials" (Universalis, 2025). The Scandinavian economies provide their societies with high standards of living and well-developed social services. The electricity, oil, gas, manufacturing, petroleum, nuclear power, forestry, and livestock sectors are among the most significant sources of income for these states (Britannica, 2025). "The Nordic model is characterized by stable inflation and exchange rates, a large public sector, many welfare benefits and a social safety net that embraces everybody. Taxes are among the highest in the world. (…) The Nordic countries are among the richest in the world measured in per capita GDP significantly above the EU average. Norway is top of the Nordic ranking" (Nordic Cooperation, 2025). All of these features have enabled the Scandinavian states to be recognized worldwide as successful examples of welfare states, and furthermore, to establish a brand identity under the name Nordic Model, which also includes Finland and Iceland (Hilson, 2015). The absence of deep financial and commercial problems in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway acts as a centripetal force, thereby bringing the populations of the region closer together.

***Centrifugal Forces in Former Yugoslavia***

The disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY, 1945–1992) provides a powerful case for examining Richard Hartshorne's concept of centrifugal forces. As a natural transit corridor between Europe and

Asia, the Balkan Peninsula has long served as a bridge and a battleground—hosting a mosaic of national and ethnic groups shaped by successive waves of conquest and migration. Thracians, Illyrians, Greeks, Romans, Slavs, Huns, and Bulgars settled in the region over the centuries, each leaving behind distinct cultural, political, and linguistic traces. Influenced by great civilizations such as the Greek, Roman, and Celtic worlds (Cvijić, 1918:470), the history of the region reflects continuous layering of identities and loyalties. Moreover, centuries of imperial rule under the Roman, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian empires further deepened the heterogeneity and geopolitical instability of the region.

This section focuses on the former Yugoslav region, particularly the period of SFRY to understand the centrifugal forces. The South Slavic unification project, which began with the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918 and continued under socialist rule after the Second World War, succeeded in uniting the nations of the region into a federated state. However, persistent centrifugal forces—including ethno-nationalist tensions, economic disparities among republics, religious and linguistic divisions, and the region's complex geography—gradually undermined their cohesion.

*Physical Geography*

Geography has profoundly shaped the spread and development of civilizations. Resembling an inverted triangle, the region is surrounded by the Adriatic Sea to the west; Albania and Greece to the south; Bulgaria and Romania to the east; and Hungary and Austria to the north. Approximately 60% of its area is mountainous, with limited fertile plains and a rugged Adriatic coastline. This geographical feature creates difficulties in the areas of communication, transport and governance, becoming an important centrifugal force.

The geography of the region is characterised by three important mountain systems. In the northwest, Slovenia is home to the Julian Alps—an extension of the Italian and Austrian Alps—which contain the country's highest mountains. The Dinaric Alps create a remarkable natural barrier along the 640-kilometer stretch of the Adriatic coast. Meanwhile, branches of the Carpathian and Balkan ranges extend southward into Serbia, joining the Dinaric system in what is now North Macedonia (Curtis, 1992:63). These mountain ranges function both as natural barriers and as selective channels of connectivity. While routes such as the ancient Via Egnatia facilitated trade and cultural exchange, the terrain also fostered isolated communities and fragmented political formations (Cvijić, 1918). These geographical divisions often transcend political borders, shaping societal structures in enduring ways.

Strategically, the region's shape has played a crucial role in its historical trajectory. While the northern plains provide relatively easy access, the southern Dinaric Alps and steep Adriatic coast present formidable natural obstacles.

Historically, two main routes have facilitated external penetration. The first is the route of the Danube River from the Asian steppes to the Hungarian Plain, which enabled successive waves of migration and invasion. The second begins at Belgrade—where the Danube meets the Sava—and follows the Morava Valley southward to the Balkan interior (Jelavich, 2016:3). These routes create an additional vulnerability, hampering efforts to achieve unity and consolidate authority.

The climate of the region varies considerably, from a mild Mediterranean climate along the Adriatic coast to colder continental conditions in the mountainous and lowland areas inland (Curtis, 1992:xvi). This climatic diversity, combined with the complex terrain, further influences patterns of settlement, agriculture, and infrastructure development.

The scarcity of arable and habitable land due to the region's challenging topography, has intensified competition over fertile plains and river valleys. This has historically encouraged the emergence of small and fragmented political units. River systems further underline the geographical constraints and opportunities. The Danube and its tributaries—such as the Drava, Tisza, Sava, Morava, Iskar, Seret, and Prut—have served as vital arteries for trade, military movement, and communication. In contrast, rivers flowing into the Adriatic are often impassable due to the steep slope of the terrain (Jelavich, 2016:1–3). Others, like the Vardar, Struma, and Evros, connect the region to the Aegean Sea.

Transportation remains constrained by these natural barriers. While rivers and valleys provide some access, mountains often block internal connectivity, affecting settlement patterns, cultural development, and even collective psychological traits. Strategically positioned yet internally divided, the Balkans have historically served more as a battleground of competing powers than a platform for unification.

*History*

Despite its modest size, the Balkan Peninsula has held an important place in world history, largely owing to its strategic location. Following the Slavic migrations in 6$^{th}$ and 7$^{th}$ centuries, Balkan history can be divided into three phases: the era of the Byzantine Empire and the medieval kingdoms; approximately five centuries of Ottoman rule; and, from the nineteenth century onward, the age of modern state formation and nation-building (Sundhaussen, 1999:9). Given space constraints, this section focuses exclusively on the SFRY period, examining the efforts of achieving the South-Slav unification (mainly Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Slovenes, Macedonians, and Montenegrins) in spite of enduring centrifugal forces.

The exposure of Allied plans to partition South Slav lands after World War I led the war-weary Balkan peoples to seek a common front (Günal, 2021:188). This led Serbia's government-in-exile in Corfu, led by Prince Aleksandar and Prime Minister Nikola Pašić, to reluctantly work with the emigrant Yugoslav Committee of anti-Habsburg Croat and Slovene politicians, despite Belgrade's preference for the Greater Serbia solution over a full-fledged Yugoslav state (Jelavich, 2017:153-154). When post-war borders were redrawn, common interests overshadowed historic divisions. The Corfu Declaration (1917) envisaged a democratic, parliamentary monarchy headed by the Karađorđević dynasty, promising equality of nations, languages and religions (Ćirković, 2004:250). In December 1918 the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes—later renamed as Yugoslavia—was proclaimed, uniting Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Vojvodina, Macedonia and former Habsburg South-Slav provinces (Cox, 2002:67-68; Nenadović, 2012:17).

The reality, however, was quite different from this egalitarian ideal. Serbs, forming about 40 per cent of the population, dominated state institutions through a slightly modified version of the 1903 Serbian constitution. Between 1918 and 1929 twenty-four governments rose and fell as Croats, Slovenes and other minorities protested Serbian supremacy (Ćirković, 2004: 257-259). Growing ethnic and political tensions prompted King Aleksandar to suspend the constitution and establish a royal dictatorship in 1929.

The dictatorship fuelled militant nationalism. During World War II, Yugoslavia was divided into competing resistance movements: the Ustaša, an ultra-radical Croatian separatist force backed by Italy; the ultra-nationalist Serbian group Chetniks; and the multi-ethnic, communist Partisans. The Partisans, led by Josip Broz Tito and supported by the USSR, ultimately prevailed. They liberated Yugoslavia in 1944-45, paving the way for the establishment of a socialist federation.

In 1946, the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was proclaimed under a Soviet-style constitution. The Titoist regime's community-building strategy was grounded in the idea of Yugoslavism (Bertsch, 1977:89), which promoted a collective identity whereby individuals could identify with a shared Yugoslav identity without relinquishing their distinct national identities. The goal was to make a fresh start, fostering national reconciliation and healing historical wounds. While the government aimed to achieve centralism, it also sought to accommodate national diversity by establishing a six-republic federation—Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia—along with the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo. Article 13 of the constitution guaranteed the equality of all nationalities and their right to use their own language and to develop their cultural heritage and identity under their own conditions. The six republics were granted equal status within the federation,

regardless of differences in size, population, wealth, or level of development (Hashi, 1992:48).

Tito's guiding principle was "unity in diversity." While the League of Communists maintained centralized control through the security apparatus, successive constitutions (1946, 1953, 1963, and especially 1974) progressively decentralized authority. The 1974 constitution promoted workers' self-management and extensive autonomy for republics. However, many Serbs felt their wartime sacrifices were not reflected in their political influence. Tito's death in 1980 removed the central figure who had held the system together. Empowered by constitutional decentralization, republican leaders turned to nationalism, reframing economic grievances and historic rivalries in ethnic terms. The federation quickly came undone, setting the stage for Yugoslavia's eventual dissolution.

*Ethnicity, Religion, and Language*

Socialist Yugoslavia was a multi-ethnic federation located in the heart of the Balkans. According to the 1991 census, the ethnic composition of the Yugoslav population was as follows: Serbs (36.3%), Croats (19.7%), Muslims (8.9%), Slovenes (7.8%), Albanians (7.7%), Macedonians (5.9%), Yugoslavs (5.4%), Montenegrins (2.5%), Hungarians (1.9%), and others (3.9%) (Perry-Castañeda Library, n.d.). The SFRY's multi religious and ethnic demographical structure stemmed from Balkans historical migration patterns and social mobilization. Historically, the north and west of Yugoslavia were under the influence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while the south, east, and central regions were primarily influenced by the Ottoman Empire. These distinct imperial legacies contributed to stark cultural, linguistic, and religious contrasts across the federation.

The Yugoslav territory encompassed four major languages—Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, Macedonian, and Albanian—spoken across two alphabets, Latin and Cyrillic, and adhered to three predominant religions: Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity, and Islam. These identities were not merely cultural markers but were deeply intertwined with national belonging and political representation. Language, religion, and ethnicity were closely aligned, often reinforcing group boundaries rather than bridging them (Crnobrnja, 1996:17–19).

Slovenia and Croatia, positioned in the northern and western regions, were mostly Catholic and bore the cultural imprint of Austro-Hungarian influence. Both republics employed the Latin alphabet, yet their languages—Slovenian and Croatian—are distinct (Bertsch, 1977:93). On the contrary, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia were shaped by the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Ottoman legacy, with Orthodox Christianity predominating. These southern republics, with the exception of Albanian-speaking populations, generally used the Cyrillic

script (Bertsch, 1977:94). Bosniaks, largely located in Bosnia and Herzegovina, practiced Islam—a religious identity introduced through centuries of Ottoman rule.

Beyond the major Slavic groups, Yugoslavia was also home to significant non-Slavic minorities, including Albanians, Hungarians, Roma, Turks, and Bulgarians. Albanian, a non-Slavic language with ancient Illyrian roots, added to the country's linguistic complexity. Minority languages such as Albanian and Hungarian further diversified the national landscape and often became sources of political controversy (Crnobrnja, 1996:20).

This linguistic plurality not only complicated everyday communication and governance but also heightened national sensitivities and cultural insecurities. The diversity of languages, scripts, and religious traditions represented both the richness and the fragility of the Yugoslav state. Religion, initially not a major barrier to coexistence, increasingly became a vehicle for ethnic mobilization and exclusion (Mirescu, 2003:3). The civil wars of the 1990s, as Misha Glenny observed, took on the character of religious conflicts, pitting Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Islam against one another in brutal ethno-political struggles (Glenny, 1993).

In essence, the former Yugoslav territory exemplified extreme cultural heterogeneity, with two alphabets, three religions, four major languages, five nations, and numerous minority communities (Kukić, 2023:1). Even though efforts to promote ethnic inclusiveness in SFRY were institutionalized under the slogan of "Brotherhood and Unity" (Miladinović, 2025: 446), managing ethnic representation and achieving parity among groups proved to be one of the greatest challenges facing the federation. As previously highlighted, efforts to foster unity ended up deepening divisions.

*Economy*

Geographical conditions significantly shaped the region's economic development, making progress difficult due to harsh terrain and a diverse society. Nevertheless, the SFRY prioritized rebuilding its war-torn economy and fostering national reconciliation. Recognizing the link between ethnic tensions and regional disparities, the Yugoslav leadership aimed to reduce inequality through redistribution and targeted investment in underdeveloped areas (Hashi, 1992:47).

The SFRY promoted workers' self-management as an alternative to both Soviet-style socialism and Western capitalism (Jović, 2001:103). Its economic model emphasized rapid industrialization, gradual trade liberalization, and extensive social benefits, while maintaining balanced relations with both East and West to secure Western aid (Woodward, 1995:29). This approach generated

strong growth in the 1950s and early 1960s (Yarashevich & Karneyeva, 2013:265).

By the 1950s, Slovenia and Croatia had become the most developed republics, while Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo lagged behind; Serbia stood in the middle (Gligorov, n.d.). By the 1960s, wealthier republics pushed for a market transition, frustrated by the slow development of poorer regions.

Even though the self-management system promoted decentralization and regional autonomy, it weakened federal control and the effectiveness of redistribution. The focus on capital-intensive industries often ignored social services and failed to address productivity amid rapid population growth (Hashi, 1992:47). Despite continued support, regional inequalities deepened, fuelling centrifugal forces.

Signs of economic trouble appeared by the mid-1960s but became apparent in the late 1970s. Structural inefficiencies and external shocks, such as the oil crises, eroded export competitiveness (Žižmond, 1992:103). By the 1980s, the country faced rising inflation, debt, and unemployment. Richer republics resented redistribution, while poorer ones felt neglected. Although nationalism and socialism's collapse were key factors, economic grievances played a crucial role in the disintegration (Singleton, 1983:287-288).

Today, the former Yugoslav republics are on their way to the EU. As a part of enlargement strategy, the regional countries try to align with the requirements put forward by the Union to become a part of the EU's single market. Economic convergence is essential and to achieve this goal, the EU initiated several aid and assistance packages for the aspirant countries. Today, the most developed country in the region is Croatia (EU member since 2013), followed by Serbia and Montenegro. Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina are the least developed countries in the region.

**Conclusion**

The Scandinavian societies, largely Protestant and nourished by Viking and Germanic cultures, have experienced important turning points in their history together. Today, they are largely homogeneous societies, renowned for their welfare state models. The Scandinavian triad, which keeps its distance even from other societies in the European region and prefers to remain in their core area, have managed to turn their harsh geographical conditions into an advantage over time. Factors such as common culture, history and economy have functioned as centripetal forces in accordance with Hartshorne's model, bringing the societies in this geography closer to one another. These centripetal forces have even turned into a kind of 'shared or regional identity', to use Szapary's example for the EU.

Today, when a Norwegian first identifies himself/herself as 'Scandinavian', demonstrates the extent to which this 'regional identity' has developed in these societies and functions as a centripetal force in these societies.

In contrast, the same story did not unfold in the former Yugoslavia. From the arrival of the South Slavs in the 6th century until today, unity and cohesion in the region have remained an elusive dream. Even though the unification of South Slavs was achieved with the second Yugoslav experience, centrifugal forces such as physical geography, ethnic, and religious diversity soon surfaced, intensifying societal divisions. Shared history and experiences did not function as a uniting force; instead, they actually served as fuel for further fragmentation. Even in its finest moments, the number of people who identified themselves as Yugoslav could be counted on the fingers of one hand. SFRY attempted to accommodate its multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, with the motto of *Brotherhood and Unity*; however, this unique system collapsed with the death of Tito. In the aftermath, populist leaders exploited historical grievances and the dire economic situation to further divide the country.

Hartshorne argues that the most basic force holding states together is the raison d'être or state idea. The state idea is, in short, the reason for existing (Hartshorne, 1950:110). A state idea that can keep a society together is the most crucial factor in preventing a state's disintegration, regardless of vast territories, diverse cultures, or destructive events like war. The original state idea, present from a state's inception, may lose its meaning over time; if it does, a new one must emerge. Otherwise, that state is destined to fragment over time (Hartshorne, 1950:111).

For the Scandinavian states, their raison d'être stemmed from their geography. Harsh geographical conditions forced these societies to struggle together. The Viking era, on the other hand, led these societies to modernisation and exploration. Today's Scandinavian welfare model has its roots in the Vikings. These states, which have not been at war among themselves for a long time and are peaceful, mediating and cooperative in the international system, have now transformed their role as pioneers of soft power into their state idea. In other words, the raison d'être, which was initially formed in the fight against harsh climatic conditions, today focuses on protecting the model and social values they have created. From the past to the present, Scandinavians have overcome many difficulties together, forging a core world for themselves. Today, maintaining this regional identity as the Nordic five, including Finland and Iceland, is their most crucial state idea element.

For the states of the former Yugoslavia, 'war' was the most important state idea for them to come together. The new but 'artificial' states established after World Wars I and II lost their purpose of coming together in time and were

doomed to disintegrate. The state idea built around *'Brotherhood and Unity*' did not resonate with society. These states, forged by the devastation of war, failed to discover the 'new' raison d'être necessary for their continued existence. The 'Yugoslav identity' that Tito sought to create, unlike the Scandinavian example, could not evolve into a shared or regional identity. Consequently, the absence of a strong raison d'être and the persistent influence of centrifugal forces ultimately led to the demise of the SFRY.

In conclusion, the very factors that unite societies can also be sources of division. These centripetal forces foster a profound sense of belonging, common purpose, and collective identity, leading to internal cohesion and strength within a society. Conversely, centrifugal forces can create significant rifts both with and within societies. As Hartshorne emphasized, possessing a strong state idea is crucial for long-term continuity. A state is not merely a geographical area or a set of institutions; it needs a shared purpose or a unifying vision. This state idea acts like an anchor, enabling a diverse population to function as a cohesive whole over time.

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