At the end of the Introduction a generic theory of the public sphere in institutional perspective was sketched (Engelstad, Larsen, Rogstad & Steen-Johnsen, this volume). Seven main dimensions, or building blocks, aimed to describe variations in the shape of different public spheres, were pinpointed. The foregoing chapters demonstrate that combinations of values on these empirical variables appear in clusters. It is widely outside the scope of the present volume to treat the totality of relevant elements, but the empirical studies presented here yield some significant indications of what one such cluster looks like. It should be borne in mind that the Nordic model is an ideal type. Its fruitfulness rests on a high degree of correspondence, but in no way identity, with the empirical Nordic societies. Conflict, inconsistencies and compromises are also necessary parts of societies labeled under the Nordic model. The ability to cope with such conflicts determine the viability of the model.

13.1 Institutional Elements in the Public Sphere

The neo-corporatist state is a seemingly unlikely combination of a basic liberal orientation with high degree of state intervention. This is upheld due to long term development of democratic institutions, in tandem with a growing inclusion of groups excluded from the public sphere and the fields of power (Aakvaag, this volume). This is due to close – but in no way conflict-free – interaction with social movements, from the early feminist and labour movements of the late 1800s to contemporary neo-feminism and environmentalism. This also serves as basis for continuous negotiations between the state and broad interest organizations, most prominently in the labour market.

Freedom of expression. State guarantees are a precondition for freedom of expression. At the same time it serves as a guarantee against abuse of power by the state. In Scandinavia legal protection of freedom of expression preceded the development of democracy (Engelstad, Larsen & Rogstad, this volume). Particularly in Norway, recent extensions of freedom of expression have occurred in two directions: On the one hand, in the constitutional responsibility of the state to secure information to the citizens, and on the other hand, in strengthened protection of the freedom of expression in working life (Trygstad, this volume). Nevertheless, the actual freedom of expression is negotiated; and to a certain extent it is under pressure. One source is skepticism and resistance among employers, not least in the public sector (Trygstad, this volume). Another is a blend of terrorist threat with public pressure, paired with demands for self-censorship among citizens (Elgvin and Rogstad, this volume).
**Five institutional fields** are singled out as the most salient sub-sets of the public sphere: media, research and higher education, religion, voluntary organizations, arts and culture (Engelstad, Larsen & Rogstad, this volume). These in turn may be divided into subspaces according to social class, gender or other elements. Emerging as a result of social differentiation, these five have their own mode of operation. On principle they may constitute parallel worlds, without significant interaction. Yet, minimal compatibility between the fields emerges by their degree of direct or indirect relevance to the lives of citizens. Continuous conflicts over religion and science, or art and morality are examples close at hand.

**Institutionalized integration.** In the Nordic societies the five fields are in no way isolated instances, but serve as integrated parts of society, with both contact and potential conflict between them. A core source of integration is vertical integration via state regulation and economic support. This means that the fields are adjusting their mode of operation to common democratic norms for a pluralist society. A telling example is the Nordic majority churches. Even if the Nordic states are basically secular, all the variants of majority churches have close links to the state (Furseth, this volume). Still, conflict is constantly present, also over the legitimacy of given state policies, state subsidies and political recognition (Larsen, this volume). In addition, there are issues related to horizontal integration via mediatization. The media are the single most powerful channel of communication. This means that their special mode of selection and presentation becomes contagious into other fields. A demonstration is given in the chapter on mediatization of religion (Lundby, his volume).

**Access to participation.** Critical accounts of the public sphere have to a large extent focused on the tendency to exclusion along the lines of gender and social class; more recently ethnicity has been added on. The emergence of the social media has had a revolutionary effect on the access of ordinary citizens to fora for information and deliberation. This is true for the social media in general (Enjolras and Steen-Johnsen, this volume), but has taken on a special significance in the Nordic societies, where Internet coverage is the highest in the world. When specified to processes in local politics, a mix of traditional and electronic media turns out to be most potent; whereas the improved effects of internet participation for formerly marginalized groups as women, young people and those with low formal education still holds (Segaard, this volume).

**Values and normative specifications.** The viability of democracy rests on general adherence to democratic values and constitutive rules. But these rules are set in motion in relatively exceptional cases. In a society with strong institutions, the dominant normative rules to a large extent reflect the institutional patterns. In practice, norms and values function at two different levels. Important sets of norms are tailored to the challenges posed to different occupations. Artistic norms or norms of the legal profession are obvious examples. Despite many common elements, different ethics of occupation may be incompatible, thus creating considerable conflict between groups. A much cited example is the constant tensions between the media and communica-
tion officers (Engelstad, this volume). A consequence is that the normative consensus at the on the meta-level is not repeated at the more practical connection.

*Power struggles as sources of social change.* Power struggles are normally fought over specific interests. But not seldom they shade into concerns of the shape of institutions as such. Media policy is a case near at hand. Questions of homogenizing tax exemptions for print media and electronic media is in one sense a minor question, on the other hand it implies the more principled question of equal treatment of widely different media, with possible large long term effects. Such dilemmas get a special force in the Nordic societies, with their dense institutional structures. On the one hand, these contribute to a high degree of stability. On the other hand, exactly this density invites a large amount of pressures and negotiations, with compromises and outcomes that in the long run may have destabilizing effects on the institutional structure. Hence, a question arises; can the Nordic model of the public sphere in the long run remain relevant, given that the Nordic societies are facing internal tensions as well as external competition?

### 13.2 A Viable Type of Public Sphere?

Compared to most of the world, the Nordic model of the public sphere sketched here may seem odd, even anomalous. To answer the question whether it has a future, the reciprocal relationship between the public sphere and the socio-economic aspects of the Nordic model must be drawn in, while at the same time the internal sources of change in the public sphere must be taken into consideration. In both cases, the institutional perspective is relevant.

Despite ambivalence and uncertainty, existing analyses indicate significant robustness of the political and economic aspects of the Nordic model (Thelen, 2014; Andersen, Dølvik & Ibsen, 2014; Engelstad & Hagelund, 2015). Strong support for the welfare state is a dominant feature of Nordic politics, notwithstanding unavoidable adjustments of its workings. This is highly relevant also to the future of the public sphere, as it gives high legitimacy to state intervention; even Nordic right-wing populism is in favour of the welfare state. However, general support for the welfare state is no guarantee against future changes, but rather it shapes them in decisive ways.

A core feature of the strong Nordic state is its commitment to redistribution, not only concerning economic aspects but socio-cultural aspects as well (Engelstad, Larsen & Rogstad, this volume). The structure of these engagements is open to change, even if the commitment remains unaffected. Likewise, the liberal state is the prime defender of freedom of expression, not only in terms of its ‘negative’ qualities but also its ‘positive’ qualities. Nevertheless, the Nordic state, in common with other modern states, is acquiring more and more non-liberal traits due to threats of terrorism and organized crime. No clear predictions emerge from these observations, only
that both the redistributive and the liberal facets invite struggles over interpretation and reformulation.

To understand the challenges to the public sphere, these very abstract assumptions must be specified, at least down to the five institutions distinguished above. The following descriptions may be somewhat one-sided, but cover significant tendencies. (i) Drastic changes in media technology may lead to intensified commercialization, and it initiates discussions of changes in state support of the press and public ownership of public service broadcasters. (ii) State subvention of the arts and cultural production may change direction from support for avant-garde and ‘elite’ art to more popular forms of expression. (iii) Research and higher education is to a growing extent becoming internationalized, in parallel loosening ties to the national public and practical applications. (iv) As the field of religion is becoming more pluralized, it may to a certain degree be diluted, into core of humanist social values. (v) Voluntary organizations are becoming more professionalized as lobby actors, while grass root members are more concentrated on local activities.

All of these changes are to a large extent influenced by state intervention, albeit not in a uniform way. Rather, they are closely connected to a normative, democratic conception of universalization and not least universalization of access. Why should the production of news be restricted to journalists or art be reserved for curators or research be restricted to the national realm or religious truth be represented by one denomination or representation be restricted to one organization? Undoubtedly, there is great strength in this argument. At the same time, it will be confronted by demands for professionalism. News must be trustworthy, art innovative, research critical, religion transcendent and organizations socially integrative. There is an equal strength in this argumentation. Hence, public policies must consider both lines of argumentation and will be met with opposition along both lines.

This leads to a reflection if not a conclusion. The Nordic type of public sphere is viable to the degree that the institutions are stabilizing elements in society and the strong and liberal state retains its legitimacy. But how the various parts of the public sphere will develop in the future is hardly possible to predict. Even if institutions seem stable in the short run, an important reason why they change is that they are arenas for power struggles and thus for efforts to alter them.