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Creating a Place Brand through Design: a critical study of Scandinavian design as a cultural project 1930 - 1957
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Introduction

The implications of cultural industries for a country’s economy, society and foreign affairs are manifold. The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) is one of the sources to emphasize the constructive and regenerating role that cultural industries play in developing countries, including contributions to economic growth, international cooperation, poverty reduction, and sustainable development. This paper aims at adding another applicable area of impact – place branding, that is, building and communicating internationally a consistent and enduring place identity in order to stimulate a place’s economic, social and cultural indicators.

I first developed my interest in this aspect of place branding when being shortlisted for the Deutsche Bank Award for Creative Enterprise in the spring of 2015. My project was centered on hand-printed domestic textiles inspired by the folk art of Belarus, a young post-Soviet country and my home land in search of its national – and cultural – identity that my generation is looking to rediscover through interpreting the visual manifestations of our cultural heritage, and much of my inspiration was drawn from the National Romantic movement in the Scandinavian countries. The fact that we Belarusians follow in the footsteps of the nineteenth-century Norway or Finland won’t seem accidental should we take a closer look at the nature and capabilities of design as a conglomeration of cultural commodities that construct and manifest both individual and national identities – the function that is especially appealing to young nation states in the early years of their independence.

Taking this initial impetus further, this paper considers the twentieth-century Scandinavian design industry both as an export channel and a vehicle of the national idea. Grown from the national revivalism of the nineteenth century, Scandinavian Design as we know it provides an exemplary case study of conceiving a competitive place brand in the actual historical context, where Scandinavian Design comes as a
real-life cultural project with its political, economic and social determinants. As evidenced in this work, the narrative crafted in support of this project came as a set of myths about Scandinavia and Scandinavianism, the myths that transcended conventional marketing (that is, surpassed the commercial discourse of consumer commodities) and took on political, ideological and aesthetic dimensions. This explains the biased character of this mythological narrative that exposed only a limited scope of regional design developments at the expense of the others. It is for the purpose of emphasizing this selectivity that Scandinavian Design is capitalized in opposition to the rest of the Scandinavian design milieu not represented in the official discourse.

Although the phenomenon of Scandinavian Design existed in its original incarnation up to the 1980s, the timeframe is narrowed down to 1930-1957, the years that mark the pinnacle of Scandinavian Design, to provide more precision and focus to this analysis. From the principal Stockholm Exhibition in 1930 that signified the Functionalist turn in the Scandinavian design paradigm and “assumed almost mythic status as a radical and highly visible break with the architectural thinking that dominated Swedish discourse and practice in the 1910 and 1920s” (Creagh, Lane and Frampton, 2008 : 127) to the large-scale travelling exhibition Design in Scandinavia (1954-1957) that ensured both critical and commercial success of Scandinavian Design in North America, this paper follows the process of unleashing this cultural project with particular emphasis on concrete promotional steps and their subsequent critical analysis. As this work is concerned with institutionalization of a concept rather than its aesthetic content, the primary attention is paid to the conception of a value chain and a network of actors behind this cultural project. By singling out the major agents and institutional cornerstones of this cross-continental promotional campaign, it could be possible to define a mechanism, powerful levers to be pulled, to construct a competitive export identity for developing countries that can be further adjusted along specific national characteristics.
This paper aims to contribute to both academic and professional debates on the role of cultural industries in place branding and the history of design (Scandinavian Design in particular) by bringing together multi-disciplinary methods due to the complicated timeframe in question. Since place branding was not yet a well-defined and researched academic field at the time when Scandinavian Design rose to its prominence in the 1950s, the actors behind this cultural project were guided by anything but specifically branding programmes. However, this project can therefore illustrate the genuine nature of crafts and design as cultural commodities beyond borders and reveal a sea-changing play of contemporary political, social and cultural paradigms as a mise-en-scène for promoting a competitive place identity. In this regard, the academic milieu of place branding provides a theoretic apparatus and methodological backdrop for this work, aided with the historical and culturological analyses as much as semiotics to dissect Scandinavian Design’s mythology and relate it to the place brand of Scandinavia.
Chapter I ~ The Making of Place Brands: Theoretic Framework

The chapter below provides a theoretic overview of nation/place branding as a research field with its particular implications for cultural industries, where the terms place branding and nation branding are used interchangeably, providing that their difference lies solely in (1) a territorial scale in question, and (2) the authors adopting distinctive terminology for their seminal works, with nation branding being attributed prevailingly to Simon Anholt.

It also considers a range of academic perspectives on the relation between corporate and place branding, the role of cultural entrepreneurs in building and promoting a place brand, and lastly, the capacity of design to participate in place branding by cultivating and commodifying a national identity.

1.1 ~ From Brands to Nation Brands

As part of the conceptual structure of marketing, branding (of primarily consumer products and services) became a central concept only from the 1990s (Corte-Real and De Lencastre, 2010), shortly before being applied to nations in Simon Anholt’s (1998) pioneering essay Nation Brands of the Twenty-First Century. In such works as Competitive Identity (2007) and Places. Identity, Image, Reputation (2010), Simon Anholt – an independent policy advisor and one of the first researchers on nation branding – provides an informed and detailed account on the link between corporate and nation/city branding and the latter’s implications for countries, as well as shares common misconceptions and ‘branding traps’ that governments internationally fall into.

For Anholt (2007; 2013), a commercial brand in its generic meaning rather refers to a product’s or a company’s image in the mind of its target audience, with a brand’s name, identity and reputation as key identifiers. Other sources link brands to
consumers’ purchasing decisions and experiences (Batey, 2008; Kotler and Gertner 2002; Van Gelder 2003), brand owners’ increasing incomes, and impetus for development (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2008). Most importantly for the purpose of this work, a few authors underline a brand’s capacity as a tool to construct and manifest identities – that of consumers, companies, and countries (Arvidsson, 2006; Kapferer, 2004).

This identity-building function receives further exposure in the works on place branding, which aims at linking a place identity and its image perceived by consumers through place experiences and projected narratives (Govers and Go, 2009). Here, “place identities are constructed through historical, political, religious and cultural discourses; through local knowledge, and influenced by power struggles” (Govers and Go, 2009 : 16-17) and encompass national, cultural, natural, social and religious assets (Morgan and Pritchard, 1998 cited in Govers and Go, 2009).

Place branding is generally defined as a search for a country’s competitive identity as “secure moorings in a shifting world” (Harvey 1989 : 302) within the dichotomy of “local landscapes versus global ethnoscapes” (Govers and Go, 2009 : 57). For Govers and Go (2007), a place brand itself is the representation of identity.

For Harvey (1989 : 302), a place identity receives additional importance in “this collage of superimposed special images that implode in upon us.” It is not accidental, then, that the term competitive identity lends itself to Simon Anholt’s 2007 book title as an identifier close to national identity and a viable alternative to the largely discredited language of branding.

Another approach to brands is a semiotic one that considers brands as signs based on the Peircean triadic model of sign vehicles, objects and interpretants. When applied consistently to a brand, this model is broken down into the three pillars of identity (the sign itself), marketing (the object to which the sign refers) and the market
response to the sign (the brand image perceived and interpreted by the audience), as described by Paulo de Lencastre and Ana Córte-Real (2010).

In line with this semiotic perspective, Mark Batey (2008: 6) considers brands as “clusters of meaning” or, more precisely, “mediators of cultural and symbolic meaning” (2008: xiv) that is derived from a brand identity conceived by brand owners and a brand image perceived by consumers both consciously and subconsciously at the other end of the branding model of communication (Batey, 2008; Moilanen and Rainisto, 2008). In the course of decoding a brand image, brand meaning comes as a major distinction, and is capable of determining consumer behavior (Batey, 2008).

In the triadic model of signs, Batey’s brand image equals an interpretant, a market response to a brand, and is comprised of consumers’ associations, beliefs and feelings about a brand, which turns them into active agents who create brand meanings out of the narratives made available by companies (Batey, 2008). For this to happen, a physical product must be augmented by “images, symbols, perceptions, feelings” to acquire “a soul, a distinctive identity and image that resonates with its consumers and transcends its physical representation in terms of product format” (Batey, 2008: 3-4).

A connotative (indirect, implicit) meaning that a physical product thus appropriates becomes a different cognitive dimension that accounts for consumers’ behavior, finally leading to what Batey calls ‘symbolic consumption’ and defines as “the process by which people endow products and objects with meanings above and beyond those that inhere in the objects themselves” (2008: 90).

When applied to place branding, this connotative meaning takes shape of a place image, loosely defined over the past three decades as a set of impressions of a place, a traveler’s general perception, or a travelling experience, and capable of influencing the place’s positioning and the audience’s behavior towards the place (Govers and Go, 2009).
Another theoretic shortcut instrumental to Batey’s study of brand meaning is a brand associative network based on Daniel Schacter’s theory of engrams, or “the brain’s record of the event” (Batey, 2008; Daniel Schacter, 1996 : 56). A brand associative network becomes a repository of a consumer’s “mental representations of the brand” (Batey, 2008 : 111) and is constantly augmented with each new brand encounter.

Consumers’ associations born out of encounters with a brand are paramount for establishing it as a symbol, i.e. a sign with an arbitrary connection between its visible vehicle (the signifier) and its mentally constructed equivalent (the signified), where this arbitrary connection largely depends on the context (Batey, 2008 : 92):

Symbols evolve, gain or lose strength and sometimes fade away. Objects that in one context are highly charged with symbolic significance may be devoid of such significance in another. Or they may have a different significance—for symbols are multivalent and multimeaning, the variation in their meanings usually a function of cultural differences.

Symbolic consumption is a crucial variable in place branding as it involves inscribing symbols and images to a place (Lemmetyinen, Hakala and Go, 2015) that would ultimately form a foundation for consumers to decode a projected brand identity. Thus, a place brand is defined as “the set of central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics that actors ascribe to a place” (Lemmetyinen, Hakala and Go, 2015 : 49).

Moilanen and Rainisto (2008 : 7) provide a more institution-focused definition: “place branding is the management of place image through strategic innovation and coordinated economic, commercial, social, cultural and government policy.” They also draw on Anholt’s competitive identity as a cornerstone of place branding and a “synthesis of brand management with public diplomacy and with trade, investments, tourism and export promotion” (2008 : 7).
Throughout the academic sources on place branding, authors agree on its top-down character, where a centralized branding campaign would be initiated and endowed by a state government as part of a national policy, and delegated down to specialized agencies in tourism, education, foreign trade and culture (Anholt, 2007; Govers and Go, 2009; Moilanen and Rainisto, 2008). All these agents would mutually participate in creating a projected narrative of the place in question, building its added value through planned and coordinated messages. This is where place branding enters the domain of marketing and public relations, using communication strategies and public opinion to construct a place brand’s identity out of five discursive sources:

- history, literature, popular culture and media;
- origins, continuity, tradition, and language;
- cultural and educational institutions that re-invent tradition;
- ‘the foundational myth’ that draws on geography and national symbols;
- nationalism (Govers and Go, 2009).

The value of place branding is further elaborated in multiple sources. For Anholt (2005), a nation’s image may impede its economic development, while place branding can also

...mobilize value-adding partnerships and networks among public and private actors in order to build a coherent product offering (which includes tourism, trade, temporary employment and investment opportunities), communicated in the right way in order to guarantee the emotion-laden place experience that consumers are seeking (bridging the identity, image and experience gaps) (Govers and Go, 2009 : 16-17).

Regarding branding as an economic tool of critical importance, Anholt (2007 : 26) emphasizes a number of stakeholders benefiting from a successfully implemented strategy for creating and sustaining a viable competitive identity – among them, “exporters, importers, government, the culture sector, tourism, immigration, and
pretty much every aspect of international relations.” Reiterating, Anholt (2007) compares competitive identity to a magnet and suggests its three primary functions:

- attraction of consumers, tourists, professionals, investments, etc.;
- transfer of the brand appeal to other national objects;
- systematization, bringing a sense of order.

In search for a universal framework to evaluate the impact from place branding efforts and rank countries’ brand images, Anholt introduced Anholt-Gfk Roper Nation Brands Index™ that measures the international public’s perceptions of select countries’ brand images in the categories of people, products, government, tourism and culture. According to Anholt (2009), the Index is a comprehensive system designed to measure and manage national reputation that is adopted by governments, national agencies, tourist boards, etc. around the world.

Although treating a place brand like a corporate one (“like Nike and Toyota”) may be regarded as one of the most common misconceptions (Anholt, 2005 : 20), corporate brands are also in the position to impact on place branding. Being active agents in both representing a place image domestically and disseminating it internationally, they are admitted to “accelerate and lead changes in the public perceptions of countries: whether we like it or not, they are increasingly important vectors of national image and reputation, even of culture” (Anholt, 2007 : 91). Additionally, international companies that represent a particular region abroad, i.e. serve as a place’s commercial ambassadors, are considered to be most effective marketers (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2008).

There is a disadvantage too – narrowly selected corporate brands may lead to stereotypization of a country’s economic and cultural climate, thus hurdling non-stereotypic exporters’ way on to the international markets (Anholt, 2007), as evidenced further in the case of Scandinavian Design that presented too exclusive a
picture to embrace the diversity of the region’s contemporary design industry (Fallan, 2012).

As outlined earlier, a place branding programme encompasses multiple stakeholders, including those belonging to the economic and cultural sectors. Extending the argument to the brands that are positioned at the intersection of commerce and culture, we shall consider the role of cultural entrepreneurs in place branding to define the capacity of cultural industries to generate and transmit a place image.

1.2 - Place Branding and Cultural Entrepreneurship

With no intent to provide an exhausting overview of the multi-faceted definitions of culture, this study handles it as “a concept which embraces the ideas and values expressed by modern society as a whole” (Sparke, 1986 : xix), where these ideas, values and territory-specific judgements are interwoven within culture that presents itself as human-spun “webs of significance” (Geertz, 1973 cited in Arcangeli, 2012 : 12-13).

The importance of culture as one of the driving factors in place branding is underlined in a number of sources (Govers and Go, 2009; Morgan and Pritchard 1998; Anholt, 2007; Anholt, 2013; Lemmetyinen, Hakala and Go, 2015). Cultural industries in particular gained a special position within place branding for their role in identity building by generating unique artefacts through viable enterprises that invigorate local communities and thus create a location-specific atmosphere (Mittilä and Lepistö, 2013).

According to Anholt (2007 : 97), culture is capable of communicating “a country’s true spirit and essence,” and underestimating this power or considering cultural production as generally ‘non-for-profit’ or problematic in terms of return on
investments may be short-sighted. A local culture embodied in a place’s identity becomes “a metaphor for personality” (Anholt, 2007 : 99) showcasing the country’s unique characteristics not found anywhere else. This capacity to manifest uniqueness gains a new dimension with the coming of globalization – “a new commercial reality, the emergence of global markets for standardized consumer products on a previously unimagined scale of magnitude” (Levitt, 1983 : 92) where the appearance of ethnic-specific markets stretching across borders only confirms global homogenization. Referring to this capability, Anholt also admits culture to be “a more eloquent communicator of national image than commercial brands, even if it does work more slowly” (Anholt, 2007 : 99).

Contrary to specifically marketing messages crafted to ‘sell’ a place, culture is perceived as authentic and non-sellable, which accounts for its higher credibility with international audiences and proves to be a crucial ingredient for a successful place branding campaign (Anholt, 2007 : 97):

You can whistle a country’s commercial brand, and not its cultural counterpoint; but the former is worth very much less without the latter. Representation of a country’s culture provides the country’s image with that all-important quality of dignity which, arguably, commercial brands can do without, but countries cannot.

The essential role of culture and cultural industries was most recently reiterated at the global level in the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005 : 6):

Since culture is one of the mainsprings of development, the cultural aspects of development are as important as its economic aspects, which individuals and peoples have the fundamental right to participate in and enjoy.
In the Convention (2005: 6), cultural industries are compositely defined as those “producing and distributing cultural goods or services, which at the time they are considered as a specific attribute, use or purpose, embody or convey cultural expressions, irrespective of the commercial value they may have,” where cultural expressions emanate from individual or collective creativity and are vehicles of cultural content that stems from or manifests cultural identities (UNESCO, 2005). As a major document ratified, accessed or approved by 139 parties, UNESCO Convention (2005) position cultural expressions as vehicles of identity, values and meaning, while emphasizing the cultural industries’ capacity to advance a country’s economic growth, sustainable development, social cohesion and quality of life in general, thus putting culture on each party’s national agendas in policy-making and international cooperation.

As producers and bearers of cultural expressions, cultural entrepreneurs are thus considered to be “change agents” (Lemmetyinen, Hakala and Go, 2015: 50) capable of translating a place’s identity into marketable, consumable goods and services, creating attractive value propositions for international audiences and disseminating them across borders as part of a place’s projected narratives discussed above. Unlike state-run, top-down branding initiatives, cultural entrepreneurship originates bottom-up but, to be successful in its consistent efforts, should be inclusive of political institutions that foster “innovation, economic expansion and more widely held wealth” (Lemmetyinen, Hakala and Go, 2015: xiv).

Converting place identities into largely visual artefacts that are crucially important for place branding (Lemmetyinen, Hakala and Go, 2015), cultural entrepreneurs are able to engage audiences through manifesting their site-specific culture, since “people deduce a great deal about the inner qualities of a nation through its cultural enterprises” (Anholt, 2007: 99). Authenticity, creativity and innovation are listed among the entrepreneurial cornerstones leveraging the value of locations, forging new markets and helping to develop a unique value proposition that is rooted

The final part of Chapter I will look at (interior) design as one of the cultural industries fulfilling representational and place branding functions with a particular attention to the connotative meanings it acquires in relation to home, national identity, and symbolic consumption.

1.3 – Design as a Place Branding Medium

Design – from two-dimensional graphics to interior manifestations engendered in furniture, textiles, wallpapers and decorative objects, is claimed to be one of the major cultural contributions used as place branding instruments (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2011 cited in Lemmetyinen, Hakala and Go, 2015 : 36). As a cultural industry representative of a country’s creative, technological and economic prowess, it provides a range of place branding opportunities. Its universal application, scalability and visual language has proved to be an effective vehicle of both individual and national identities that rest on local traditions, knowledge, vision and authentic culture in its entirety.

As a material, visual medium of communication, design is capable of reflecting its system of operation (Sparke, 1986) and expressing “a wide range of cultural, psychological, social, economic and technical values” (Sparke, 2008 : 185) converted into a tangible reality by design reform ideologists, architects, interior designers, arbiters of taste and consumers themselves (Sparke, 2008).

Following Michel Foucault’s model of analysis (Mattsson, 2012; Sarantola-Weiss, 2012), these actors form the discourse of domestic interior decoration where, behind its explicit aesthetic form that mediates the individual and the surroundings,
design conceals an apparatus for creating “order, discipline and subjectivity” (Mattsson, 2012: 66). In the age of consumer society, this discourse of material objects presents a space for dynamic interaction between commodities, aesthetic debates, market mechanisms and lifestyles that is anchored in manifestations of individual identities through consumers’ self-expression (Sarantola-Weiss, 2012; Sparke, 2008).

The idea that interior decoration serves as a visual and spatial proclamation of inhabitants’ personalities and social status can be traced back to Andrew Jackson Downing’s publication in 1841. However, it wasn’t until the latter half of the nineteenth century and the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London in particular that nations realized the powerful role of designed commodities in forming and promoting their national identities both domestically and internationally (Sparke, 2008; 2013).

Since then, agenda-driven universal exhibitions of manufactured goods became the arenas for industrialized countries to showcase their technological achievements, to a great extent with the help of decorative arts and, later, mass-produced items of interior design – “the products of the new industries and the achievements of engineers” (Sparke, 2013: 82). Therefore, industrial design came to serve as a mediator between technology, culture and the market, by means of which consumers could comprehend the artefacts of technology (Fallan, 2015; Sparke, 2013). Additionally, design became a channel for transmitting economic and political nationalism, the supremacy of industrial capitalism, and middle-class values (Sparke, 1986). Penny Sparke (2013: 90) goes on to conclude that by 1914, it was clear that design had played a large part in forming and communicating a large number of national identities, especially the contested ones in Europe. It was an important means through which governments and corporations could define their citizens and consumers and, just as importantly, through which citizens and consumers could define themselves.
The role of design in defining identities was yet reinforced after 1945, the setting period for this work. The post-war European countries employed the mid-century Modern interiors to manifest their contemporary national identities at times when home design equaled post-war regeneration and social reforms that consequently led to large-scale housing schemes and reconfiguration of urban living spaces (Leighton, 2014; Sarantola-Weiss, 2012; Sparke, 2008).

In the post-war years of economic growth, home and interior decoration came to be increasingly associated with consumption. The tendency for conspicuous consumption by the new middle classes, unleashed with the coming of the nineteenth-century department stores, has been since reinvigorated by mass media that account for rendering designed commodities into objects of desire through depicting images of ‘idealized’ interiors to aspire to and reinforcing their susceptibility to the system of fashion. This “management of meaning” (Jensen, 2012: 164) as a function of media allowed for the counter-process of turning modern interiors into a mass medium in itself that transmits symbolic attributes of the modern lifestyle (Sparke, 2008).

Supporting this claim with cultural critic Grant McCracken’s stance, “without consumer goods, certain acts of self-definition and collective definition in this culture would be impossible” (Sparke, 2013: 7).

Lastly, design is uniquely positioned at the intersection of portable consumer goods and art due to its affiliation with a reigning aesthetic paradigm and/or a ‘star’ designer. While possessing both creative dimension and symbolic value ascribed to cultural products, objects of design can be transported in industrial quantities and sold at affordable prices, which accounts for their wider dissemination and lower access barriers to truly mass markets (unlike exclusive works of art that exist in limited quantities). Throughout the twentieth century, this allowed a number of design-conscious countries to export their products “in the name of design” (Sparke, 1986: 56) and use this creative dimension of consumer goods as a means of their economic expansion and competitiveness on the international market (Sparke, 1986). Coupled
with the capability of these objects to serve as a repository for a nation’s distinctive identity, these characteristics make design an efficient instrument of both export stimulation and national brand promotion.
Chapter II – Scandinavian Design as a Cultural Project

Chapter II starts with unlocking the brand associative network of Scandinavian Design along Mark Batey’s theory discussed earlier. This approach may prove helpful considering the ultimate mythological nature of Scandinavian Design as a cultural construct deliberately conceived as a vehicle for ‘Scandinavianism’. As put my Kevin Davies (2003 : 104), “Scandinavian design was never sold on the basis of its cost but on the basis of its quality and (imagined) associations.” Thus, the brand ‘Scandinavian Design’ referred not only to material objects of the regional design industry but to a whole cognitive system of associations comprised of both projected and perceived narratives (the terms used in Govers and Go, 2009) that embraced many notions of the mid-twentieth-century Modern, including functionalism, democratic ideals, ingenuity, mass production based on craft traditions, and dedication to social reforms in the wake of the rising consumer society.

The chapter then looks at a sequence of historic events and cultural paradigms of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that were crucial to forming and communicating the idea of Scandinavianism through the medium of modern design in the 1930s – 1950s. The chapter concludes with a detailed overview of the international conceptualization of Scandinavian Design as a cultural project with a particular attention to the key institutions, industrial design pioneers and creative networks that shaped both its aesthetics and cultural agenda.

2.1 – Scandinavian Design: In Search of the Myth

“The highly mythical phenomenon, or even mythological construction, generally known as 'Scandinavian Design' reached its zenith in the mid to late 1950s,” wrote Kjetil Fallan (2007 : 43), looking back at this cultural construct more than half a century later.
The understanding of Scandinavian Design as a **myth** came largely with the reassessment of this concept in the recent decades. A number of publications – like the major exhibition catalogue *Scandinavian Design: Beyond the Myth* (2003) or *Scandinavian Design. Alternative Histories* (2012) – point to the selectivity of the official narrative conceived by curators, critics, policy makers and designers at international exhibitions and in the media during the 1950s. At the same time, the language of these publications speak of the *deliberate* and *intentional* character of that wholesome and consistent campaign to market Scandinavian Design, including calling it “a trading initiative” and “marketing ploy” (Davies, 2003: 101, 105), “concrete promotional projects” (Skjerven, 2003: 27) and manufacturers’ “complex marketing agendas” (Halén, 2003: 7). The term *Scandinavian Design* itself was coined within institutional confines at the *Scandinavia at Table* exhibition organized by the British Council of Industrial Design in London, UK in 1951. But what makes this carefully crafted concept a myth in the first place?

Dictionaries define **myth** as “a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone; especially: one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society” (Merriam-Webster, 2015) or as “an exaggerated or idealized conception of a person or thing” (Oxford University Press, 2015). In his seminal work on modern mythologies, Roland Barthes (1972) defined myth in quasi-linguistic terms as a system of communication and a mode of signification, among others, that are conveyed by a discourse and have formal limits. A myth’s relation to form defines its ultimate function to represent the world, albeit reducing it to a simplified and purified version (Barthes, 1972; Fallan, 2007): “Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion” (Barthes, 1972: 128).

In case of Scandinavian Design, this distortion is described as “neutralization, naturalization, simplification, reductionism and homogenization” in the guise of “a
generic, descriptive and objective term” (Fallan, 2007 : 43-44). The foundation for this myth-making was comprised of the expectations from both the Nordic countries themselves and beyond, of conceptual elements that would fit into the storytelling of Nordic manufacturers and arbiters of taste (Skjerven, 2003; Unckel, 2003):

The straightjacket of mythologies meticulously woven around design from the Nordic countries by marketers, promoters and historians alike has resulted in a strong but severely distorted image of what Scandinavian design is. Particularly the international and popular reception of this cleverly crafted concept has led to a disturbingly narrow understanding of Nordic design culture (Fallan, 2012 :1).

This selectivity is further pointed out by Leena Svinhufvud (2012 : 63) with regard to representing and marketing Finnish handwoven fabrics at international exhibitions:

[It] has idealized certain elements of design from the Scandinavian countries, and the narratives of a surviving tradition and individual artistic creativity have obscured the diversity and scope of the production, the modern practice and the breadth of the networks.

Over the critical decades of 1930s-50s, the mythology of Scandinavian Design came to include select institutions, ideology and stereotypes associated largely with the aesthetic side of the phenomenon. As argued by Kjetil Fallan (2007), Scandinavian Design failed to encompass contemporary design in its entirety, reducing itself to professional studio crafts and industrial design, while turning into “an elite design buzz word, a high-end marketing tool” (Fallan, 2007 : 44). Another, idealistic dimension of the myth of Scandinavian Design is reflected in its role as “a blanket concept used for marketing a trend that embraced an idyllic and leisurely lifestyle as well as an idealistic belief in the humanitarian – democratic values of design” (Kalha,
2003 : 70), although these ‘elitist’ products mostly remained beyond the general public’s reach (Fallan, 2007).

Even a superficial content analysis of anthological or encyclopedic sources on Scandinavian Modern, design history or home improvement reveals a range of stereotyped conceptions about Scandinavian Design. From the widely held views about the impact of harsh climate and relative geographic isolation on its minimalism and spaciousness to the common belief in the perseverance of Scandinavian craft traditions that are rooted in the region’s commitment to craftsmanship and natural materials, the literature is interspersed with such attributes as sparse, ascetic, lightweight, functional, simple, uncomplicated, clean-cut, uncluttered, practical (Burdett, 1998; Gelfer-Jørgensen, 2003; McDermott, 2007; Sarantola-Weiss, 2012; Skurka, 1995); according to Scandinavian Country. A Little Style Book (Skurka, 1995 : 9), these features were crucial for developing a distinct modern style of the 1950s:

The Nordic emphasis on original beauty and honest workmanship is, of course, a harbinger of modern design and explains why it sprang so naturally to the Scandinavian imagination. In few places on earth do age-old handicrafts merge so seamlessly into contemporary design.

Additionally, no account of Scandinavian Design would be complete without its relation to Scandinavian home – a cornerstone of everyday life and the place through which one creates one’s identity (Gelfer-Jørgensen, 2003). However, within the narrative of the mid-century Modern these latter assumptions may rather reflect the footprint of the Arts and Crafts Movement and National Romanticism of the nineteenth century, best exemplified by Carl Larsson’s highly influential depictions of his family house Lilla Hyttnäs in Sundborn north of Stockholm, Sweden, in the 1890s – 1910s (Fig. 1).
Above this, Scandinavian Design was conceived as an international vehicle for ‘Scandinavianism’ as an aesthetically and ideologically charged identity of the Scandinavian region. It is in this context that the concept was first called ‘a cultural project’ by Per Unckel (2003 : 5), Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers, although the narratives behind this project were called ‘fictions’ that suited both the Nordic and non-Nordic countries (Davies, 2003).

In the context of the newly emerged nation states of the nineteenth century, Scandinavia was defined as a group of underdeveloped countries that relied on a mixed economy (Sparke, 1986). Historically, it was comprised of Sweden, Norway and Denmark, which were later affiliated with Finland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland as a “loose confederation” (Skurka, 1995 : 7) of the Nordic countries. However, the concept of Scandinavian Design in the first half of the twentieth century was formed prevailingly by Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland (Unckel, 2003 : 5). They were looking to define and promote their modern identities in the post-war
world of the 1940s and 1950s, while undertaking deliberate efforts to market their designs collectively (McDermott, 2007). During these decades, the so-called “Nordic spirit of solidarity” (Kalha, 2003 : 68) solidified, yet this sense of kinship can be traced back to an ideological and political movement of Scandinavianism started out under the influence of the French Revolution of 1789-1799 (Gelfer-Jørgensen, 2003).

Within this shared identity, different parties brought in their own distinctive traits that shaped the artistic whole. Norway is attributed with Scandinavian Design’s raw energy and primitive origins with the emphasis on woodworking and carving; the Finnish contribution is characterized by the country’s harsher weather and economic conditions; old vernacular traditions of weaving and pottery were strongly articulated in the twentieth-century Sweden and Denmark respectively (Kalha, 2003; Skurka, 1995). At the same time, the Nordic designers are distinguished with their common “love of nature, respect for natural materials, and innate sense of proportions and scale” (Skurka, 1995 : 8) that, combined with their visionary and skillfully executed works in glass, ceramics, textiles, plywood and more, have made Scandinavian Design “the domestic style of the period” (McDermott, 2007 : 203).

Before that happened, however, the Scandinavian countries had to undergo dramatic transformations of their geopolitics, economy and culture in search of their distinct national identities and original voice on the young international market of industrially produced consumer goods, which are considered in detail below.

2.2 ~ The outline of historic prerequisites: Scandinavia in the 1840s – 1920s

In the historic perspective, the success of the Scandinavian Design project in the 1950s was a culmination of consistent and institutionalized efforts undertaken in the course of more than a hundred years. As a cultural phenomenon, it relied heavily on the National Romanticism and folk craft revivalism of the nineteenth century; on
design reforms and industry modernizations of the early twentieth century. This pan-Scandinavian programme laid the ground for crucial design promotion organizations that acted as arbiters of taste and policy makers, as well as shaped the key characteristics of Scandinavian Design that fully unfolded in the 1950s (Fallan, 2007; Sparke, 2013).

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the Scandinavian countries in geopolitical turmoil over the questions of national identification and distinctiveness. These debates, supported with the contemporary idea of nation states, were quite understandably concentrated in Norway and Finland, both countries seeking independence from Sweden and the Russian Empire respectively. Norway, ceded to Sweden in 1814, reclaimed its independence only in 1905; Finland stayed an autonomous part of the Russian Empire from 1809 till 1917.

This seemingly disparate national revival movements rested on the common idealization of the past and authentic folk crafts as material manifestations of the national and cultural identities these countries were longing to rediscover: “For the first time, the assimilation of the most attractive primitive forms of an idealized, native past was seen as the basis for change and a new style” (Bowe, 1993 : 10). Historical roots served as an inspiration for the ‘Norse revival’ – the Old Norse style in Sweden or Dragestil in Norway followed by a broader pan-Scandinavian National Romanticism of the late nineteenth century marked by the flourishing of Nordic decorative arts.

Whereas art was generally regarded as a medium of national regeneration and consolidation (Berman, 1993), design was called upon as a tool of national politics and visible change, and it is said that design innovation and nationalistic sentiments went hand in hand before the First World War (Sparke, 1986). Since the 1840s, national decorative styles were promoted by specific institutions like the Swedish Society of Craft and Design established in 1845, the Finnish Society of Crafts and
Design founded thirty years later, or the Norwegian Society for Home Industry started out in 1891. Actively supporting international cooperation through art journals and exhibitions (Bowe, 1993), these institutions along with architects, painters and designers acted as major national image makers. Carefully depicting national ethnic styles (Gerhard Munthe, Norway, Fig. 2), epic scenes (Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Finland) and revolutionary interiors (Carl Larsson, Sweden), they contributed to the formation of cultural identities and accelerated national renewal.

At the heart of this national revival there was fascination with the romanticized peasant culture, its ethnic forms and enduring decorative arts from “a despoiled world” (Bowe, 1993: 7) that survived yet into the 1950s, albeit as quite abstract interpretations. For Norway in particular, which had been under the Danish rule ever since 1397 subsequently losing its national institutions and written language, decorative arts that survived from the Middle Ages were on the ideological agenda as a model of cultural purity encapsulating a truly Norwegian style (Berman, 1993). In this regard, Norwegian artist Gerhard Munthe’s and Finnish artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela’s field trips to the indigenous regions of their countries resulted in producing some of the most known stylizations of vernacular expressions, including frescoes, domestic textiles, book illuminations and more.

Ultimately, the authentic craft traditions were ‘filtered’ through a modern lens by Scandinavian artists who rather belonged to the nationalist avant-garde and
therefore pointed their criticisms and progressive ideas at the bourgeoisie. As suggested by Gerhard Munthe (Berman, 1993: 158):

The engagement with folk art could redirect the urban middle class to consider the genuine and humble manifestations of a true Norwegian spirit. It was through the peasantry that the urban middle class could seek its identity.

As influential members of the Norwegian cultural elite, Munthe and art historian Andreas Aubert, among others, were instrumental in propagating new trends among the receptive middle class, which was best exemplified by the bourgeoisie’s penchant for traditional tapestry weaving in the 1890s. Their support also partly accounted for the success of such revivalist initiatives as Norwegian Museums of Applied Arts, open-air folk museums and the Norwegian Society for Home Industry established in 1891 to stimulate national design, provide professional training in crafts and popularize traditional decorative arts through historical publications and manuals.

The Nordic vernacular styles engendered in Norwegian mountain farmers’ homes or the Karelian decorative culture were perceived not only as a repository of the national identity, but also as a point of departure for modern design reforms. Adopting folk art for the contemporary domestic interior, artists and architects were bringing interior decoration and the cause of national regeneration together within their own residences (Fig. 3). Here, peasant crafts and vernacular expressions were interpreted within the artistic tradition of the time, influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement, Art Nouveau and symbolism. Additionally, newly founded open-air folk museums in Oslo, Stockholm and Helsinki played a significant role in disseminating revivalist ideas and art models for the urban bourgeois interior, while educating the broader public about the indigenous way of life (Berman, 1993).
This focus received further impetus in the Finnish architecture at the turn of
the twentieth century, when young Finnish architects became aware of the necessity
to introduce a national element into their works and promoted their vision through
competitions and professional press of the 1890s. Coupled with the efforts of the
Friends of Finnish Handicraft established in 1879 as a workshop to produce
handwoven textiles that supported the idea of ‘Finnishness’ in contemporary
decorative arts, this nationalist project came together at the 1900 Paris World’s Fair
where the Finnish pavilion succeeded in displaying the national identity through folk
ornaments and reinterpreted visual traditions of Karelia, including original frescoes

Towards the early twentieth century, the divide between design and industry
started to blur – the movement named Art Manufacturing aimed at bringing fine
artists and designers together with manufacturers to produce skillfully designed and
aesthetically appealing mass produced wares that existed along a still lively market for
handicrafts (Sparke, 1986: 56):
As design had become intrinsic to the systems of mass production, marketing, consumption, many countries that depended on it for successful trading, saw the need both to consolidate its role within industry and to communicate its benefits to as wide an audience as possible to guarantee its future.

These functions were taken up prevailingly by national design promotion organizations. Alongside these institutions, exhibitions and emerging mass media (newspapers, journals and radio) became a vital means of promotion among the general public as well to earn their support in forming national export identities for the international market.

The turning point in this pan-European campaign to marry design and industry was the formation of the Deutscher Werkbund (Association of Craftsmen) in Munich, Germany in 1907. Influenced by the British Arts and Crafts Movement that advocated “the importance of the work of artists in design and decoration” (Wilhide, 1994 : 18) while praising the handicrafts and blasting the use of machinery, institutionally the Werkbund was preceded by craft workshops – Werkstätte, where a fine artist both designed and crafted the end product. Responding to the ‘zeitgeist’, the Werkbund worked towards bringing improved design standards into the industry for the sake of Germany’s cultural unity and competitiveness on the international market (Sparke, 1986). This industrial turn was also encouraged by Hermann Muthesius, a German architect and a major admirer of the Arts and Crafts Movement who was closely associated with the Werkbund and believed that “industry has the vigour and the energy to inspire a new cultural revolution” (Naylor, 1985 : 39).

This influential association with its own constitution, policy and coordinated tactics acted as a forum and a pressure group for industrialists, artists, architects and craftsmen introducing and monitoring high aesthetic standards in mass produced consumer goods (Schwartz, 1996). Some of its responsibilities included
- publications, exhibitions, public education;
- pressure on retailers and manufacturers to sell and make Werkbund-approved products;
- establishing the Museum of Industrial Design in Hagen;
- industrial standardization of consumer goods;
- running the yearbook and Form magazine (1925-1933).

It was through this association that this groundbreaking design ideology with a social dimension to it was introduced to Sweden by art historian Gregor Paulsson, at the time Curator at the National Museum of Fine Arts, who visited Germany in 1912. Two years later, the Swedish Society of Craft and Design put the industrial question on its agenda and created its own Werkbund-inspired liaison office that acted to a large extent as an employment agency (Fig. 4). As a result of these institutionalized efforts, the homogeneous middle-class population of Sweden grew more susceptible to the modern design and proved to be its early adopters in the interwar years (Sparke, 2013).

Figure 4. Simon Gate, Fritz Blomqvist and Edward Hald for Orrefors, Sweden, 1917-1928 (Freeforms, 2015?)
Elsewhere in Europe organisations like the Deutscher Werkbund, Bauhaus and Soviet Vkhutemas propagated functional, practical and affordable everyday things that didn’t compromise on aesthetics or quality (Conran and Fraser, 2004 : 10). Although in such revolution-struck countries as Germany or Russia much of this discourse was determined by dramatic political and social changes that included a growing urban population and housing crisis, Sweden wasn’t strange to these ideals and engendered them as early as 1917 in the seminal Home Exhibition that displayed ready-made modern interiors targeting single-generation families with low to average income (Woodham, 1997). This event marked the beginning of the “modern Swedish craft and design culture” and turned the ‘home’ inherited from the 1890s into “a battleground of the morals of the poor, an instrument of control” (Zetterlund, 2012 : 104, 108). Two years later, Gregor Paulsson’s book Better Things for Everyday Life summarized these new democratic ideals that were eventually embodied in Sweden’s pioneering consumer goods successfully showcased at the Exposition international des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes (World’s Fair) in Paris in 1925.

These eighty years - from the abolition of the Swedish guild system in 1846 to the fusion of art and technology proclaimed by Bauhaus’s Walter Gropius in the 1920s – saw the evolution of design thinking informed by the nationalist agenda of the young European nation states. Driven by the search of their cultural and – more importantly at the turn of the twentieth century – export identity, the Scandinavian countries cemented the role of design as a medium of national renewal and economic competitiveness, preparing for what came to make Scandinavian Design one of the century’s cultural icons.
2.3 - Unleashing the cultural project: institutionalized conceptualization of Scandinavian Design, 1930-1957

Started out in the early twentieth century, the trend for design reforms based on the democratic and social ideals was further propelled in the 1930s and never actually ceased to evolve despite being hampered by the outbreak of the war (Leighton, 2014). The housing projects, like those in the 1930s Sweden or the 1950s Britain, facilitated the wider acceptance of design reforms that centered on the home and the interior that remained a battleground for debates and experimentation (Creagh, Lane and Frampton, 2008: 131):

The home would take on a real dimension in 1930: no longer a generic space in an exhibition hall that was simply a container for furnishings, but full-scale model homes and rental apartments where the functional, social and economic implications of the home would be investigated with a degree of specificity hitherto unattempted in Sweden.

It was during this time that the designer’s profession was finally recognized as a distinct occupation, later grown into ‘industrial design’ as an opposite to applied arts (Fallan, 2015; Sparke, 1986). The role ascribed to the contemporary design encompassed its capability to create a national identity for a country’s products on the international market and, aided by mass media and growing industrial capacities, form a mass culture of consumers who were susceptible to the language of fashion and advertising, eager to define themselves through purchasing highly symbolic goods like clothes, cars, furnishings and interior decorations (Sparke, 2013). This construction of identities, both individual and national, defined the post-war decades when the new lifestyles engendered in bolder designs (Fig. 5, 6) replaced the beiges and browns of the 1940s (Leighton, 2014).
Figure 5. *Piccolo* prints designed by Vuokko Nurmesniemi for Marimekko, Finland, mid-1950s (Gravelandgold, 2014)

Figure 6. Lucienne Day’s *Calyx* print designed for the Festival of Britain in 1951 (Gallery Bookshop Ltd., 2015?)
The alliance between design and industry thus rose to an unprecedented level of realization, with a number of designers cooperating with such Scandinavian mass producers of glass, ceramics, furniture and textiles as Gustavberg, Rorstrand, Orrefors, Svenskt Tenn, Marimekko, Arabia and the Association of Friends of Textile Art.

In this regard, Finnish architect and designer Alvar Aalto’s rise to international fame is emblematic. His agenda to “break with decorative arts in order to design for the masses” (Svinhufvud, 2012: 49) coincided with the national trend of hiring qualified designers in the industry, especially for mass production of domestic textiles. This attitude was also in tune with the European design reformists who responded to Aalto’s innovative forms throughout the series of exhibitions – the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930, the Small Apartment Exhibition in Helsinki in 1930, Milan Triennali of 1933 and 1936, the Paris World’s Fair in 1937 and the New York World’s Fair in 1939 (Fig. 7) – that proved to be crucial for the international recognition of Aalto’s (and Finland’s in general) design in the 1930s-1950s.

Leveraging both the representational and networking opportunities provided by these exhibitions, Aalto established close ties with the British and North American architectural elite, including British critic and co-founder of the Modern Architectural Research Group Philip Horton Shand and the New York Museum of Modern Art’s (MoMA) curator of architecture and design John McAndrew. While the latter was
instrumental in arranging Aalto’s first solo exhibition at MoMA in 1938, Shand went as far as to co-found Finmar Ltd., a distribution company for selling Aalto’s plywood furniture in the UK, at the time Finland’s largest export market (Davies, 1998). Systematically, through publications in the *Architectural Review*, of which Shand was a contributor, and consecutive promotional efforts he built up the international consumer base for Aalto’s designs (Fig. 8) that signified the rise of the national element in the Internationalist tradition of the 1920s and 30s (Pelkonen, 2005).

![Alvar Aalto’s Paimio chair, 1931-1932](image_url)

**Figure 8.** Alvar Aalto’s *Paimio* chair, 1931-1932 (American Craft Council, 2015)

At the same time, the Swedish design avant-garde was consolidating its efforts to settle in the European Functionalist milieu, the ultimate aesthetic paradigm of the 1930s made popular first in Germany and France. Despite major criticism from the advocates of traditionalism and national handicrafts, the coming of Functionalism was aided by the Social Democratic government’s welfare policies and support of the major decision makers like Gregor Paulsson, now Director of the Swedish Society of Craft and Design.

Filtered through Sweden’s economic reality and centuries-long craft traditions, Functionalism took a milder, more humanistic form embodied in the architecture and consumer wares at the critical *Stockholm Exhibition* of 1930. It was
there that Alvar Aalto first met Philip Horton Shand, who later coined the catchphrase *Swedish Grace* describing the exhibition architect Gunnar Asplund’s delicate style informed by his “distinct national sensibility” (Pelkonen, 2005: 88), and it was this event that provoked Gregor Paulsson and the architects Gunnar Asplund, Wolter Gahn, Sven Markelius, Eskil Sundahl and Uno Åhrén to release the *Acceptera!* manifesto in 1931. Interspersed with playful images, the manifesto addressed Sweden’s social and economic issues and outlined the principles of Swedish Functionalism proposing rationalization and standardization of industrial production (Creagh, Lane and Frampton, 2008).

The international success of the contemporary Swedish wares designed by Gustaf Axel Berg, Bruno Mathsson and Josef Frank, among others, was further affirmed through export trade and international exhibitions: Sweden was represented both in Paris (1937) and New York (1939) where the Swedish take on Functionalism earned the reputation of “a movement towards sanity in design” (Sparke, 1986: 85-86).

Therefore, the inter-war years helped define the Nordic character in the Modernist design and start an effective dialogue with the global community of design reformers. As international exhibitions and professional press coverage ensured a warm reception of Scandinavian designers on the international market, the pan-Scandinavian promotional campaign evolved further into the war-struck 1940s and the recovering 1950s.

Throughout the 1930s – 1950s marked by the ascent of the Nazis in Germany and the Fascists in Italy, the Civil War in Spain and World War II followed by the political polarization and growing tension between the West and the Eastern Bloc, the neutral Nordic countries came to represent “a sanctuary of common sense in politically convulsed times” (Pelkonen, 2005: 87) and “a third political alternative in a polarized world” (Skjerven, 2003: 28-29). As argued by Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen (2005),
this perception was also supported with the cultural idea of the North being a creative and spiritual haven. At the same time, for such country as Finland the post-war design exhibitions became the forum for integration with the Western economy and culture, building up “a spiritual barricade against the East” (Kalha, 2003 : 69) as an antithesis to possible political misconceptions held abroad.

In the public eye, this geopolitical unity facilitated the mission to promote Scandinavian Design as a product of the so called ‘Nordic solidarity’ that was propagated with a renewed energy after WWII, up to the foundation of the Nordic Council in 1952 and the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1971 (Gelfer-Jørgensen, 2003). Internally, this mission took shape of design congresses, domestic exhibitions and professional communication within the Scandinavian design community. Externally, it was promoted by consolidated administration of international exhibitions like Design in Scandinavia (1954-1957) or the 1954 Milan Triennale, as well as by common means of marketing the brand of Scandinavianism, a sum of equally distinctive parts, and the export markets for this brand were chosen intentionally. These were the United Kingdom and the USA where

some kind of tradition about what [Scandinavian design] was supposed to be was synthesized in the marketplace and the exhibition hall, perhaps from existing beliefs and mythologies, to satisfy the desires of consumers, manufacturers and other interested parties such as exhibition organisers. (…) It is essential to recognize that Scandinavian design had, effectively, a political function in coordinating ideas about what Scandinavia was supposed to be (Davies, 2003 : 102).

Although innovative design developments were impeded during the World War II due to tariff barriers, austerity and general economic deprivations, the post-war European countries set out on large-scale reconstruction. Housing was regarded as one of the key priorities and received public support, while home design
accompanied the regeneration programme as an instrument to “keep [the population’s] morale high” (Leighton, 2014: 5). For this purpose, the British Board of Trade established the Council of Industrial Design (CoID) in 1944 that was also responsible for building new export markets for national products.

The CoID was instrumental in popularizing the post-war paradigm of Good Design as a remedy against tastelessness and inferior quality of mass produced goods. Although the term was used as early as in 1946 as a slogan for the principal exhibition Britain Can Make It, it didn’t arrive as a new design policy until 1949 when Gordon Russel, the CoID’s director, published his essay What Is Good Design? in the inaugural issue of Design magazine. This functional and aesthetic paradigm that advocated for clean, crisp and well-designed products that fit their purpose was quickly picked up across the Atlantic by MoMA’s curators who mutually saw it as a means to reform mass taste and expand the international trade (Sparke, 1986).

The visual language of Functionalism-influenced design from the Scandinavian countries fell in line with Russel’s aspirations. In the 1950s, he proved to be a major proponent of Scandinavian Design that he regarded as a model of Good Design. Back in the late 1940s, Scandinavian Design exercised considerable influence over the new housing projects in Britain, with furnishings frequently being recognizably wooden, light, clear-cut and colourful with some direct imitations (Leighton, 2014). Now, Britain’s disposition was further propelled by the CoID’s efforts, including the publications of Scandinavian goods like Swedish and Danish furniture in professional press or endorsing a range of exhibitions, one of which – Scandinavia at Table – became the place where the term Scandinavian Design was ultimately coined.

London’s flagship furniture store Heal’s that till these days bears the motto Good Design. Well Made helped to bring Gordon Russel’s promotional efforts out in the retail market by stocking a wide range of modern Scandinavian furniture from
Finmar Ltd., hosting Scandinavian Design For Living exhibition (1951) and shaping the audience’s response through well-targeted publications (Davies, 1997). These marketing efforts were coupled with generally weak competition from the UK manufacturers who were still recovering from the war and couldn’t keep up with the popular demand, which also created favorable export conditions for Scandinavian countries that suffered far less losses in World War II (Davies, 1997).

In its turn, Scandinavia’s journey to the North American market started, however, in Italy. A series of Triennali di Milano in the 1950s provided a backdrop to the mid-century Scandinavian myth-making and a test ground for the official narrative that was soon imported to the USA. The Milanese Triennali took the place of the pre-war universal exhibitions and contested the role of “design Olympics” (Wickman, 2003: 33) where different countries could play out their “cultural diplomacy” (Fallan, 2015b: 2) and establish new export markets.

Of all the post-war Triennali, the one in 1951 proved to be crucial for the trans-Atlantic promotion of Scandinavian Design. It assembled Sweden, Denmark and Finland (Norway didn’t join until 1954) under the roof of Palazzo dell’Arte where, apart from winning multiple awards, the countries caught the attention of Elizabeth Gordon, editor of the American journal House Beautiful. As an alternative to International Style that Gordon linked with totalitarianism and “the importance of the state over the individual” (Selkurt, 2003: 62), more humane, warmer Scandinavian Design emphasized the qualities she was looking herself to instill in the American way of life and domestic culture – closeness to nature, respect for the home and the family, and democratic ideals (Guldberg, 2011; Selkurt, 2003). Following the 1951 Triennale she actively encouraged her network of journalists and gallery curators to arrange an American showcase for the modern Scandinavian design that resulted in the flagship touring exhibition Design in Scandinavia (1954-1957) that eventually travelled 24 locations in North America and enjoyed more than 650,000 visitors.
However, it wasn’t the first attempt to bring the post-war Scandinavian Design to the American soil. Back in 1948, MoMA’s director of the Industrial Design Department Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. visited Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland negotiating a possible exhibition to be held at MoMA. Despite Scandinavian designers’ expectations, their works weren’t found particularly innovative – which can be explained, partly, with MoMA’s penchant for experimental avant-garde rather than down-to-earth, agenda-driven designs for the masses (Fallan, 2015). Nevertheless, it was Kaufmann who advocated for the inclusion of Scandinavian design items into a range of American exhibitions themed around Good Design in the 1940s, his disposition resting to a large extent on the prior Scandinavian developments showcased in the late 1930s by the likes of Alvar Aalto and Bruno Mathsson. It wouldn’t be long, however, until both Scandinavian and American designers started a vibrant trans-Atlantic dialogue through professional press and trips funded by the Marshall plan. This two-way inspiration can be illustrated with the fact that around the time Design in Scandinavia was touring American cities, the exhibition American Design for Home and Decorative Use (1953-1954), curated by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., was touring Scandinavia.

From the very beginning, promotion of Scandinavian Design in the USA was aided by commercial enterprises, which in their turn benefited from the vibrant publicity generated by design exhibitions. Claire Selkurt (2003) gives a comprehensive overview of the American companies selling Scandinavian wares including Knoll Inc. that first introduced many Scandinavian designers to the American market, the Finland House showroom representing Tapio Wirkkala and the ceramic artists of Arabia, Bonniers selling Bruno Mathsson’s furniture alongside Swedish Modern Inc., to name a few. In the wake of the popular Chicago exhibition Norway Designs for Living in 1951, its organiser and co-founder of Norwegian magazine Bonytt Per Tannum converted the exhibits into a business - Norway Designs A/S – that enjoyed moderate success for a few years (Fallan, 2015). The patriarch of Scandinavian Design in the
USA, the Dane Frederik Lunning started to import Scandinavian goods back in the 1920s, and went to establish the peer-awarded *Lunning Prize* (1951-1970) to celebrate the major design achievements from the region.

Apart from consistent ‘lobbying’ of Scandinavian Design in the USA through trade journals, popular magazines (featuring images of Jens Risom’s furniture by avant-garde fashion photographer Richard Avedon, among others, Fig. 9) and critical acclaim, its success was also determined by its aesthetic appeal to the upper-middle class’s tastes shaped by the likes of Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Marcel Breuer and Rudolph Schindler, the European design elite who immigrated to the USA in the previous decades. In the wake of the booming consumer society, this “spectacle of abundance” (Fallan, 2015: 134), Scandinavian Modern presented a milder, more humanistic version of the inter-war Functionalism and an alternative to the ubiquitous mid-century streamlining without losing its high-end gloss (Fallan, 2015: 135):

The aim was to revise design ideologies and practices to align with these rapidly changing consumption regimes based on economics, class, politics, and taste among others.
This was the environment that provided “a crucial discursive backdrop for the spectacular mise-en-scene of Scandinavia in the 1950s” (Kalha, 2003 : 67), when Elizabeth Gordon and later Leslie Cheek, Jr., director of Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, were negotiating the upcoming Design in Scandinavia exhibition with a range of national institutions – the American Federation of Arts, Scandinavian Societies of Craft and Design and various exhibition committees formed during the early 1950s for the Triennali di Milano. This event is considered to be one of the cornerstones of this “carefully orchestrated” (Fallan, 2015 : 135) cultural project under discussion, up to the point where it could influence the mid-century American Modernism in its own right. Beyond a common goal of stimulating the export market for Scandinavian goods in the USA, it fulfilled a critical mission of communicating the idea of Scandinavia to a vast new audience.

Claire Selkurt (2003) and Jørn Guldberg (2011) give detailed accounts of how this publicity was constructed by both sides. Some of the promotional efforts started as early as in 1953 included an efficient media campaign – a series of publications in Elizabeth Gordon’s House Beautiful, radio broadcasts frequently featuring Scandinavian music and literature, TV programmes and film screenings; mutually advantageous advertising carried out between hosting museums and department stores selling the exhibits; lectures at colleges and universities and special ‘Scandinavian Weeks’, which collectively familiarized the audiences more with the Scandinavian culture and ethnoscape rather than with the nature of the design objects on display. This quasi-educational campaign informed the Americans about the history and character behind the exhibition, at the same time provoking the public’s interest and, consequently, significant numbers of visitors who, once in the exhibition hall, were welcomed with large-scale depictions of Swedish, Norwegian, Danish and Finnish landscapes (Fig. 10). As suggested by Harri Kalha (2003 : 69), “the pervasive presence of nature and landscapes also bore witness to the exhibition’s hoped for role in promoting Scandinavian tourism.”
Most importantly, this event is associated with one of the ‘cult’ texts in the Scandinavian myth-making discourse – the introduction to the exhibition catalogue written by Gotthard Johansson, President of the Swedish Society of Craft and Design. Symptomatic for such a carefully crafted marketing message is the attention to the specific perceptions and modes of the American readership paid by the parties working on it (including the cultural attaché at the Swedish embassy in the USA) (Guldberg, 2011), who eventually coined many of the key clichés around the notions of craft, tradition, home, nature and democratic ideals, readily picked up by the press. This document also contributed to the post-war project of merging the four distinct countries into a Scandinavian whole that, according to Danish designer Finn Juhl (Wickman, 2003 : 38) could act “much more forcefully”. This project was further propelled during the preparations for the 1954 Triennale in Milan where Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway collaborated on administering the pavilions and exhibited next to each other. It is necessary to admit, however, that this geopolitical
generalization had its positive externalities for Norway – despite being the last to join the parade of Scandinavian commodities at the Milan Triennali, it benefited from the goodwill generated by its neighbors and earned the appraisal as “this year’s revelation” in 1954 (Fallan, 2007: 53).

In the late 1950s, the messages so vigorously publicized during the aforementioned events were reiterated throughout such exhibitions as Scandinavian Design in Use (1954) and Formes Scandinaves (1958-1959), but the key narratives had been conceived and disseminated. The Scandinavian countries were to live off this legacy up to the 1980s when Scandinavian Design as an aesthetic and political construct was metaphorically ‘buried’ by a group of Norwegian industrial design practitioners and students in Oslo, Norway on July 5, 1980 (Fallan, 2007).
Conclusion

Although the international march of Scandinavian Design continued well into the 1960s and the 1970s – the decades left beyond the scope of this study – the ‘golden age’ of this phenomenon didn’t survive the 1950s when it was first truly recognized by the global design establishment. As a cultural project grown out ‘organically’ of the immediate requirements of the time, be it the revival of nations under the foreign rule or the massive post-war regeneration, it always relied on contemporary cultural paradigms and substantial theoretic legitimization. With the dying out of the 1910s-1940s design reforms brought out as an imperative of the industrial turn in manufacturing, the phenomenon of Scandinavian Design was dying out too: lacking a central strategy and a single authoritative body behind its management, it failed to adapt to the changing aesthetic paradigm of the 1960s – 1980s and meet new consumers’ instantaneous demands.

However, this historic determinism played a crucial role in the project’s mid-century success. From the Functionalism of the 1930s to the Good Design of the 1940s, Scandinavian designers were effectively adopting internationally recognized design ideologies that were in fact invented in countries like Germany and the United Kingdom. This ‘mimicry’ can also account for these designers’ acclaim in the USA, the new home country for a number of modern design advocates that fled Nazi Germany and Bolshevik Russia, among others. As a result, the products created along these lines but filtered through the Scandinavian designers’ own ethnic traditions were brought back to the receptive British and American markets in the course of full-scale promotional campaigns that had the elements of both commercial marketing (positioning, advertising, visual identity, attention to target consumers) and place branding (politically charged messages that defined its position on the complicated post-war map, educational events, focus on the regional arts, nature and people).
Looking back at this century-long cultural project – from the foundation of the Swedish Society of Craft and Design in 1845 to the cross-continental success of Scandinavian design exports in the 1950s – it is possible to single out a number of critical elements of its international conceptualization:

**Policy**

Scandinavian design promotion organizations – national craft and design associations, industrial design panels and exhibition committees – provided aesthetic and technical guidelines for the contemporary cultural expressions as well as built the bridge between Scandinavia and the international design community through professional press and networking.

**Education**

The Scandinavian Design project was accompanied with the emergence of new educational initiatives like the Helsinki Craft School, the Norwegian Society for Home Industry and studio workshops to meet the industry’s demand for innovatively thinking designers.

**Exhibitions**

The role of both domestic and international exhibitions couldn’t be overestimated. Particularly during 1917-1957, these events served as a powerful communication tool for transmitting the politically charged idea of Scandinavianism and disseminating specifically crafted messages that eventually positioned the region at the forefront of design thinking.

**Media**

Professional press, trade magazines and design journals, were not only a vehicle for popularization of Scandinavian Design wherever this phenomenon was imported, but also connected Scandinavian designers to the influencers behind them,
who through their respective networks helped to build Scandinavian Design’s goodwill abroad.

However, the elements listed above reveal Scandinavian Design’s dependence on select taste-makers and ‘star’ designers that defined the generation’s visual language, which might also impacted on the project’s ability to sustain changes. Throughout its history, influencers and advocates like Philip Horton Shand, Gordon Russel, Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. and Elizabeth Gordon mediated between Scandinavian Design and its foreign audiences, shaping the public’s taste and promoting Scandinavian wares to retailers, galleries and policy-makers. It is also noteworthy that the list of promoted products was frequently limited to select designers only – among them, Alvar Aalto, Tapio Wirkkala and Timo Sarpaneva (Finland), Finn Juhl, Erik Herlow, Kay Bojesen and Arne Jacobsen (Denmark), Arne Korsmo (Norway), Gustaf Axel Berg and Bruno Mathsson (Sweden) who were all active players in their national artistic milieu.

This selectivity was further substantiated through the ‘cult’ texts made public on the occasions of exhibitions. They contributed to the mythological discourse of Scandinavian Design and invented the stereotypes that covered both Scandinavia’s style and way of life. These texts became part of a larger campaign to bring all the Nordic countries under the umbrella of Scandinavia, to consolidate their efforts and market their products collectively. As participation of the Nordic countries in this cultural project was heterogeneous throughout its history, the united Scandinavia also helped to level off the positive impact on the region’s international image and foreign trade for all the actors. From the perspective of place branding, this clever step facilitated promotional efforts and leveraged the countries’ varied capabilities.

As an important cultural phenomenon that encompassed political imperatives, social reforms and industrial progress, Scandinavian Design proved to be an engaging case study of a cultural industry where ‘the marketplace meets the
exhibition hall’. Studying this phenomenon within the framework of place branding served as a helpful exercise in pinpointing this cultural industry’s potential in promoting a place image internationally through the discourse of consumer commodities and domestic interior while revealing both strengths and weaknesses of this promotional channel. Hopefully, the findings outlined in this work could also suggest the practicalities of place branding for countries looking to build and sustain their international image by means of cultural industries in general and design in particular.
Appendix I

From Scandinavian Crafts to Scandinavian Design:
The Historical Timeline

1845 – The Swedish Society of Craft and Design (renamed Svensk Form in 1976) is founded to protect crafts after the abolition of the guild system

1859 – The Young Norway group releases a manifesto calling for Norwegians to recognize themselves as a distinct nation

1872 – The first Nordic Exhibition of Industry and Art is held in Copenhagen, Denmark

1875 – The Finnish Society of Crafts and Design is founded by C.G. Estlander, head of the Helsinki Craft School

1876 – Museum of Applied Arts is opened in Kristiania, Norway

1879 – The Friends of Finnish Handicraft start out in Helsinki, Finland

1887 – The second Museum of Applied Arts is opened in Bergen, Norway

1888 – The Nordic Industrial Exhibition takes place in Copenhagen, Denmark

1890 – Norwegian artist Gerhard Munthe publishes his essay on the Norwegian folk art, From Farmers’ Homes

1891 – The Norwegian Society for Home Industry is founded with participation of Lorentz Dietrichson, the first Professor of Art History at the University of Kristiania

1893 – The third Museum of Applied Arts is opened in Trondheim, Norway

1894 – The first Norwegian open-air folk museum is founded in Oslo

1896 – Influenced by the national craft revival, Norwegian art historian Andreas Aubert publishes his study on the national Norwegian colours, Den Norske Favre. Et Norsk Favre-Instinkt

1900 – The Exposition Universelle (World’s Fair) is held in Paris, France

1905 – Norway declares independence from Sweden
1907 – The Deutscher Werkbund (German Association of Craftsmen) is founded in Munich, Germany

1909 – *Art and Industry* exhibition is organized by the Swedish Society of Craft and Design in Stockholm, Sweden

1911 – The Finnish Association of Decorative Artists *Ornamo* is founded in Helsinki, Finland

1914 – The *Baltic Exhibition* showcasing the industry and culture of Sweden, Denmark, Russia and Germany is held in Malmö, Sweden

1915 – Design and Industries Association (DIA) is founded in the United Kingdom

1917 – Finland declares independence from the Russian Empire

1917 – *Home Exhibition* is organized by the Swedish Society of Craft and Design’s liaison office at the Liljevalchs Art Gallery in Stockholm, Sweden

1919 – Bauhaus, a revolutionary German school of fine arts and craft, is founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar

1919 – Gregor Paulsson, president of the Swedish Society of Craft and Design, publishes the influential book *Better Things for Everyday Life*

1925 – The *Exposition international des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* (World’s Fair) takes place in Paris, gives its name to the new, internationally acclaimed style of Art Deco

1930 – *Small Apartment* exhibition curated by Alvar Aalto takes place in Helsinki, Finland

1930 – *Stockholm Exhibition* is held in the Swedish capital, leaving its mark on the Swedish Functionalism and International Style in architecture

1931 – *Acceptera* manifesto is published by architects Gunnar Asplund, Wolter Gahn, Sven Markelius, Eskil Sundahl, Uno Åhrén, and art historian Gregor Paulsson in the wake of the Stockholm Exhibition

1931 – Kay Bojesen founds *Den Permanente* exhibition gallery and shop in Copenhagen, Denmark

1931 – The exhibition of *Swedish Industrial Art* takes place at the Dorland Hall, London, UK

1933 – The Social Housing Committee is appointed in Sweden
1933 – The V Triennale takes place in Milan, Italy
1934 – The Deutscher Werkbund is disbanded (reestablished in 1949)
1936 – The VI Triennale is held in Milan, Italy
1937 - The Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne (International Exposition dedicated to Art and Technology in Modern Life) takes place in Paris, France
1939 – The World’s Fair starts in New York, USA
1944 – The Council of Industrial Design (CoID, now Design Council) started in the United Kingdom, later propagated Scandinavian design as a ‘Good Design’ model
1946 – Britain Can Make It exhibition is held by the CoID at London’s Victoria & Albert Museum
1946 – Nordic Decorative Arts Congress is held in Copenhagen
1947 – The first post-war Triennale takes place in Milan, with Sweden being the only participating Scandinavian country
1948 – Nordic Decorative Arts Congress is held in Oslo
1949 – The ‘Good Design’ paradigm emerges in the post-war Britain
1950 – Nordic Decorative Arts Congress is held in Stockholm
1951 – A showroom exhibition Norway Designs for Living is held in Chicago, USA
1951 – Festival of Britain is held throughout the country to celebrate the centennial of the 1851 Great Exhibition in London and showcase the latest post-war achievements in design and architecture
1951 – The term ‘Scandinavian Design’ coined at Scandinavia at Table exhibition organized by the British CoID in London, UK
1951 – Scandinavian Design For Living exhibition is hosted by Heal’s furniture store in London, UK
1951 – Sweden, Denmark and Finland take part in the IX Triennale di Milano
1952 – Nordic Decorative Arts Congress is held in Oslo
1953-1954 – MoMA-curated touring exhibition *American Design for Home and Decorative Use* takes place across Scandinavian countries before leaving for Belgium and Italy

1954 – Nordic Decorative Arts Congress is held in Helsinki

1954 – Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway are represented at the X Triennale di Milano next to each other with a common introductory area called *Scandinavia*

1954-1957 – The major exhibition *Design in Scandinavia* travels 24 locations in the USA and Canada

1955 – *H55*, a collective exhibition of architecture and design from Scandinavia, is held in Helsingborg, Sweden

1955 – The *Norwegian Industrial Designers* (Norske Industridesignere) organisation, focused on industrial design, is co-founded by designer Thorbjørn Rygh

1957 – The XI Triennale di Milano gathers all the Scandinavian countries (except Norway)

1958 – Expo 58 world’s fair is held in Brussels, Belgium

1958-1959 – *Formes Scandinaves*, a joint exhibition of Scandinavian Design, is shown in Paris, France

1980 – Norwegian designers metaphorically bury Scandinavian Design in Oslo, Norway


FIGURES: REFERENCES


