

Patterns of reception in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden: In search of interpretive communities

Irma Hirsjärvi, Urpo Kovalu, Maria Ruotsalainen,
University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Abstract:

This paper focuses on the search of interpretative communities across and amongst the Nordics. First the idea of shared 'Nordic mode of reception' between the three Nordic countries which participated to the *World Hobbit Research project* is presented and investigated, after which the focus is shifted towards the examination of the possibility of the 'country-specific profiles'. Finally it is questioned if any other background variable than nationality could explain the finding which emerge when examining the data at the level of nationalities.

Keywords: Comparative reception studies, conjunctural theory, The Nordic Countries, *The Hobbit*

1. Introduction

The Hobbit can be seen as a transcultural and transnational phenomenon, locally 'domesticated' through the consumption practices of audiences who are anchored in different cultural contexts. As originally a very British children's book, then a text situated, translated, and commented as a part of the Tolkien 'Imaginarium', a world of texts originally created by J R R Tolkien, and finally as the film trilogy known worldwide, it has brought us an exceptional example to be studied. How American popular culture has historically been exported and inserted into local cultures, supplementing or supplanting indigenous cultural products, is well documented. However, there is still relatively little empirical research into the ways in which transnational cultural products are received and made sense of today by people anchored in national or other local cultures (for an early example, see Liebes & Katz 1993).

Local experiences of transcultural products are presumably shaped in complex, culturally patterned ways by the cultural fabrics and traditions of the importing countries. Cooperation across national borders in comparative audience research projects adds to the understanding of such processes. The World Hobbit Research Project, by virtue of its unique mixed-method empirical design, is intended to provide in-depth answers to such challenges by empirically investigating local receptions and responses to a contemporary globally conceived and distributed Hollywood blockbuster, based on a milestone work of British literature.

The project offers an excellent basis for comparative approaches to the reception of fantasy. The biggest strength of comparative studies, in turn, is their capacity to shed light on context in a way that is very seldom possible in other research orientations. This paper focuses on the reception of the *Hobbit* films in one specific European context, the Nordic countries, of which researchers from three countries, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, are part of the global Hobbit project. Drawing on the World Hobbit Project materials, this article asks how we could best characterize the Danish, Finnish, and Swedish audience responses from a comparative angle. We start by looking at the possibility of there being a specific 'Nordic' reception of the *Hobbit* films. The Nordic countries – Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) and Finland – are known to be culturally and socially quite similar and based on this we ask if we can identify a mode of reception that would allow us to consider the Nordic countries as something of an 'interpretive community' (Fish 1980) of its own? We also look at the reception data country by country, looking for differences that might be significant. Are the three countries, in the light of this study, distinct interpretive communities? And at the end, we pose a suggestion for an alternative categorisation to the nationality or culture -based one, enabling us both to compare 'national' data and contextualise the findings, and also to account for the intersectional or conjunctural regularities. This is based on the relationship that the respondents appear to have with the films or/and the work of Tolkien and with the Peter Jackson films. This comes close to Martin Barker's distinction between 'Enthusiasts' and 'Critics' (Barker 2016 in this issue). We suggest that those who have a more affective relationship with the book and/or the Tolkien community are on average a little bit more critical towards the films, unless they conceptualize the films as different or distinct from the book: thus rather as a work in its own right, rather than strictly as a literary adaptation.

2. The Nordic countries

The population of the Nordic countries, a total of 26 million, are mainly Scandinavian or Finnish, with Greenlandic Inuit and the Sami people as minorities and a number of immigration-related ethnic minorities. Linguistically, the area is heterogeneous – of today's native languages, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, and Faroese are Germanic languages, while the non-Germanic languages spoken are Finnish, Greenlandic, and several Sami languages. In addition, there are significant immigration-related linguistic minorities.

The main religion of the area is Lutheran Christianity, although increasing immigration brings in several other religions whose share is slowly growing.

The Nordic countries have much in common as to their history, social structure, and way of life. The countries cluster near the top in numerous metrics of national performance, including education, economic competitiveness, civil liberties, quality of life, and human development.¹ The Nordic countries also share, more or less, the 'Nordic model' of economy and social structure: market economy is combined with strong labour unions and a universalist welfare sector financed by relatively high taxation. There is a high level of income redistribution and relatively little social unrest. And culturally, the countries are regarded as quite similar.

There were two issues we consider as interesting to be followed in this research. The one is the question of media literacy and education, and the other is 'fandom', the intense relationship towards media phenomena, in this case fantasy, Tolkien, Jackson, or other elements of the *Hobbit* trilogy. Media literacy has been an important new initiative in many international and national research programmes. However, even though many initiatives have been conducted, there has been little follow-up. Furthermore, in Finland there has been a remarkably strong media literacy and media education agenda in both schools and research (Erstad, 2010)

Access to media, and strong ties to literature, arts and media at large are the elementary parts of fandom. If these three countries Denmark has the longest ties to worldwide SF-fandom, but in there the fandoms of popular culture as well as research of fantasy have been kept separated until the last years. The international ties have been very strong in sf fandoms of both Sweden and Denmark, and Finland has followed this only during the last two decades. The beginning of the Finnish fantasy fandom was influenced by Sweden since 1950s, when the culture magazines debated about sf as the dangerous American influence. Since then the young adult SF book series were given public support in Finland, as well as translating and publishing of YA SF and fantasy as well as SF classics for adults, together with abundant cultural funding have been contributing to the growth of Finnish SF fandom to a strong one in international comparison. Also, unlike in Sweden and Denmark, in Finland the fandoms of fantastic in the arts and popular culture are not separated but the fandom meets through mutual events, magazines and web forums. (Määttä 2006, Hirsjärvi 2009).

Comparative reception studies are easily equated with cross-national comparative reception studies. In our case, our target is a set of countries and cultures, three of the Nordic countries. But actually, comparison may be between any aspects of the reception process, not only country or nationality. Increasingly, there is a tendency to look at the intersections of different 'background variables', of which nationality – itself a notion that is target of increasing critique – is only one. Intersectionality is only one aspect of this trend. In recent reception and audience studies in the field of media studies, there has been a tendency to combine and even integrate cross-media and cross-cultural approaches (Stehling, Finger & Jorge 2016). In the same way, it is useful to look at correlations between

different 'sections' or background variables and thereby possibly detect patterns which would not be salient in a country-based comparison. In all, as Martin Barker (2008, 177) has noted, the idea of country-specific reception is a very complex one – although not impossible.

3. Approach and method

Our approach is what could be called qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) – more precisely, a hermeneutically oriented variety of it (Hellström 2001; Jokinen & Kovala 2004; Luoma 2003; Rantala & Hellström 2001), instead of the formally oriented Raginian type drawing strictly on Boolean logic in its analyses (see Ragin 1987). Both examine the relationships between variables and explanatory contexts. The hermeneutically oriented variety, however, does not aim at formalizing those relationships, but contextualizes them by means of the comparative research design and the cultural contexts brought in by the researchers. While the strength of the Raginian type is systematicity and the careful grounding of conclusions, the hermeneutic type underlines the importance of reflexivity and the multi-level nature of explanatory contexts (cf Vainikkala & Kovala 2000).

The approach also fits what Amenta & Poulsen (1994, 25) dub as the 'conjunctural theory' approach to using QCA, where the focus, in their definition, in the selection of indicators is on combinatorial and conjunctural factors. That is, we pick up survey questions in the answers to which significant differences in the statistical sense can be detected but go on from there qualitatively, seeking to contextualize the differences, and the fifth category, the conjunctural approach. Thus, statistical analysis serves as a starting-point to qualitative analysis and contextualization only.

For the purpose of this article, we chose the responses from the three Nordic countries participating to the World Hobbit Project for our examination. We also used all the rest of the recruitment for the comparison. For the examination of the 'Nordic mode of reception' we created an additional dataset which combined all the Nordic respondents together. We then compared these responses together to the rest of the *Hobbit* responses (the overall recruitment excluding the Nordic respondents). The total amount of Finnish respondents was 1614, Danish Respondents 966 and Swedish respondents 2,074. Thus from the Nordic nationalities we had a total of 4654 respondents. The total of *Hobbit* respondents globally, excluding the Finnish, Swedish and Danish, respondents, was 31,455. From now on this article we call them as *the rest of the respondents*. In what follows, we continuously move between comparing the Nordic respondents (thus all of the Nordic respondents grouped together as one dataset) to the rest of the respondents (thus the overall recruitment excluding the Finnish, Swedish, and Danish respondents) and in comparing the Nordic respondents to each other.

We started our analysis by looking for statistically significant differences between the Nordics (grouped together) and the rest of the respondents. In the cases where the differences were found, we furthermore examined the results on national levels, in order to see if bundling the Nordic responses together made sense in that specific instance. In this

manner, we also traced what appeared to be typical for each of the Nordic nationality. Finally, we also examined (some of) these typicalities by choosing other background variables than nationality to determine if these can truly be called national specific differences or do they repeat across all the Nordics and are merely just overrepresented amongst some of the nationalities.

In this article, we limit the analysis to those questions that lend themselves to statistical analysis, leaving aside the replies to the open questions. We also left out the sub-questions for Q3 (A1-A15), which asked if an actor was a reason to go see watch the films, and if so, which actor. The reason for this was twofold: Firstly, the amount of respondents choosing yes for these questions was very low; and secondly, we wanted to keep the data somewhat manageable, as it was already large even without the inclusions of these sub-questions.

Figure 1: Number of respondents per nationality, in total in the Nordic countries, and the rest of the *Hobbit* respondents globally (excluding the Finnish, Swedish, and Danish respondents)

	Number of respondents (n.)
Danish respondents	966
Finnish respondents	1614
Swedish respondents	2074
Respondents from the Nordic countries	4654
Rest of the respondents	31455

4. Is there a Nordic mode of receiving the *Hobbit* films?

In what follows, we operationalize the issue of a possible Nordic model of reception by looking at whether the Nordic responses are consistently and significantly similar enough. If, for instance, one Nordic national sample is consistently and significantly deviant, it makes limited sense to bundle them into a 'Nordic experience'. Moreover, if the Nordic samples as a whole follow the same pattern as the rest of the *Hobbit* data, it is in a similar manner difficult to argue that they would constitute a particular mode of reception.

In our analysis, we grouped the questions in four groups: firstly, those which related to the demographics of the respondents; secondly, those which concerned the actual or preferred way of accessing or viewing the *Hobbit* films; thirdly, to those which concerned the way the respondents related to the *Hobbit* films and to what kinds of films the participants experienced the *Hobbit* films to be; and fourthly the way they rated the films. We took the statistically significant differences between the Nordics (as a whole) and

the rest of respondents (thus the overall *Hobbit* recruitment excluding the Nordics) as a starting point of the analysis, but aimed to further to contextualize our findings.

Demographics of the Nordic respondents

When examining the demographics of the respondents, both differences and similarities between the Nordics and the rest of the respondents were discovered. Also between the Nordics there were both similarities and differences.

With regard to the age of respondents (see **Figure 2**), there was no significant difference between the Nordics and the rest of the respondents. Those between 16-25 were the largest group amongst all Nordic respondents, as well as amongst the rest of the respondents, but amongst the Danish respondents the share of those between the ages 36-55 was higher than in the rest of the Nordic countries or amongst the rest of the respondents. Moreover, in the average the Swedish respondents were a bit younger than the Danish or even Finnish respondents and the Danish respondents were underrepresented in the age groups 6-15 and 16-25 when compared with the rest respondents.

Figure 2: The age of the respondents

Age	Finland	Sweden	Denmark	Nordics	Rest of the respondents
0.-6	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.10%
6.-15	8.40%	6.40%	2.20%	6.20%	5.50%
16-25	44.20%	54.60%	36.60%	47.20%	53.70%
26-35	25.70%	20%	23.40%	22.70%	23.90%
36-45	12.90%	12.20%	17.80%	13.60%	9.50%
46-55	5.90%	5.60%	12.40%	7.10%	4.90%
56-65	2.50%	1%	5.40%	2.40%	2%
66-75	0.37%	0.20%	2.20%	0.70%	0.40%
76-85	0.06%	0%	0%	0%	0%
86-95	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Over 95	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.10%

With regard to the sex of the respondents, there was no significant difference between the Nordics and the rest of respondents, but when examining this at the level of nationalities, the Nordics' results differed from each other considerably. As can be seen in **Figure 3**, the Swedish results were similar to the rest of the data, with a slight majority of male respondents. The Danish respondents, on the other hand, had a considerable male majority (60.1%) and amongst the Finnish respondents female respondents were far more common (66.8 %) than male respondents.

When examining the occupation of the respondents (see **Figure 4**), the Nordic respondents were by and large similar to the overall recruitment, albeit amongst the Finnish

respondents the occupation 'Student' was slightly more common, and amongst the Danish respondents less chosen (9.8%). Again, when examining the age structure of the respondents (the Danish respondents having a bigger percentage of older respondents), this makes sense.

Figure 3: The sex of respondents

Sex	Finland	Sweden	Denmark	Nordics	Rest of the respondents
Male	33.20%	53.10%	60.10%	47.70%	53.70%
Female	66.80%	46.90%	39.90%	52.30%	46.30%

Figure 4: The occupational position of respondents

Position	Finland	Sweden	Denmark	Nordics	Rest of the respondents
Student	53.70%	48.90%	40.20%	48.70%	50%
Clerical administrative	8.60%	6.80%	13.30%	8.80%	7.80%
Creative	5.60%	8.70%	7.70%	7.50%	7.80%
Professional	13.80%	13.20%	16.30%	14%	17.50%
Industrial labour	1.10%	2.60%	2.50%	2%	2%
Executive	2.50%	1%	3.90%	2.10%	2.80%
Home child-care	1.40%	1.50%	2.40%	1.70%	1%
Military	0.01%	0.80%	1.70%	0.80%	0.50%
Self-employed	1.40%	1.60%	2.70%	1.80%	3.30%
Service work	5.20%	7.20%	1.90%	5.40%	3.30%
Unemployed	4.50%	6%	3.40%	4.90%	2.40%
Religious spiritual	0.06%	0.60%	0%	0.50%	0.30%
Agricultural labour	0.02%	0.40%	0.40%	0.30%	0.10%
Retired	1.20%	0.70%	3.80%	1.50%	0.90%

When examining Question 25 (the level of education the respondents had reached), some differences were discovered between the Nordic respondents and the rest of the respondents, albeit the significance remained statistically very weak. Whilst amongst the rest of the respondents 42.1% had reached a University degree, amongst the Nordic respondents this figure was only 26.1%. There was some variation between the Nordics,

but the difference to the rest remained even when these variations were accounted for (see **Figure 5**). The Swedish respondents especially were underrepresented amongst those with a higher qualification and overrepresented amongst those who had chosen primary school as their highest level of education, but the fact that the Swedish respondents were also younger in average than the rest of the respondents partially explains these findings. In a similar vein it is understandable why Danish respondents are overrepresented amongst those with a higher qualification when comparing just to the other Nordics, and not the rest of the respondents (see **Figure 5**).

Figure 5: The highest level of education attained by respondents

Level of education	Finland	Sweden	Denmark	Nordics	Rest of the respondents
Primary school	2.80%	19.80%	10.40%	11.90%	5.50%
Secondary school	39.10%	39.70%	23.10%	36.10%	27.10%
Vocational qualification	11.00%	8.30%	8.90%	9.30%	10.10%
University degree	25.40%	29.40%	20.20%	26.10%	42.10%
Higher qualification	21.70%	2.70%	37.50%	16.50%	15.10%

There are few ways that can explain the fact that amongst the Nordics the amount of those choosing ‘University degree’ was smaller than amongst the rest of the respondents. Firstly, it is plausible to assume that some of those who chose their occupation to be student are going to be obtaining a ‘University degree’. Secondly, the manner of recruitment of respondents might have affected: where the respondents mainly inside universities or, like in Finland, by advertising the survey in the biggest newspaper of the country. Thirdly, the smaller amount of people with higher education in our Nordic data compared to the rest could point towards the tradition of the equality in cultural activity in Nordic countries, created already in late 19th century and supported by cultural policy. There were no significant differences in selecting the media (eg, cinema theatre, DVD etc) between those with vocational school background or higher education, suggesting the equal use of media. However the higher numbers of secondary school respondents in Finland and Sweden suggest that fantasy has a common ground in each county, or towards the active role of schools, explaining why such number of respondents had heard about the questionnaire in early age compared to the rest.

Thinking of the global comparison of the results, what we do not easily see, as we are blinded for them, are simple things like public transportation, and location of movie theater and overall access to media technology, both support the ability to cultural activity and participation.

Formats and preferred formats of seeing the films

The most significant similarities among the Nordics that also amounted to significant differences to the rest of the respondents were related to the actual or preferred formats in which the films were viewed and accessed. Some of the similarities which emerged are easily explainable: For instance, the finding that the Nordics were considerably less likely to have seen the films dubbed than rest of the respondents (the Nordics were under 1% while the rest were around 25-30%), is explainable by the fact that films, apart from children's films, are very rarely dubbed in Nordic countries. In a similar vein, it is logical that the Nordics were more likely to have seen the films subtitled than the other respondents (the Nordic average for all films was around 50%, while the average for the rest was around 30%). Here, however, some differences emerged within the Nordics as well, whilst the difference from the rest of the respondents remained: while under 50% of Danish and Finnish respondents indicated they have seen the films subtitled, the proportion of Swedish respondents was consistently around 60% with regard to all of the *Hobbit* films. While this can indicate that the Swedish respondents were simply more likely to watch the films subtitled than Finnish and Danish respondents, some interesting results arise when examining all the responses to the question Q19, which challenge this assumption: the Swedish respondents consistently had higher rates of choosing 'yes' than other Nordic respondents for all the options, leaving aside the option 'mobile device' for the *Battle of Five Armies* and the options 'not seen' for all the films. This indicates that either the Swedish respondents had seen the films more often than the other Nordic respondents or simply remembered better the formats in which they had seen the films. Nevertheless, while examining these tendencies with other particularities of the Swedish responses, it does tell us something about the way the majority of Swedish respondents related to the films.

Finally, the Nordic respondents were also significantly more likely to have seen the original cinema release for all the three films than the rest of the respondents. When examining the option 'original cinema release' in Q19, the Swedish respondents again stand out: up to 90% of the Swedish respondents indicated that they had seen the original cinema releases, while as few as 60-70% (depending on the film) of the Danish respondents indicated this, and around 58-59% of Finnish respondents (again depending on which of the *Hobbit* films they had seen) indicated this. Amongst the other respondents this was between 46-49%. It is thus clear that amongst the Nordics seeing the films as original cinema releases was experienced to be important. Furthermore, 85.7% of the Nordic respondents also chose 'Cinema release' as their preferred format for seeing the *Hobbit* films, whilst the average of choosing this option amongst the other respondents was 76.1%. This nevertheless was not statistically significant. With regard to this option, there were no substantial differences amongst the Nordic respondents, albeit Finnish respondents chose this a bit less than Danish and Swedish. But when examining the option 'original cinema release' in Q19, the Swedish respondents again stand out: up to 90% of the Swedish respondents indicated that they had seen the original cinema releases, while as low as 60-70% (depending on the film) of the Danish respondents indicated this, and around 58-59%

of Finnish respondents (again depending on which of the *Hobbit* films they had seen) indicated this. Amongst the rest of the respondents this was between 46-49%. It is thus clear that amongst the Nordics seeing the films as an original cinema releases was experienced important.

The cinematic experience is familiar to Nordic cinema watchers. There are several reasons for that: already children are taken to movies, the cinema production for children and young adults are supported by state and cinema in media education in school curricula has a steady position. When films worldwide are shown first in cinemas, and you have a fine network of cinema theatres around – supported by the State in smaller communes with fewer ticket buyers, the social way of sharing the new film has become an everyday experience.

How the Nordic respondents experienced the Hobbit films

At this point, in order to evaluate whether a particular Nordic mode of reception can be distinguished in the way the respondents experienced or evaluated the *Hobbit* films or in what kind of relationship they have to them, we looked at the responses for the questions Q1, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q12, Q13, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17 and Q18. Through these we examined the reasons for seeing the *Hobbit* amongst the Nordic respondents, what kind of film the respondents considered the *Hobbit* to be, the ways the respondents engaged with the *Hobbit* films, and finally how did the Nordic respondents rate the *Hobbit* films.

The reasons for seeing the Hobbit films

When we examined the responses for the Q3 ('Please choose up to three reasons for seeing The *Hobbit* films'), there were no significant differences between the Nordic respondent (when grouped together) and the rest of the respondents. While the Nordics did choose more often the options 'I love fantasy films generally' and less often 'actor I particularly liked was in them' than the rest of the respondents, the differences were not statistically significant (see **Figure 6**). It is also worth noting that the option 'I love fantasy films generally' was the second most popular option amongst the Danish respondents, while with the Swedish and Finnish respondents, like with the rest the respondents, it was only the third most popular option.

In all of the Nordic countries, as amongst the rest of the respondents, the most popular option for Q3 was 'I love Tolkien's work as a whole'. 76% of the Finnish respondents chose this option, while amongst the rest of the respondents this was chosen by 70.6% respondents and amongst the Danish and Swedish respondents a bit under 70% chose this option. The second most popular option amongst the Finnish, Swedish and others was 'I knew the book, and had to see what the films would be like'. This in turn was the third popular option amongst the Danish respondents. The Danish respondents seemed also more likely to appreciate *The Hobbit* films as *films*, thus giving more importance to matters

Figure 6: Reasons for seeing The *Hobbit* films

Reasons for seeing the obit Films	Finland	Sweden	Denmark	Nordics	Rest of the respondents
I wanted to experience their special features (eg, high frame rate, 3D)	12.50%	13.10%	19.60%	14.20%	12.30%
I am connected to a community that has been waiting for the films	33.30%	32.40%	17.40%	29.60%	34.40%
I love Tolkien’s work as a whole	76%	69.1 %	67.7 %	71.2 %	70.2 %
I like to see big new films when they come out	6.50%	16.20%	22.50%	14.20%	13.30%
I wanted to be part of an international experience	6.40%	5.60%	5.60%	5.30%	4.50%
I love fantasy films generally	47.60%	47.50%	50.50%	48.20%	44.10%
There was such a build-up, I had to see them	14.40%	3.60%	7.30%	8.10%	7.40%
I was dragged along	10.40%	1.40%	6.00%	5.50%	5.30%
I knew the book, and had to see what the films would be like	62.10%	48.90%	47.70%	53.20%	52.20%
I love Peter Jackson’s films	13.40%	33.90%	19.20%	23.70%	26.80%
No special reason	0.06%	0.04%	1.30%	0.07%	1.30%
An actor that I particularly like was in them:	18.70%	25.40%	19.20%	21.80%	25.60%

such as special features: Up to 19.6% chose the option ‘I wanted to experience their special features (eg, high frame rate, 3D)’ for Q3, while amongst the rest of the respondents and amongst the Finnish and Swedish respondents around 12-13% chose this option. Moreover, in the same question Danish respondents were also overrepresented amongst those who chose the option ‘I like to see big new films when they come out’: 22.5% of the Danish respondents chose this option, while only 6.5% of the Finnish, 16.2% of the Swedish and 13.3% of the rest chose this. Finally, the Danish respondents were also underrepresented amongst the respondents who chose the option ‘I am connected to a community that has been waiting for the films’ for Q3. The Swedish respondents, on the other hand, were overrepresented amongst those who chose the option ‘I love Peter Jackson’s films’ (33.9% chose this option, while only 13.4% of Finnish respondents, 19.2% of Danish respondents, and 26.8% of the rest of respondents chose this option). And the Finnish respondents were overrepresented amongst those who chose the option ‘I knew the book, and had to see what the films would be like’. This was chosen by 62.1% of Finnish respondents, while only

53.2% of the others chose this, and amongst the Danish and Swedish respondents less than 50% chose this option.

What kind of films The Hobbit films are, and are not

With regard to what kind of film the respondent considered the hobbit films to be (Q4: 'Which of the following come closest to capturing the kind of films you feel The *Hobbit* trilogy are?' and Q5: 'Are there any of these that you definitely would not choose?'), there were some differences between the Nordics and the rest of the respondents. Firstly, the Nordic respondents (when grouped together) were more likely to consider the films as 'Fairytale' than the rest of the respondents. Secondly the Nordic respondents were less likely to choose the options 'Coming of age' and 'Fairytale' when asked how they would *not* describe the films. Nevertheless, when examining closer these choices at the national level, it was revealed that the results amongst the Nordics varied considerably and despite the difference to the rest of the respondents, it made limited sense to group the Nordics together, except in regards of the option 'Coming-of-age story', chosen less by the Nordics than rest of the respondents for Q5. Nevertheless, this option was not overrepresented in Q4 amongst Finnish and Swedish respondents.

While amongst the Finnish and Swedish respondents the most popular option for Q4 was 'World of fantasy' (62.9% of the Finnish respondents and 67.7% of the Swedish respondents chose this), it was only the second most popular option amongst the Danish respondents (chosen by 60.7% of respondents). Instead, the most popular option amongst the Danish respondents was 'Part of Tolkien's legend-world', chosen by 64.8% of the Danish respondents. This option was in turn the second most popular option amongst the Finnish and Swedish respondents. For the third popular option, all the Nordics chose differently: for the Danish respondents this was the option 'Fairytale' and 35.9% of the Danish respondents regarded the films to be 'Fairytale'. By contrast, only 3% of the Finnish, 15.5% of the Swedish, and 6.8% of the rest of the respondents chose this. The high percentage amongst the Danish respondents (together with the Swedish respondents) choosing this also explains why there was significance difference between the Nordics and the rest of the respondents in regards of this question. The Danish respondents also chose the option 'Digital novelty cinema' more often than the rest of the respondents and the Finnish and Swedish respondents. When examining the Swedish respondents' choices for the third most popular option, 36.1% chose 'Stunning locations'. For the Finnish respondents, the third most popular option was 'action adventure' chosen 35.6% of the respondents. The Finnish respondents were also more likely than the rest of the respondents and the Danish and Swedish respondents to choose the option 'Literary adaptation' (27% chose this) and 'Hollywood Blockbuster' (32.4% chose this.)

Figure 7: Which of the following come closest to capturing the kind of films you feel The *Hobbit* trilogy are?

Which of the following come closest to capturing the kind of films you feel The <i>Hobbit</i> trilogy are?	Finland	Sweden	Denmark	Nordics	Rest of the respondents
Children's story	1.50%	3.30%	1.70%	2.40%	2.70%
<u>Fairytale</u>	3.00%	15.50%	35.90%	15.40%	6.80%
World of fantasy	62.9 %	67.7 %	60.7 %	63.8 %	63.0 %
Prequel / sequel	25%	19%	18%	20.8 %	24.8 %
Star attraction	4.10%	4.00%	4.20%	3.70%	4.50%
Part of Tolkien's legend-world	51.50%	56.50%	64.80%	56.50%	62.30%
Multimedia franchise	10.50%	9.20%	4.30%	8.60%	11.50%
Family film	2.20%	4.30%	3.60%	3.50%	4.00%
Digital novelty cinema	9.90%	7.40%	15.90%	10.00%	10.40%
Action-adventure	35.60%	22.60%	19.80%	26.50%	24.00%
Peter Jackson movie	20.40%	22.50%	12.20%	19.60%	22.80%
Literary adaptation	27%	17%	22%	21.6 %	24.9 %
Stunning locations	18.30%	36.10%	24.80%	28.30%	28.00%
Coming-of-age story	4.20%	3.90%	7.30%	4.70%	3.60%
Hollywood blockbuster	32.40%	20.00%	13.00%	22.90%	18.60%

Engaging with the Hobbit movies

In order to understand the ways the respondents engaged with the *Hobbit* movies beyond the activity of viewing the films, we examined the questions Q12: 'Have you taken part in any of these other activities connected with *The Hobbit* films?', Q14: 'How important was it for you to follow stories and debates around the films?', Q17: 'Have you read *The Hobbit*?' and Q18: 'If you did, what did you think of it?'

At first glance, when comparing the Nordic respondents (grouped together), it seemed that the Nordics were rather similar to the rest of the respondents as to the ways they engaged with the activities around the *Hobbit* movies. Only 'Visiting filming location' (for Question 12). Have you taken part in any of these other activities connected with *The Hobbit* films?) appeared as something that Nordics did considerably less than the rest of respondents and even there no significant difference to the rest of the respondents was found. But again, when examining the results at the level of nationalities, a very different kind of story emerged: While the Finnish were very active at participating to activities around the *Hobbit* movies (only 23 chose the option 'none of these') and the Swedish were

in par with rest of the respondents in this (31% of the Swedish respondents chose the option 'none of these' and 33.2% of the rest of the respondents chose this option), the Danish respondents more rarely participated to any activities: up to 58.7% of the Danish respondents chose the option 'None of these'. Partially this can be explained by the fact that the Danish respondents tended to be bit older in average than the rest of the respondents and other Nordics and indeed, both amongst all the Nordic respondents as a whole and the Danish respondents, age had a significant relationship with how often the respondents chose the option 'none of these'. Interestingly though, while amongst all the Nordics the older the respondents were, the less likely they were to participate the activities around the *Hobbit*, amongst the Danish respondents already those between age 25-36 years more often chose the option 'none of these' while as amongst the Finnish and Swedish the respondents of this age group still more often *did not* chose the option 'none of these'.

The Danish respondents were consequently underrepresented in all the activities, thus the other options for Q12. This was especially prominent in the 'fannish' activities, such as 'producing fan art', 'writing fan fiction', and 'making fan videos'. The Finnish respondents, on the other hand, were overrepresented amongst those who chose option 'seriously debating the films' (69.8% of the Finnish respondents chose this) and the Swedish respondents more often chose the options 'Role-playing', 'Commenting online' and 'Collecting merchandise' than the other Nordics or rest of the respondents.

Figure 8: Have you taken part in any of these other activities connected with *The Hobbit* films?

Have you taken part in any of these other activities connected with The Hobbit films?	Finland	Sweden	Denmark	Nordics	Rest of the respondents
Producing fan art	9.70%	8.00%	2.30%	7.40%	7.70%
Blogging	7.60%	8.80%	2.50%	7.10%	8.50%
Role-playing	7.90%	10.70%	4.60%	8.40%	10.50%
Writing fan fiction	7.30%	4.90%	1.20%	5.00%	7.10%
Collecting merchandise	15.90%	24.00%	5.60%	17.40%	22.40%
Seriously debating the films	69.80%	44.80%	30.20%	50.20%	44.50%
Commenting online	29.90%	36.50%	12.70%	29.30%	30.50%
Gaming	14.10%	20.20%	14.30%	16.80%	24.70%
Making fan videos	1.50%	1.70%	0.03%	1.40%	2.20%
Visiting filming locations	2.00%	3.20%	2.30%	2.60%	5.20%
None of these	23.00%	31.00%	58.70%	34.10%	33.20%

We also examined the way the respondents engaged with *Hobbit* movies through examining had they read the *Hobbit* book (and if so what they thought about it), as well through the Q16: 'How important it was to you to follow debates around films'. As with Q12, the Nordic respondents answered similarly to rest of the respondents we examined as a whole, but when looking at the level of nationalities, some differences emerged: the Finnish respondents were more likely than other respondents to have read the *Hobbit* book more than once: 51% chose this option for Q17, while amongst the rest (excluding Danish and Swedish respondents) this was chosen by 44.4%. Amongst the Swedish respondents this was 47.3% and amidst the Danish 41.6%. The option 'Not read at all' was considerably pronounced amongst the Danish respondents: 20.2% chose this option, while amongst the rest of the respondents and Swedish and Finnish respondents it was chosen by 9.5-13.3% of the respondents. Finally, there was no significant differences between the Nordics and the rest of the respondents in regards of the Q14, but when examined at national level, following the debates around the films (Q14) was important to Swedish respondents: 10% chose the option 'Extremely' and 21.10% 'Very', while amongst the others (Finnish and Danish respondents excluded), 10.60% still choose 'Extremely', but only 8.40% 'Very'.

Figure 9: What is the role that you think fantasy stories can play today?

What is the role that you think fantasy stories can play today	Finland	Sweden	Denmark	Nordics	Rest of the respondents
They are a way of enriching the imagination	67.30%	58.10%	74.80%	64.70%	68.00%
They are a way of experiencing and exploring emotions	29.50%	30.00%	29.00%	29.60%	29.90%
They are a source of hopes and dreams for changing our world	29.40%	37.10%	33.10%	33.60%	34.80%
They are a way of escaping	60.50%	52.10%	55.10%	55.60%	53.90%
They are a form of shared entertainment	20.20%	29.90%	31.80%	27.00%	25.20%
They allow us to explore different attitudes and ideas	33.10%	30.40%	21.90%	29.60%	29.00%
They are a way of creating alternative worlds	48.40%	48.80%	45.30%	47.90%	45.50%
No particular role	1.30%	1.60%	4.90%	2.20%	2.10%

The role of fantasy today

When the Nordic respondents were asked about the role of fantasy today, they responded rather similarly than rest of the respondents and there were no significant differences between the Nordics as a whole and the rest of the respondents. When examining the responses amongst the Nordics along the national lines, the responses still remained rather similar: amongst all – the Finnish, the Swedish, and The Danish respondents – the option ‘They are a way of enriching the imagination’ was the most popular option, ‘They are a way of escaping’ the second most popular option and ‘They are a way of creating alternative worlds’ was the third most popular option for all the Nordics – as it was amongst overall recruitment.

How the Nordic respondents rated the Films

When examining how the Nordics evaluated the *Hobbit* films, there was no significant difference between the Nordics as a whole and the rest of the respondents. The Nordics, nevertheless, differed from each other in this regard considerably. When compared with other Nordic respondents, the Finnish respondents appeared to be somewhat more critical towards the films than Danish and Swedish respondents (see **Figure10**). The same holds true when comparing the Finnish respondents with the rest of the respondents: Only 18.3% of the Finnish respondents regarded the *Hobbit* films as ‘Excellent’, while amongst the others (excluding Danish and Swedish respondents) this figure was 35.5%. In similar vein, 11.3% of the Finnish respondents regarded the films as ‘Poor’, while only 7.7% of the rest of the respondents (excluding Danish and Swedish respondents) chose this option. When examining how the Swedish respondents rated the *Hobbit* films, it was discovered that they were more likely to rate them ‘Excellent’ than either Finnish or Danish, or the rest of the respondents. Indeed, up to 43% of the Swedish respondents rated them ‘Excellent’. The Danish respondents tended to rate the *Hobbit* films as ‘Excellent’ (38.8%) or ‘Good’ (44%), having both options chosen more often than amongst the rest of the respondents or amongst the Finnish respondents – while the Swedish respondents were still more often rated the films ‘Excellent’ than the Danish respondents. As the Swedish respondents tended to be slightly younger than the rest of the respondents (albeit not statistically significantly) we wanted to also examine if the better ratings could have relationship with the age. Whilst there was only very weak statistical significance when examining all the Nordics together, amongst all of the Nordics, the younger the respondents were, the more the more often they rated the films ‘Excellent’, up to the age group 26-35 years old. The age group 26-35 was consistently more critical than other age groups, amongst the Finnish respondents highly so (only 9.4% rating the film ‘Excellent’). The Finnish were also the only group amongst which the age showed significant relationship with ratings. Amongst the Finnish respondents also the age groups above 26-35 continued being more critical towards the films than the younger respondents, while amongst the Danish and Swedish respondents this was not case.

As the Finnish respondents chose the option ‘Excellent’ less frequently than other Nordics (or indeed the rest of respondents), we wanted to also examine if the sex of respondents had relationship with the way the respondents rated the *Hobbit* movies amongst the Nordics – keeping in mind there considerable majority of the Finnish respondents were female (66.80 %). But when we examined the sex of the respondents in regards the ratings, it was the females who more often rated the films ‘Excellent’ than the males. This was true amongst all the Nordics, even with the Finnish respondents, who had the majority of female respondents and yet were in average more critical towards the films. Amongst the Finnish and Swedish respondents, sex also had a significant relationship with the ratings.

Figure 10: The results for ‘What did you think of the *Hobbit* films overall?’

Ratings	Finland	Sweden	Denmark	Nordics	Rest of the respondents
Excellent	18.30%	43%	38.90%	33.60%	35.50%
Good	37.30%	29%	44%	35%	37.40%
Average	30.50%	18.50%	10.90%	21.10%	17%
Poor	11.30%	7.90%	4.80%	8.40%	7.70%
Awful	2.50%	1.70%	1.40%	2%	2.40%

The Nordic mode of reception (or therefore the lack of it?)

When examining the possibility of a shared Nordic mode of reception, little evidence was found that there would be an interpretive community with its shared repertoires across all the Nordics that would also differ from the rest of the global recruitment. While there are similarities between the Nordic countries with regard to all four aforementioned aspects – the demographics of the respondents, the actual and preferred formats for viewing the films, the way the respondents relate to the *Hobbit* films and with how they evaluate the *Hobbit* films – the differences were more common and more prominent than similarities. And some interesting differences *between the Nordic* respondents were indeed discovered: The Danish respondents appeared to have a less affective relationship to the films or the book than the Finnish and Swedish respondents. They gave the *Hobbit* films good ratings, but seemed a bit less attached to or involved with Tolkien’s work in general as the proportion of respondents not having read the *Hobbit* book was higher than among the rest of the respondents, albeit the Danes still indicated in quite high numbers that they love Tolkien’s work in general. The Danish respondents also regarded the *Hobbit* films as ‘Fairytale’ more often than the rest, and appreciated the ‘Special features’ of the films more often than the rest. The Danish respondents also appeared to be least active in participating the activities or debates around the films. They were also more likely to see *Hobbit* films as films in general – not so much within the framework of Tolkien’s

'Imaginarium' or as a work of Peter Jackson. And while the Finnish respondents appeared to be more critical towards *The Hobbit* than the rest of the respondents, at the same time they appeared to be rather involved with the activities around the *Hobbit* films, including the 'fannish' activities, and have a strong connection to the work of the Tolkien. The Swedish respondents, in turn, appeared to be more positively connected to the films themselves, and tended to rate the films higher than other respondents, while still retaining a positive connection to the work of Tolkien, albeit not as prominently as the Finnish respondents. The Swedish respondents were also more likely than the rest of the respondents to describe the *Hobbit* films as 'Peter Jackson films' and to indicate that they 'Love Peter Jackson films' in general.

These differences pose a question: are they really particular to the different nationalities, uncovering thus particular national interpretative communities, or could there be another way of examining and understanding them? Could some background variable other than nationality explain them? In what follows, we examine few ways to answer these questions.

5. How the Nordic respondents rated the films: a conjunctural approach

Why are the Finnish respondents on average more critical towards the *Hobbit* films, while still demonstrating such fondness towards the Tolkien Universe and the works of Tolkien? Why do the Swedish respondents rate the films so highly and *yet* still retain their fondness towards the work of Tolkien? And what could explain the ratings behind the Danish responses? Under which terms could we talk of interpretive communities? Could we define and identify them according to linguistic or national borders, or are there rather taste groups, formed by media uses?

In this last section of the article, we propose a way of reading the data that goes beyond the idea of a 'Nordic mode of reception' or a country-centred analysis and that takes into account other variables, contextualising the findings. For this stage of analysis, we wanted to explore what other variables than nationality could possibly explain those findings which suggest country-specific profiles. At this stage of the analysis, we looked at the Nordic data only, leaving aside the rest of the respondents, as it appeared that one 'Nordic mode of reception' did not emerge from the data. Whilst we first pondered of looking at those questions in which the Nordics appeared to be rather similar (with each other but as well with the rest of the respondents), more in depth, we ultimately chose the opposite: it was the Nordic 'specificities' we wanted to pay attention, to see if they truly were particular for the given nationalities or would a 'change in perspective' do away the national lines. For this reason we chose to focus on the way the Nordics rated the films and, based on the earlier findings, we wanted to take a look at the data in a manner which was not based on the division between the nationalities, but rather on the relationship that the respondents appear to have with *Hobbit* films and Hobbit universe over all, thus the films or/and the work of Tolkien and with the Peter Jackson films. This came to be very close to

how Martin Barker ended up with his distinction between ‘Enthusiasts’ and ‘Critics’ (Barker 2016 in this issue). We wanted to see whether those who, regardless of nationality, have a more affective relationship with the book and/or the Tolkien community are on average a little bit more critical towards the films (as appeared to be wit Finnish), unless they conceptualize the films as different or distinct from the book (as appeared to be the case to some extent with Swedish respondents): thus rather as a work in its own right, rather than strictly as a literary adaptation.

We speculated that it is possible that there are (at least) two groups of respondents that can be found across the Nordics but are individually overrepresented in the respondents of one or two nationalities. The first group, we suggest, are those who consider the films as a literary adaptation of the *Hobbit* book, or in some other manner a work which attempts to remain loyal to the work of Tolkien, and who are simultaneously fond of the work of Tolkien. We speculated that these respondents would be more likely to rate the films less excellent than the rest. The second group, we suggest, are those who are fond of the films and of the work of Tolkien alike, but see them rather as part of a transmedial world or shared universe, rather than strictly seeing the films as an adaption – thus expressing fondness in both in their own right. Finally, it can be suggested that the third group could be those who are interested in *Hobbit* films *as* films (thus not so much as part of Tolkien’s work or strictly Peter Jackson films) and thus evaluate them in relation to their ‘filmness’ - the special features and such (these could be overrepresented amongst Danish respondents). We, nevertheless, focused on the two hypothetical groups mentioned first in our subsequent analysis.

In order to examine this we cross-tabulated responses to Questions 3.2, 3.3, 3.9, 3.10, 4.6, 4.11, 4.12, and 17 with responses to Q1, wanting to see if the national specific tendencies described above would lessen or disappear when examining the groups along these lines. For choosing these questions, we used thematic and qualitative criteria, rather than statistical one and the aim of this examination is not to produce definitive results, but rather to work as a ground for further research and suggest non-country-centred ways to approach comparative data. At this stage of the analysis, we only looked at the Nordic data only, leaving aside the rest.

Before moving to the analysis itself, it is important to mention two things. Firstly, our hypothetical grouping also leaves out many interesting differences between the Nordics, for instance the fact that the Danish respondents saw the *Hobbit* films as ‘Fairytale’ considerably more often than the rest, while the Finnish respondents saw the *Hobbit* films as ‘Action-adventure’ or ‘Hollywood blockbuster’. Nor does it explain or seek to explain why the Swedish respondents considerably more often than Finnish and Danish respondents chose ‘Stunning locations’ as a description for the kind of films. Moreover, multiplicity of interesting similarities between the Nordics as well between the Nordics and the rest of the respondents are left unaddressed.

The kind of relationship with film and ratings

Firstly we examined the questions which might indicate something about the kind of relationship the viewers have with the films. When cross-tabulating responses to question Q3.2 ('I am connected to a community that has been waiting for the films') with Q1, it appeared that in general those Nordics who chose this option, slightly more often rated the films 'Excellent' than those who did not choose this option and less often rated the films poor or awful. When looking at this at the level of nationalities, this remained to be the case. Nevertheless, the relationship with Q3.2 and Q1 was statistically significant only amongst the Finnish (for the Swedish respondents there was only very weak sig significance, and for Danish not at all).

When cross-tabulating Q3.10 ('I love Peter Jackson's films') with Q1, all the Nordics who chose this option were far more likely to give the films the rating 'Excellent' than those who did not chose this option. In addition the relationship with Q3.10 and Q1 was statistically significant amongst all the Nordics. As to what kind of movies the respondents considered the *Hobbit* films to be, those respondents who chose Q4.11: 'Peter Jackson film' were in Sweden and Denmark slightly more likely to rate the films higher, but in Finland the opposite was the case: those who chose this option were slightly less likely to rate the films 'Excellent'. Here, nevertheless, the differences were minimal and there were no statistically significant relationships.

Those respondents who chose Q4.12 'Literary adaptation' tended amongst the Danish and Finnish respondents to rate the films 'Excellent' more often than those who did not choose this. This was especially pronounced amongst the Finnish respondents. Amongst the Swedish respondents, on the other hand, these respondents were less likely to rate the films 'Excellent'. Here too though, there were no statistically significant relationships. We also looked at how those respondents who saw the films as 'multimedia franchise' rated the films. Here amongst all the Nordics those who chose this option less often rated the film excellent than those that did not choose this option. Moreover, those who chose this option also more often rated the films poor and awful, amongst all the Nordics. This option also had significant relationship with rating, in all Nordic countries.

The kind of relationship with books and ratings

Next we looked at the respondent's relationship with the book and the ratings. We started by cross-tabulating responses to Q1 with choices of 'I love Tolkien's work as whole'. Among Finnish respondents those who chose this were considerably less likely to rate the films 'Excellent'. In Sweden it did not appear to matter. But amongst the Danish respondents those who chose this option were considerably more likely to give the films the rating 'Excellent'. The relationship between the questions was also significant amongst the Danish respondents.

We next looked at Q3.9 ('I knew the book, and I had to see what the films were like') in relation to Q1. Here, both Finnish and Swedish respondents choosing this option were far

less likely to rate the films 'Excellent', whilst amongst the Danish respondents there was no significant difference. We also looked at Q4.6. ('Part of Tolkien's legend-world'), and here those Finnish, Danish and Swedish respondents choosing this option were far more likely rate the films 'Excellent'. Both of these questions had significant relationship with Q1 amongst all the Nordics.

Finally, when relating responses to Q17 to Q1, amongst the all the Swedish, Danish and Finnish respondents those who were still reading or planning to read *The Hobbit* most often also gave the movie rating 'Excellent'. Those Swedish and Finnish respondents who had *The Hobbit* read to them in turn more rarely gave the film rating 'Excellent' or 'Good' than those who had not read the book, had it once or were planning to read it. This was not the case amongst the Danish or Swedish respondents. These, nevertheless had only very weak relationship/no relationship at all to the Q1. Also, we found out that while those respondents in Finland and Denmark who had read the *Hobbit* book 'More than once' were less likely to rate the films 'Excellent' than other Danish and Finnish respondents. This was not the case amongst the Swedish respondents: these respondents were still as likely as the rest of the Swedish respondents to rate the films 'Excellent'.

Examining these results, our suggestion is that those who have more affective relationship with the book and/or the Tolkien community are on average a little bit more critical towards the films, unless they conceptualize the films as different or distant from the book (as appeared to somewhat the case with Swedish respondents): thus, rather as an work of its own right rather than strictly a 'Literary adaptation' is not fully confirmed. Nevertheless, in various ways it seems to capture something significant about the respondents: it does seem that those who knew the book were generally more critical towards the films and those who had read the book more than once were more critical amongst the Finnish and Swedish respondents, which suggests that a strong relationship with the book might indicate a more critical view of the films. Moreover, as those who were still reading the boom or planning to read the book were more likely to give the book an 'excellent' rating, it appears that it matters which is the 'entry point' to the *Hobbit* – the book or the movie. It also seemed that loving Peter Jackson's films would mean better ratings, but then again, considering the movie to be Peter Jackson film would not necessarily indicate this. Still, it remains to be understood why Tolkien lovers in Finland were giving signals of great disappointment while Swedish and Danish responses were more positive – and the Danish still credited the films, even when they were answering the question 'I knew the book and I had to see what the films were like?' and why do those, across all the Nordics, who chose multimedia franchise tended to rate the *Hobbit* films so badly? The last question is especially of interest as it appeared to be a question having a significant relationship to the ratings.

6. Discussion

Our hypothesis about the significant Nordic ‘interpretive community’ did not find strong support. However, evidence that a strong relation to the works of Tolkien, especially the *Hobbit* book, went hand in hand with a critical attitude towards the trilogy, was found among those who were familiar with Tolkien’s works, and those who were familiar with Tolkien’s and Jackson’s works across the Nordics (as was also seen in Barker 2016 in this issue). Moreover, we found out that across the Nordics the females more often rated the movies excellent (though only amongst Swedish and Finnish significantly so) and that in some manner those considering films as multimedia franchise more often rated it ‘poor’ or ‘awful’, across the Nordic region, than those who did not choose this option. It thus appears that it makes more sense to talk of a number of interpretive communities across the Nordics (and possibly beyond the Nordics) which are not constructed according to nationality, but are rather based on the way the respondents relate to and experience the movies, and possibly to other background variables, such as gender and age, instead of there being one Nordic mode of reception – or even a Finnish, Danish, or Swedish mode of reception.

It was interesting that both Sweden and Finland come up with strong fandom responses. As Kim Christian Schrøder pointed out in his comment (Schrøder 2016), the fannish nature of the Finnish and Swedish samples is striking. Only 23% in Finnish responses and 31% in Swedish responses did not express engagement in any fannish activities, as against 59% in Danish responses who did. Similarly responses to Question 3 shows that considerably more Finnish responses (33%) and Swedish responses (32%) than the responses of the Danes (17%) bring up as their motivation their connection to a community that has been waiting for the films. This strong fandom relation in Finland and Sweden was an expected outcome on the basis of our previous knowledge about the size of the fantasy communities and fandom in these countries. The science fiction fandom – very aware of Tolkien texts – of Finland was influenced by Swedish fandom and its strong connection to Anglo-American fandom since 1950s. The connections between the fandoms of Finland and Sweden have been strong since 1970s, so some similarities were expected in the responses (Hirsjärvi 2009). However, it does not explain the differences in positive and critical responses. It may suggest an opinion leader phenomenon in fandoms, or it could point to the Finnish curriculum of media literacy or to the strong reader culture in Finland – or to the overall positive manner of cultural discourse in Sweden.

In the previous sections, we concluded that while it is hard to configure what we called a Nordic mode of reception, significant differences were found between the Nordic respondents. In our analysis, we concluded that some fandom-based differences became visible – such as the very strong female fantasy audience in Finland (especially compared to the Danish), or the importance of role-playing in Sweden and the visual media-oriented responses in Denmark. However, to get more background, the statistical data must be put onto a larger mediascape analysis as well. For example the very critical comments in the 26-35 age group needs more careful study of both the open questions and the statistical data: were these people perhaps ones that had been read the *Hobbit* book when they were

children, or were they ones with more aesthetic or otherwise special relationship to fantasy/literature/artworks related to Tolkien? Or are they perhaps in the age where they are sensitive of questions of 'media literacy', thus 'bad taste' elements of *The Hobbit* trilogy would rise attention as not suitable, even dangerous media production for children and adolescents?

In this manner, our article raises more questions than it answers and merely offers a ground for further research, being such a first step in longer journey we are about to undertake – a journey perhaps as interesting as journey there and back.

7. Concluding remarks

In our approach to comparing responses between the Nordics and the rest of the respondents we used the hypothesis of a 'Nordic mode of reception' of a transcultural and transnational phenomenon. While this did not hold the test of evidence, some other interesting results emerged and our further reading of the data suggests that nationality-based groupings are not the only way to understand these results. While our analysis of the kind of relationship the respondents can have with a book or films is far from conclusive, it opens a door for another kind of reading of the data than one which sticks with national boundaries. In this it comes close to what Martin Barker (2016) has done in his article in this issue. Barker explored 'authorship' from the perspective of audiences, asking what difference is made to people's involvement with the films by their 'affiliation with the figures of 'JRR Tolkien', or 'Peter Jackson', or both'. Barker builds his comparison on the ways the participants evaluated the films, and scrutinized this through the distinction between Enthusiasts and Critics. If we look at Barker's article (2016), we see that when asked 'Do you think there are people would share your ideas around the films?', whether being among the 'enthusiasts' or 'critics', the respondents situate themselves as part of the audience, for instance as lovers of Tolkien or Jackson:

'Many people I have met online', 'They would be the people who abhor the destruction of war, 'Geeks, gamers, fantasy-overs, etc - also those who are interested in cultural myths', 'I think many people share my beliefs', 'Indie film fans..', 'The peaceful folks, like hobbits', 'I think there is a general feeling of disappointment', 'The group of friends --were all disappointed'.

The questions could be: shall we see a fantasy genre, old but constantly regenerated by different mediums and adaptations as a media product, text - or perhaps as an 'activity system' that should be approached more as a social activity (Das, Kleut & Bolin 2014), or even as indicators of cultural change or movement? Shall we see the media play here as part of a national social context, like in Nordic countries as part of a peer-oriented culture, as compared to family-oriented cultures of Spain, France or Italy (Hagen 2010)? Can we

understand more about the blind spots we have in our cultural understanding through this global data? What questions do we not yet see?

This article offers a glimpse of the possibilities of this global research through the Nordic statistical data and its comparative analysis. As a global project, The World Hobbit Project offers possibilities also for looking at previous research through comparing the national and European level media barometers and statistics, like the multiple large projects about the changing media environment and the end of the audience (eg, Livingstone 2013). The whole project is a unique possibility with its open questions to deepen the understanding of individual meaning-making processes. We are looking at an old genre, fantasy, which has succeeded in renewing itself again and again, and which lives strongly in an increasingly transmedial world. We are also looking at audiencehood on the move, attaching – in the case of Tolkien – sometimes lifelong relationships and shared experiences around the globe. This may lead us to understanding the personal – even participatory – nature of uses of genre, here: fantasy.

Acknowledgements:

International cooperation in research is always multiply demanding compared with working in a single university, where everyday meetings and the possibility to sit down for a cup of late-evening coffee are possible, giving constant changes to interaction. Thus meetings, conferences and invitations to join a round table conversation in joint venues are celebrated. We warmly thank our colleagues in Denmark, Anne Jerslev and Kim Schrøder, for their excellent comments on the first draft, and our Swedish colleagues Jerry Määttä and Ingrid Stigsdotter for their generous hospitality in a beautiful Stockholm in 2015, where ‘the Nordic Hobbit group’ was able to meet.

The Finnish research team is being funded for a year by The Finnish Cultural Foundation in 2016-2017, to proceed with the Finnish and comparative initial data analysis. The responsible leader of the project *Uses of fantasy* is PhD Irma Hirsjärvi, the other researchers are professor, PhD Raine Koskimaa, University lecturer, PhD Urpo Kovala, PhD Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, MA Tanja Välisalo, MA Maria Ruotsalainen, and MA Minna Siikilä – all from the University of Jyväskylä, and PhD Jyrki Korpua from the University of Oulu.

Biographical notes:

Irma Hirsjärvi works as a researcher in the University of Jyväskylä and is the coordinator of the research project ‘Uses of Fantasy’, the Finnish sub-project of the World Hobbit Research Project. In her research, Hirsjärvi utilizes her previous study on science fiction and fantasy fandoms and global networks (Hirsjärvi 2009) as well as her vast experience from the fields of both fandom and research. Contact: irma.hirsjarvi@jyu.fi.

Urpo Kovala is a Senior Researcher at the Research Centre for Contemporary Culture at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Kovala’s main research interests are discourse, reception,

fandom and fantasy research. Kovala is the editor in chief of the refereed Publication series of the Research Centre, and in the editorial board of *Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research*.

Maria Ruotsalainen is a PhD candidate at University of Jyväskylä. Ruotsalainen has conducted her master's degree in Digital Culture studies and she is interested in how the current technologies and digital mediums change our everyday experience of the public and private, time and location, nationality and belonging, as well of the self and the identity.

References:

- Amenta, Edwin and Poulsen, Jane D. (1994): 'Where to Begin. A Survey of Five Approaches to Selecting Independent Variables for Qualitative Comparative Analysis'. *Sociological Methods & Research* 23: 1, 22-53.
- Barker, Martin (2008): The Functions of Fantasy. A Comparison of Audiences for *The Lord of the Rings* in Twelve Countries. In Martin Barker & Ernest Mathijs (eds.), *Watching The Lord of the Rings. Tolkien's World Audiences*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Barker, Martin (2016) 'An investigation of the role of affiliations to "authors" on audience responses to the *Hobbit* films', *Participations* 13:2, 2016, pp. 198-222.
- Das, Rajana, Kleut, Jelena & Bolin, Göran (2014) New Genres - New Roles for the Audience? An overview of the recent Research. In: Niko Carpentier, Kim Christian Schröder & Lawrie Hallet (eds.) *Audience Transformations: Shifting Audience Positions in Late Modernity*. 30-46. London: Routledge.
- Erstad, Ola (2010) Media literacy and education. The past, present and future. In Media Literacy Education. Nordic Perspectives. In Sirkku Kotilainen & Sol-Britt Arnolds-Granlund (eds.) *In Media literacy Education: Nordic perspectives*. University of Gothenburg: Nordicom.
- Fish, Stanley (1980) *Is there a text in this class: The Authority of interpretive communities*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hagen, Ingunn (2010) Children and young in a changing media environment: some challenges. In Sirkku Kotilainen & Sol-Britt Arnolds-Granlund (eds.) *In Media literacy Education. Nordic perspectives*. University of Gothenburg: Nordicom.
- Hellström, Eeva (2001): *Conflict cultures: qualitative comparative analysis of environmental conflicts in forestry*. Finnish Society of Forest Science: Finnish Forest Research Institute: Helsinki.
- Jokinen, Kimmo and Kovala, Urpo (2005) Laadullinen vertaileva tutkimus. (Qualitative comparative analysis) In: Alapuro, Risto ja Arminen, Ilkka (eds.) *Vertailevan tutkimuksen ulottuvuuksia*. WSOY, Helsinki, 81-96.
- Liebes, Tamar & Katz, Elihu (1993) *Export of meaning: Cross-cultural readings of Dallas*. London: Oxford University press.
- Livingstone, S. and Das, R. (2013) The end of audiences? Theoretical echoes of reception amid the uncertainties of use. In Hartley, J., Burgess, J. and Bruns, A. (eds.) *A Companion to New Media Dynamics*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. 104-121.
- Luoma, Pentti (2003): 'Kvalitatiivinen vertaileva analyysi (QCA)' (Qualitative comparative analysis). <http://wwwedu.oulu.fi/sos/kva496.htm>.

- Ragin, Charles C. (1987): *The Comparative Method. Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Berkeley (Cal.): University of California Press.
- Rantala, Kati and Hellström, Eeva (2001): 'Qualitative Comparative Analysis - a Hermeneutic Approach to Interview Data'. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 4: 2, 87-100.
- Schrøder, Kim Christian (2016) E-mail 31.8.2016.
- Stehling, Miriam, Finger, Juliane & Jorge, Ana (2016) 'Comparative audience research: A review of cross national and cross-media audience studies'. *Participations*, 13: 1.
<http://www.participations.org/Volume%2013/Issue%201/contents.htm>.
- Vainikkala, Erkki and Kovala, Urpo (2000): 'Reading a story, reading cultures. Research procedures, theoretical considerations, comparisons'. In Urpo Kovala ja Erkki Vainikkala (eds.) *Reading cultural difference: The reception of a short story in six European countries*. University of Jyväskylä. Jyväskylä: Publications of the Research Unit for Contemporary Culture 63. 13-72.

Note:

¹ Although there are three unrelated language groups in the area, the common linguistic heritage is one of the factors making up the Nordic identity. The North Germanic languages Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are considered mutually intelligible. These languages are taught in school throughout the Scandinavian countries. Swedish, for example, is a mandatory subject in Finnish schools, since Finland by law is a bilingual country. Danish is mandatory in Faroese and Greenlandic schools, as these insular states are a part of the Danish Realm. Iceland also teaches Danish, since Iceland, too, was part of the Danish Realm until 1918. Besides these and the insular Scandinavian languages Faroese and Icelandic, which are also North Germanic languages, there are the Finnic and Sami branches of the Uralic languages, spoken in Finland and in northern Norway, Sweden and Finland, respectively, and Greenlandic, an Eskimo-Aleut language, spoken in Greenland.