

Janteloven: Scandinavian Social Conformity, IKEA, Minimalism, and The Socialism of Design

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ABSTRACT

Janteloven is a set of unspoken or hidden rules of conformity in Scandinavian societies, especially in Norway and Denmark. These rules, also called as Scandinavian Ten Commandments, were originated from a fiction novel, written in 1933 by Aksel Sandemose. Sandemose gathered, identified and described the unspoken Scandinavian nature of societal and conformity rules that he was highly critical about and stated the obvious with irony. Janteloven is commonly associated with some negative social behavioral traits as if Janteloven put a spell on Scandinavian people. It also was associated with some positive traits, Scandinavian design, IKEA and even Scandinavian social democratic life is associated with it. This study examines the stylistic characteristics of minimalism, Mid-20th Century Modern style, Scandinavian style, IKEA style and philosophies within their origins, and ideological associations. The study is designed as phenomenology; conceptual discourse analysis and content analysis methods were employed to analyze information. Design and ideology may influence each other reciprocally, and design trends may not be a coincidence. This study makes connections of how an egalitarian society ends up with minimalist design and IKEA philosophy using social conformity and Janteloven as vehicles.

Keywords: socialism, design, modernism, marxism, egalitarian, postmodernism, mid-century modern

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ÖZ

Janteloven, İskandinavya'da; özellikle Norveç ve Danimarka'da yerleşik olarak herkesin takip ettiği sosyal normlardır. Bu kurallar aynı zamanda *İskandinavların On Emir'i* olarak da adlandırılır ve 1933'de Aksel Sandemose tarafından yazılan bir kurgu romandan kökenini alır. Sandemose, bu adı konulmamış sosyal normlar ve kuralları derleyip bir araya getirmiş, tanımlamış; çok eleştirdiği bu konuşulmayan kuralları hicvederek ele almış ve romanında bunları ironi ile ortaya koymuştur. İskandinav toplumu adeta büyülenmişçesine bu kuralların etkisindedir, Janteloven sıklıkla olumsuz bir takım davranış kodlarının da sebebi olarak gösterilirken; bazen de olumlu davranışlarla ilişkilendirilmiştir. İskandinav tasarım anlayışı, IKEA ve hatta İskandinav sosyal demokratik hayat tarzı bile onunla ilişkilendirilmiştir. Bu araştırma; *minimalizm*, *Mid-Century Modern üslubu*, *İskandinav üslubu*, IKEA tasarımı ve felsefesini, üslup karakteristikleri, kökenleri ve ideolojik ilişkileri bağlamında incelemektedir. Olgubilim modelinde yapılandırılan araştırmada, analiz yöntemi olarak kavramsal söylem analizi ve içerik analizi kullanılmıştır. Tasarım ve ideoloji karşılıklı olarak birbiri üzerinde etki gösterebilmektedir; tasarımda akımlar ve trendler bir rastlantının neticesi olmayabilir. Bu araştırma, eşitlikçi bir toplumun sosyal konformite ve Janteloven aracılığı ile nasıl minimalist bir tasarım anlayışı ve IKEA felsefesine ulaştığını ilişki olarak ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: sosyalizm, tasarım, modernizm, marksizm, egalitarian, postmodernizm, mid-century modern

INTRODUCTION

In 1933, Danish writer Aksel Sandemose wrote a book “En flyktning krysser sitt spor” and later its English translation was released in 1936 under the title “A fugitive crosses his tracks”. Sandemose's novel included a list of ten rules, for some reason those rules became the unwritten laws of social norms in Norway and Scandinavia in general. In the book, those rules were written actually for the fictional town of *Jante*. Think about a fictional novel which includes some fictional rules for a fictional town; and somehow those fictional rules become the norms in certain countries. These rules were also called *Jante Law* (*Janteloven*), however; they are not official rules or laws, they are hidden rules—*lex insita*—, and also called *Ten Commandments* of the Scandinavia, hidden codes to maintain the status quo. It is a way of socially stigmatizing people that break the rules. The *Jante Laws* based on Sandemose's book are (Trotter, 2015, p. 2):

1. You shall not believe you *are* anything.
2. You shall not believe you are as much as *us*.
3. You shall not believe you are wiser than *us*.
4. You shall not imagine you are better than *us*.
5. You shall not believe you know more than *us*.
6. You shall not believe you are more than *us*.
7. You shall not believe you are good for anything.
8. You shall not laugh at *us*.
9. You shall not believe anyone cares about you.
10. You shall not believe you can teach *us* anything.

The objective of this study is to clarify relationships between *minimalism*, *IKEA* design philosophy, *Janteloven* and *socialist* ideology. The interconnection of these notions implies being more than merely coincidence. Especially in the last decades, the design notions being investigated in this study have been attracting more attention and seemingly being observed as the new design trends; e.g., minimalism, the Mid-Century modern style, Scandinavian design, Japanese minimalism.

The *Jante Laws* in Sandemose's novel reflect his critical and negative depiction of egalitarian individualism. This egalitarian individualism reflects a suspicion against successful individuals in the society, and it is also against social hierarchy.

Interestingly, those principles largely define Norwegian national identity, and they are widely shared Norwegian attitudes (Eriksen, 1993, pp. 16-17 mentioned in Palamara, 2016, p. 2; Avant & Knutsen, 1993, p. 450). Today, *Janteloven* is described as shared behavioral mindset in Scandinavian societies where “inhabitants are encouraged to set the community’s needs over the individual’s” (Ahlness, 2014, p. 547).

METHODOLOGY

Objective of the Study

Objective of this study is to investigate relationships among *IKEA design*, *Janteloven*, *Scandinavian design*, *minimalism*, the *Mid-Century Style* and possible ideological connections such as socialism, cultural Marxism and postmodernism. The study also aimed to examine reciprocal influences between design and ideology. Minimalist design, Mid-Century Modern Style, and IKEA were compared and analyzed in terms of sociological, cultural, political aspects based on Scandinavian values such as *Janteloven*.

Research Questions

1. Does *Janteloven* have influence and decide artistic style and design?
2. Do artistic style and design affect or have influence on ideology?
3. Can artistic style and design be used as a tool for a certain ideology?

Research Design

The study is designed as phenomenology, a qualitative research model. Conceptual discourse analysis and visual content analysis methods were employed to analyze information. Ideological testimonials, political manifestos, documented ideological strategies, corporate statements, public announcements, advertisement statements were examined and analyzed to clarify hidden or declared ideological and principle discourses and concepts. Visual content analysis method was employed to examine and resolve design characteristics of the *Mid-Century Style*, *minimalism*, *Scandinavian style* and *IKEA styles*. Content analysis process included constant comparisons of the styles with reference to ideological doctrines and manifestos.

Phenomenological Spotlight

The content analysis process focused on quintessential, archetypical characteristics of pre-determined styles. Therefore, criterion sampling was used to determine pre-defined stylistic characteristics based on the literature. Stylistic characteristics were crucial since designed objects were the intermediaries in shared experiences. Furniture and accessories, and the objects in our living environments reflect our preferences which are under constant influence of our world views and ideologies. Their styles also respectively may influence how we think, how we experience and how we behave within constant communication and interaction with them. Consequently, the styles are compared and contrasted within their ideological connections based on sociological, historical, and artistic associations.

Validity and Reliability

Conceptual discourse analysis and visual content analysis methods were employed while comparing and contrasting discourses, manifestos, testimonials, ideological declarations, statements, public announcements and advertisement statements as independent from each other while grouping supporting pieces of information. Ideological discourses, views, approaches and socio-cultural values were hermeneutical since they could be highly subjective in nature. However, correspondingly supporting evidences (video recordings and ideological declarations) from literature were compared and articulated to provide construct validity. The grouping of rich qualitative information from the literature supported the clear connections made based on the research questions; i.e., multiple hermeneutical evidences of *minimalist design* and *ideology* connection throughout the history. A specific instrument was neither seen as necessary nor designed and used to collect information apart from discourse analysis and content analysis.

Analysis

We need to go back to historical roots and social-cultural backgrounds of *Janteloven* to understand and clarify *Scandinavian style*, and *IKEA* in particular. The following section focused on detailed psychological, cultural, sociological, and historical contextual backgrounds to understand the concept of *Janteloven*. The concept of *Janteloven* is uniquely Scandinavian and it is connected to many characteristics of Scandinavian culture, Scandinavian people and their behavior,

their life styles and even their understanding of art and aesthetics. Once the concept *Janteloven* examined, connections with *IKEA* philosophy and style will be analyzed and clarified. *Janteloven* seems in the center of Scandinavian culture, and *Scandinavian style* is typically minimalist in its nature. *Minimalism*, and *Mid-(20th) Century Modern* have been prominent styles in the recent years, and these styles are also analyzed within their ideological connections in the related sections. While style may be expression of world views and ideology, there might also be reciprocity between them. Marxist ideology and possible style connections are also examined based on the ideological discourses in the related sections.

Roots and Existential Reasons of *Janteloven* in Scandinavia

Janteloven is usually described as a highly individualistic concept and commonly referenced in Scandinavian popular media. Typical Scandinavian behavioral traits were also commonly attributed to *Janteloven*. However, it is not articulated how a fictional novel influences social norms in a large geographical region and also decides behavioral traits and even national identity in a certain country. Actually, based on Sandemose's satirical approach to the small town of *Jante*, it was indeed a critique of societal values. Therefore, it would be incorrect to identify origins of *Jante* commandments as rooted back to Sandemose's novel. On the contrary, it seems that Sandemose gathered, identified and described the unspoken Scandinavian social codes of conformity that he was highly critical about. Otherwise, it would be difficult to believe that a novel written in 1933 and some sacred rules spread so widely over Scandinavia and haunted the *Nordic* people. In fact, it seems obvious that the rules identified as *Janteloven* were already the nature of *Nordic* people and Sandemose just stated the obvious with irony. Avant and Knutsen (1993) explained historical roots and reasons why and how Norway created such an egalitarian society:

The *Black Plague* of the mid-fourteenth century reduced the population of Norway by more than one-third, effectively destroyed Norwegian nobility and left Norway a nation of survived farmers who struggled for more than two centuries to restore farms abandoned during the plague. Unique circumstances of Norwegian history produced an egalitarian and cohesive society (p. 452).

Whereas, Scandinavian behavioral codes, egalitarianism and individualism are mostly admired by outsiders, today; Sandemose depicted the fictional town of

Jante and the nature of its people from an insider's perspective:

A hysterical thirst for power by which people stamp out each other's chances in life. While all struggle and writhe beneath its suffocating grasp, they also exercise it against all others: everyone is doomed to an eternal crucifixion.' Thus being 'packhorses', they never could learn the true use of language, only a series of verbal clichés reflecting a mediocrity, which ridiculed excellence. Condemned by the laws of *Jante*, Sandemose lamented 'we never learned to talk (p. 342) (Sandemose cited in Gopal, 2004, p. 65).

In an official Norwegian Dictionary, the word *Jante* was listed as a new entry (1945-1975) meaning "a person who is afraid of standing out in the crowd; and *Janteloven*, a set of laws which express the small society's tyrannical attitude toward the individual who stands out in the crowd" (Avant & Knutsen, 1993, p. 455).

There have been increasing negative voices over *Janteloven* in the recent years especially among young population. Though, the literature included both positive and negative views about *Jante Law* based on social, political and cultural reasons and perspectives. Nevertheless, *Janteloven* has been characterized as being an appropriate label for Norwegian shared values (Avant & Knutsen, 1993, p. 459). As a commonly observed phenomenon in Sweden, in Denmark and in Finland; *Jante Law* is seen as typical Scandinavian traits. It includes the very characteristics of Scandinavian societies, which are mostly admired by outsiders at a distance; but resented by the people living in it. Nevertheless, it is deeply embedded in the psyche of people.

Another concept, "hygge" in Danish culture can be defined as a warm, cozy setting, may be a small corner arrangement of intimate atmosphere, a call for a relaxing intimacy, and feeling of being home (Jenkins as cited in Beltagui & Schmidt, 2017, p. 406). "The concepts of *hygge* and *Janteloven* can be seen to set the rules for acceptable social behavior in Danish society" (Beltagui & Schmidt, 2017, p. 408). When we think about the process how *Janteloven* procreated itself in the society, in his book Sandemose believed that Christian ritual of Confirmation was the tool of affirmation, not the education or school in *Jante*. In other words, people were socialized into *Janteloven* through religion (Trotter, 2015, p. 7). However, it was also noted that Norwegian nationalist project attempts to socialize children into it through education (Trotter, 2015, p. 7). Trotter (2015) further emphasized "how *Janteloven* was used as a vehicle and convenient tool for the nationalism project of Norway. It was a unifying principle around egalitarianism; the nation is greater than the individual" (p. 8).

Janteloven resonates as a principle of classification, drawing sharp lines between the individual and the collective. Yet, because it does not define the characteristics of the group, it only defines punishable traits in individuals; it can be superimposed upon other markers of identity. In the case of Norway, *Janteloven* was appropriated from its literary context in order to strengthen a hegemonic ideology, which gave primacy to the Norwegian nation-state (Trotter, 2015, p. 8).

As a universal model and reference point, Norway was also claimed to be an international project. "After the *World War II*, Norway saw a prolonged period of rebuilding and solidarity, and the creation of a social democratic welfare-state. The welfare-state, the equality paradigm and nationalism in Norway attempt to turn the nation-state into a *universal reference point*" (Vike, Lidén and Lien, 2001; Pausewang, 2001; & Eriksen, 2009 as cited in Trotter, 2015, p. 8). Thereupon, it is difficult to not question whether or not Norway and other Scandinavian countries' topping the international happiness index charts is also a part of a global agenda... It should also be reminded that *Janteloven* is not a specifically unique Norwegian concept, it is rather a Scandinavian concept widespread along other Scandinavian countries as well. "Today, *Janteloven* is a sociological term that is used to describe an aversion to individual-minded behavior" (Ahlness, 2014, p. 548). In the recent years, there have been *anti-Janteloven* movements and even there is a grave in which people symbolically buried *Janteloven*.

Positive Views of Janteloven

Down to earth egalitarianism

Modesty

Against the delusions of grandeur

National pride comes before self

Gender equality

Passivism

No bragging and vanity

No class differences

No ego

Scandinavian behavioral traits, specifically *Janteloven* attracted attention within its social and cultural aspects. *Janteloven* has been linked to ideological aspects, social, cultural aspects, also art and design aspects in the Scandinavian

countries. Positive and negative characteristics have been largely discussed. As one of the claims, “*Janteloven* protected Scandinavia from the negative effects of Socialism” (Edwards, 2016 cited in Palamara, 2016, p. 2). In a study (Palamara, 2016), participants viewed *Janteloven* as an expression of equality of all people on a down to earth level. “It meant to motivate people to try to help their fellow citizens instead of winning over them. Some presented it more as an injunction not against success but against bragging” (p. 3). On the other hand, if there is a Scandinavian utopia, as typically believed by outsiders; *Janteloven* must be part of it. Because, what we often fail to realize is that you cannot have it both ways; complete individuality where everyone just ignores the rules, and still have a harmonious, equal society. Therefore, we have to make a choice between them. It may well be that for a better society; *Janteloven* might be the best way of organizing a society to live equally in harmony. However, it is also controversial since it limits individual choices and success. It's like the *Ten Commandments* against delusions of grandeur.

Avant and Knutsen (1993) pointed out that “Norwegian students usually have difficulty understanding societal class structures in other societies, by the time a typical Norwegian is a college student, egalitarian state of mind is set. *Janteloven* seems really effective to create a *classless* society ideal” (p. 457). In a study (Beltagui & Schmidt, 2017), in the online social gaming networks “*Janteloven* was reported to drive people to show fairness, by being humble in victory and gracious in defeat” (p. 420). In the same study it was also reported that *Janteloven* makes no account of gender, and perhaps leading to the perceived gender equality in Scandinavian countries (Beltagui & Schmidt, 2017, p. 421). The study may also be a response to a widely-specified question how and why Scandinavian countries succeeded such gender equality in their societies.

In a study it was tested that how culture may affect the interpretation of the expression of pride among Norwegian and U.S. participants. “Results showed that participants from Norway ascribed more negative trait attributions to a target person expressing pride than U.S. participants” (Bromgard, Trafimow, & Linn, 2014, p. 375).

Negative Views of Janteloven

Passive aggressive behavior

Lack of assertiveness
 Harmful for innovation and creativity
 Promotes mediocrity
 Does not promote success
 Hidden jealousy
 Hidden intolerance of difference and diversity
 Unexpressed resentment
 Inexpressiveness
 Denying individualism and individual choices and expression
 Suppressing individual's nature
 Promotes sameness
 Intolerance to others, cultural differences and ethnic differences
 Intolerance to language difference and religious difference
 Negative self-view
 Reduced self-enhancing tendencies
 Suppressing masculine behavior (female-dominated society)
 Avoidance of eccentric behavior
 Fear of being different

The quintessential characteristics of innovation and creativity show clear divergence from the traits linked to Janteloven. In the previously mentioned study (Palamara, 2016), over 40% of respondents reported that *Janteloven* was bad for innovation in Norway. One third of respondents were unsure and 23% reported that it was not bad for innovation. It was also viewed as an excuse for lack of success or to excuse criticism. "Some respondents reported *Janteloven* as a passive-aggressive assertion that one shouldn't be outstanding; it was reflected as tyranny of mediocrity; some respondents also described it as depiction of intolerant, spiteful and jealous nature of their society" (Palamara, 2016, p. 3).

Jante Law in general imposes being like others, while creative and inventive talent require thinking differently. Avant and Knutsen (1993) proposed that "creative and inventive talents may not be encouraged in Norway because of *Janteloven*, particularly when these talents are seen as a threat to overall equality. The fear that somebody may be getting a bigger piece of the welfare cake threatens the *social democratic Utopia*" (p. 452). Evolutionary nature of rivalry as a survival

instinct requires individual strive against problems which may be threat to survival. Jante Law, within this context increases risky possibilities against survival. However, individual survival and collective survival may be depended upon different conditions. In Denmark (in Scandinavia), “equality translates as sameness in every respect. Thus, being different suggests injustice and hierarchical subordination. Thus, many Scandinavians regard Britain and the United States as also being unjust and exploitative” (Gopal, 2004, p. 70).

It may seem conflicted, however; egalitarian values and democratic values may also diverge in certain aspects. In the recent years, there have been an immigration surge to the Europe. It has become obvious that Norwegians for example have little tolerance to immigrants with a diverse background. They show intolerance to cultural difference, ethnic difference, language difference and religious difference. “*Jante Law* was specified as underlying reasons of intolerance against diversity” (Avant & Knutsen, 1993, p. 458). Egalitarianism, democratic values, diversity, and ethnic tolerance in Scandinavia should be re-examined because they seem controversial.

In a study (Silvera & Seger, 2004) it was found that “Scandinavians might generally have less positive self-views and reduced self-enhancing tendencies compared with members of many other Western cultures” (p. 573). “Norwegians, for example, were less self-promoting than Americans. These differences might derive from *Jante Law*” (p. 581). Self-expression, motivation, self-assurance, and confidence are all significant facets of healthy personality development. *Jante Law* evidently may hinder personal development in all these aspects.

Silvera and Seger (2004) indicated based on the previous research that Norway had a substantially more feminine (vs. masculine) culture than the United States. Nonetheless, Norway, could be defined more appropriately as *female-dominated* rather than being *feminine*. Silvera and Seger (2004) argued that “the Norwegian emphasis on feminine values derives from the strong cultural influence of *Janteloven* (or vice versa)” (p. 582).

Silvera & Seger (2004) reported that “Norwegians had a tendency to give less extreme responses (i.e., they respond closer to the neutral point) than Americans on psychological measurement scales irrespective of the constructs being measured” (pp. 580-581). This might mean hesitance of being different than others, and feeling safe being around the averages and norms; this limiting behavior may easily be

connected with inhibition of self-expressive behavior.

In a study about regional assertiveness in the United States; Norwegian-origin Americans scored lower compared to other regions. "It was reported to be a cultural difference rooted to *Janteloven* Norwegian traditions. However, assertive communicative behavior was described as 'reflecting genuine concern for [everyone's] rights . . . [and] promotes equality in human relationships'" (Sigler, Burnett, & Child, 2008:90). Actually, even though Norwegian *Janteloven* tradition thought to be part of Scandinavian egalitarian behavior, it might actually be other way around and *Janteloven* may be a justification for passive aggressive behavior.

Celebrities frequently appear in advertisements. People in the most societies trust the public figures and celebrities, and this trust is used to sell products through advertisements. In a study (Silvera & Austad, 2004) about factors predicting the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement advertisements, it was suggested that *Janteloven* may have caused an increased suspicion and "Norwegians might be particularly untrusting of celebrities due to Norwegian cultural norms based on *Janteloven*" (p. 1523).

Reflections and Expressions of Janteloven

Janteloven affects the way people buy cars and furniture, how they design and decorate their houses, how they dress, it also affects how they behave. Modesty is the key; arrogance and vanity are frowned upon. Scandinavian behavioral traits expressed as *Janteloven* may also be described as a camouflage against the herd, akin to zebras' camouflages:

...(talking about an experiment of biologists with zebras: they paint a zebra's haunches with a red spot)..." When a zebra shows a different pattern than the rest of the herd, it gets hunted by the lions in a shorter time. The lions cannot hunt a single zebra down unless they can identify it. Because they have to identify and then have to organize their hunt around a target. If you stand out, the lions will kill you (Peterson, 2021).

Janteloven functions like zebra's stripes and provides a safe zone for people by protecting them from lions. Standing out and being different has been promoted in consumer society as part of marketing strategies, while it may also result in various social consequences. There are sayings in many cultures telling similar anecdotes:

"If you stick your neck out then the sword will come."

"The head that sticks up above the rest is the first to be cut off by the sword."

"Poppy that grows higher than the rest, will be cut down."

“The sheep standing out of the herd will be eaten by the wolves.”

In most cultures, children are taught to not stand out, not to be different. However, creativity is a trait that require just the opposite. We know that development and evolution of human civilization made possible by creativity and innovation, although this standing out behavior seems against survival at first glance. Steve Jobs, a pioneer in supporting creativity and innovation, narrated the anatomy of creative behavior in a 1997 TV commercial for Apple:

Here's to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes... the ones who see things differently — they're not fond of rules and they have no respect for status quo... You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can't do is ignore them because they change things... they push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world, are the ones who do (Jobs, 2011).

As previously mentioned, *Janteloven* was described as bad for innovation; also creative and inventive talents may not be encouraged in Norway because of *Janteloven*. (Palamara, 2016, p. 3; Avant & Knutsen, 1993, p. 452; Peterson, 1988, p. 2). Almost all aspects of this speech promote traits against Scandinavian societal norms, from a *Nordic* perspective, Steve Jobs' narration of creative traits can be well-described as an *anti-Janteloven* manifesto.

Janteloven, if described as Scandinavian cultural code of behavior, can be observed in Scandinavian aesthetical style preferences, as in IKEA example. IKEA, is especially famous for practicality, functionality, its modern and minimalist style. This minimalist and simple functionality has almost become IKEA's signature, and seen as Scandinavian style characteristics. Typically, the style of a culture includes essences, flavors, cultural details and characteristics from that unique culture. However, with the minimalist Scandinavian style, the essence of *Nordic* cultures have become almost flavorless without any personality characteristics, no cultural attributions, with no touch of uniqueness but very typical reflections of *Janteloven*.

Minimalism is, on the other hand, is a progressive solution to advanced design problems. Perfected, complete and sophisticated styles are functionality oriented; usually include subtraction, removal of unnecessary details, removal of cultural style cues seen as unnecessary, cutting direct and indirect identity attributions, reduction of non-functional stylistic details, and ultimately go to an abstraction and simplistic geometric forms when possible. In fact, doing all of these require mastery. Therefore, a mature and perfected design ultimately and progressively gets closer

to an almost minimalist point.

"Simplicity is the ultimate form of sophistication." (—Leonardo Da Vinci)
(Munera, 2012, p. 2)

IKEA: Democratic Design

IKEA, the world famous Swedish company's slogan is *Democratic Design*. It also uses other slogans, supporting this notion: "To create a better everyday life for the many people" (Chopra, 2009, p. 4 and 8), "We are not just making things, we are making things better. Democratic design is how we make things better" (Chopra, 2009, p. 4 and 8). "Not for the few but for the many" (Löfgren, 2015, p. 469). So, why did IKEA adopt a such a maxim? What does it mean? *Marcus Engman*, Head of design at IKEA explains what they all mean:

What is so democratic about *democratic design* is the involvement of people, in both; how we do the stuff, and how we do it within IKEA. How we do it together with people on the outside, it is really important for us to be *inclusive*, not *exclusive*. The democracy part is actually to share good ideas with a lot of people. I think this is one of the problems that we have today. There are so many good ideas but are we willing to share them with everybody? Keeping our ideas to ourselves is not the IKEA way. We want to *share* with as many as possible. That is the democracy part there. It is also not only sharing the ideas together, but actually *do the ideas together*. We're opening up boot camps, we co-create we do a lot of stuff (Engman, 2017).

Marcus Engman also explains IKEA philosophy in detail. IKEA is curious about people. IKEA staff, research department, product developers, and others including all staff do thousands of home visits every year. The purpose of these visits to learn from people and their lives. They engage in one-to-one talks with people. The new ideas of IKEA products come from actual problems in people's lives. We see collectivity in all aspects of IKEA as well. "IKEA philosophy is also all about sharing, the information collected through all research is not a secret, they put it out there, available to everyone, even available to other companies, too." The reason is simple, it is a collective responsibility, they ask for solutions from others, because IKEA is not enough to solve all these problems. It is as if sharing responsibility for humanity's problems. He further explained that people's needs are not only physical, for example, the most important part of home is the emotional needs. For this reason IKEA started a music lab and food lab. Because the best part of sharing comes usually with food, food is the most important thing if you want to socialize (Engman, 2017).

The *Five pillars of IKEA design* based on its philosophy is: *Form, Function, Quality, Sustainability, and Low price*. Engman (2017) explained that products have to have a form which is beautiful. It has to be functional for everyday use. It has to have quality and should be long-lasting and should age beautifully. It has to be done in a sustainable way; for both, people and the planet. It also for the future, maybe has to push people into a more sustainable behavior. So, it is not just making sustainable products but also establishing sustainability behavior among people. Low prices also brings accessibility for more people.

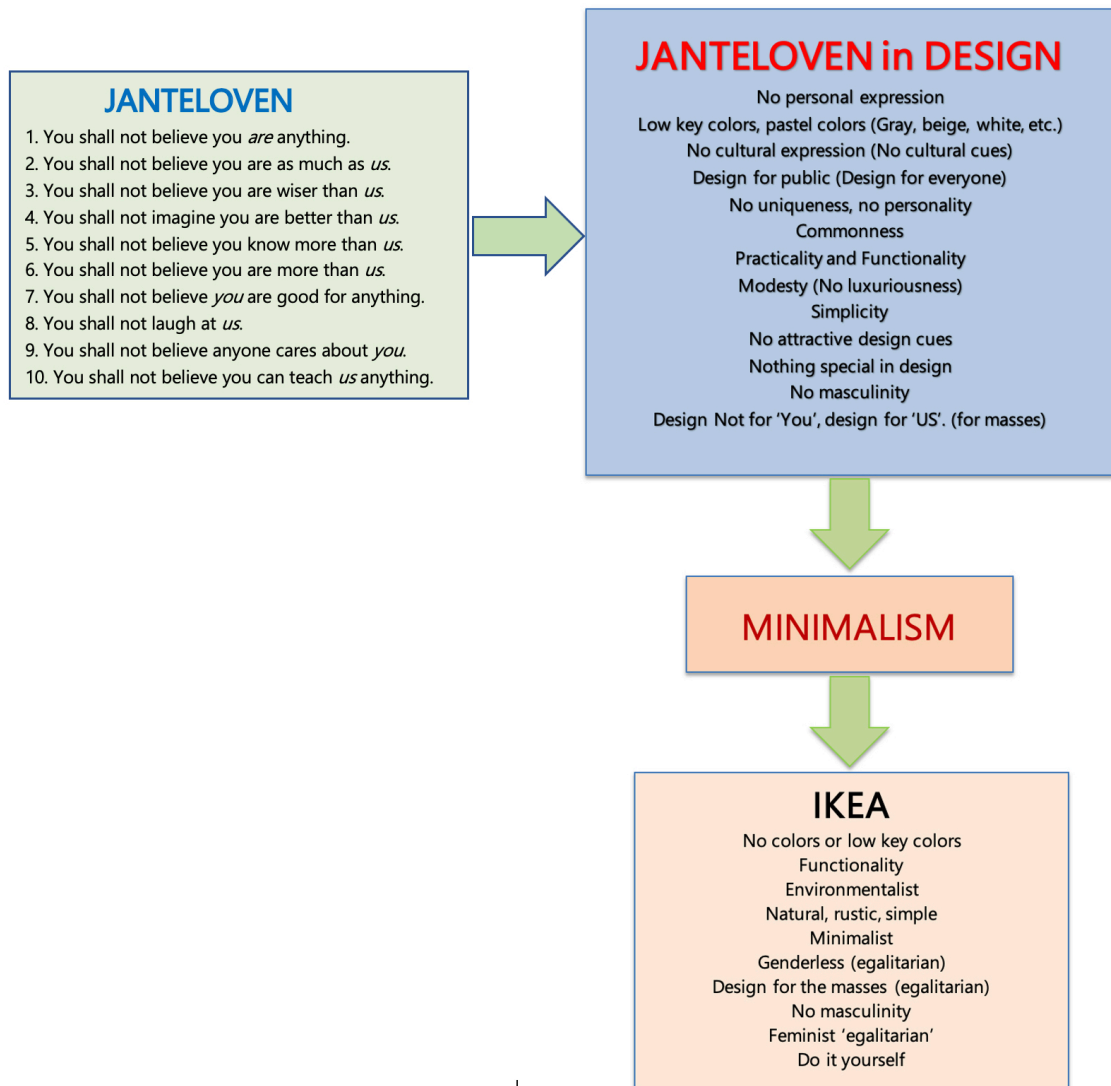


Figure 1. Conceptual relationships of Janteloven, minimalism and IKEA.

If we look at the slogans of IKEA and its five pillars, we do not see any reference to culture. Instead, IKEA is rather focused on universal values and aspects

of humanity and design. It is obvious that at IKEA, the new universal values such as *functionality*, *environmentalism* and *sustainability* is the new culture they want to create. Nonetheless, *design* is by definition, also an expression of a certain culture, it represents a certain culture or it may even be a vehicle to transmit cultural values to others and to the next generations. IKEA design and philosophy does not seem to consider cultural inheritance or preserving cultural values. However, "IKEA sells Scandinavian home furnishing styles and Swedish social and cultural values. IKEA design was also interestingly described as a marriage between design and national identity" (Löfgren, 2015, p. 467). Culture is thought to be unique characteristics of a particular society within a familiar definition. It is interesting that *Janteloven* prevents being special and unique as an identity, yet Scandinavian culture and design is still described as cultural values. A German journalist in the 1990s responded IKEA ads by describing a typical IKEA interior as: "Bloodlessly institutional: everything was *oh-so-functional*, child-proof, and über-planned, with no sharp corners, no daring touches, and no challenging design" (Löfgren, 2015, p. 468).

From a modernist perspective cultural preservation, inheritance and transmission of culture may be considered conservative values and not progressive values. IKEA seems to focus more on popular universal values of sustainability, functionality, and accessibility. On the other hand, IKEA's design characteristics and *five pillars* may also be connected to *Janteloven* as the Scandinavian cultural values (Figure 1). Some *Ikean* values such as collectivity; design—*not for individual but for masses*—; public availability; minimalism; sustainability for living collectively, they all may be connected to *Janteloven* (Figure 1). It is interesting that even for IKEA, design always represents a culture even if removing cultural cues is the *new culture*. Postmodernist views have long advocated multiple perspectives, diversity and multiculturalism; promoting *mid-century modernist*, *minimalist*, *Scandinavian*, and *IKEA* stylistic values seems controversial and conflicted since these values dictate a *cold-blooded*, *uniform*, *monotone*, *dull*, and *dry style* and kill regional cultures and unique personalities. Although, IKEA, reflects its own values as supporting diversity and multicultural values; a poll the Swedish Department of the Interior conducted in 1998 revealed that "41.5 percent of teachers nationwide agreed in part or wholly with the statement that certain cultures are so different from the Swedish that people from those cultures can hardly adapt to Swedish society" (Pred as cited in Lindqvist, 2009, p. 58); likewise a Eurobarometer Opinion Poll showed that 40% of Swedes

believe that “minority groups are so different that they will never be accepted” (Pred as cited in Lindqvist, 2009:58). Does it mean that we accept your differences up to a degree that we could assimilate you so that you lose your identity within uniform Scandinavian identity?

Mass production, loss of uniqueness and identity were the criticized aspects of consumerism for long time. What did happen to these *capitalist aspects* and now these aspects are being considered rather *democratic, universal, social democratic* or even *socialist aspects* of design? When and how did we come to this point so far?

Functionalism, and minimalism with Scandinavian blonde-rustic-wood touches seem to represent IKEA, and IKEA design has very strong similarities with the *Mid-Century Modern Style*, they both share roots (institutional look) with *Bauhaus School*. Nowadays, the *Mid-Century Modern Style*, *functionalism* and *minimalism* seem to be rising trends all over the world. Once criticized as having *modernist, capitalist characteristics*; how does the *Mid-Century Modern Style* has become the new trend and norm in the *postmodern times*?

The answer may be in the historic, *Antonio Gramsci's Cultural Marxist* doctrines. *Gramsci* justified the communist revolutions not taking place in the West, such as England or Germany, and concluded that these countries had strong cultural identities, in other words “they weren't just a bunch of Russian peasants” (*Gramsci*, 2021). An understanding of culture may be viewing it as a set of inherited values and resources strengthening chances of survival for the community and for the individual; however, *Gramsci* viewed it as a hegemonic structure to procreate bourgeoisie values:

They were a people who were clear-eyed about who they were and they had lots of deep cultural roots, and they had very effective institutions for transmitting their cultural roots and that established what would you call a *cultural hegemony* that would be characterized as common sense that would then maintain the so-called status-quo in other words not allow it to become *Marxist* (*Gramsci*, 2021).

Therefore, destroying the established culture and values is the new target of *Cultural Marxists* as explained by *Gramsci*. Culture first had to be resolved, and so this breaking down of culture became the first and the most important project. According to *Gramsci* it was a two-step revolution:

First, cultural revolution that eventually *demoralizes* people; then, the *communist party* finally steps in and seize the power, because the culture is not strong enough and the people who are within that culture are not

unified enough to be able to resist the revolution. Gramsci figured that you have to start dismantling *religion* first (Gramsci, 2021).

It looks like IKEA clearly positioned itself in an ideological direction consistent with Gramsci's cultural destruction wars, which is also called *Cultural Marxism*. Gender and identity politics is the new frontier. A full-page IKEA ad that ran in *Dagens Nyheter*, Sweden's largest daily newspaper, in August 2008 has the headline "There Is Not a Single Normal Person in This Country. (Lindqvist, 2009, p. 43)" The ad text begins:

We are all different. Our skin tones come in thousands of shades. We believe in different things (or in nothing at all). Some guys are attracted to guys, some gals to gals. And there are nearly as many kinds of families as there are families. Isn't it glorious? (Lindqvist, 2009, p. 43).

Mochon, Norton, & Ariely (2012) examined the consumer psychology behind IKEA's self-assembly, they "proposed that creating products fulfills consumers' psychological need to signal competence to themselves and to others, and that feelings of competence associated with self-created products lead to their increased valuation" (p. 363). Perhaps, it may offer further inferences in relation to sustainability and labor aspects of IKEA. They also found connection between co-creation and satisfaction. They explained that "The more we invest in labor, the more satisfied we are" (p. 368).

Design is usually thought to be a result and reflection of values, culture, and identity; however, there may also be reciprocity. Design shapes people's environments, homes, and surrounding everyday lives; it may well be used as a useful tool to create purposive values, minds, morals, world views and ideologies:

Already in early twentieth-century; Swedish architects, planners, interior decorators and teachers of home economics were united in a crusade against 'the unnecessary ugliness' of bad taste and old traditions. In such an educational example the beautiful was always the practical, simple, and restrained. The focus on the aesthetics of everyday life was closely linked to ideas about mentality and morality. The peaceful and light, the restrained and practical home was supposed to create a setting for open, harmonious, and rational minds (Löfgren, 2015, p. 468).

Löfgren (2015) reminds an IKEA marketing campaign in France in 1988. "In the campaign, a '68 couple is depicted as exclaiming: "1968 – make revolution, 1988 – re-make the kitchen!" The connection between the two decades was perhaps even stronger than the marketing people realized..." (p. 469). Perhaps, the connection may even be stronger today...

Janteloven and Minimalism

In a culturally unifying world, societies and individuals are getting increasingly similar in their cultural traits and even in their behavioral norms. Internet and the online social networks as the global networks of communication is the responsible agents of change. Cultural differences and varieties of past are fewer than ever and quickly unifying. Fashion, music, arts, aesthetical tastes and preferences are used to be “culturally conditioned” ... until now. The factors deciding these cultural differences are also constantly dissolving. A global uniform culture of consumerism is a major concern. There have also been a surging immigration to the West because of wars, natural disasters, and other humanitarian needs such as poverty and limited resources. Consequently, multiculturalism and diversity have been emerging values and new reality especially in the West.

**“Have nothing in your houses that you do not know
to be useful or believe to be beautiful”**

—William Morris (Chapman, 1993, p. 1)

Although, multicultural societies celebrate many cultures living together in harmony, the new global culture have been dominating and dictating the global common cultural norms and values. The unique, rare, exceptional local cultures are disintegrating and vanishing within this new global culture. On the other hand, within this globalization of cultural norms, values and tastes; it is not possible that the new collective, universal, global culture will not be able to contain and express all varieties of local cultures. This involuntary mutuality will also create new societal norms, conditions, tastes and preferences. Within this new conceptual frame, a local cultural aspect will hardly be accepted as a mutual cultural trait; but new and overarching communal values, norms, tastes and preferences will be needed. Perhaps, this new overarching preferences may meet at a midpoint which provides necessary functionality and practicality, and also stripped off from its cultural identity cues, such as *IKEA*.

“In character, in manner, in style, in all things, the supreme excellence is simplicity”.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

(Botto-Figueira, 2018, p. v)

Minimalism is not only a design philosophy but is also a life style. *Minimalist* philosophy may be observed and may have roots in many societies, belief systems and cultures. Japanese culture, *Attic Classicism*, *Buddhism*, *Sufism*, Scandinavian culture, *Janteloven*, *Stoic School* of philosophy; all may be connected to *minimalist* philosophy at some point. It also has been a re-emerging value and philosophy in the recent years, especially in the *West*. Providing endless supply to their unsatisfied consumers especially after the *World War II*; capitalist Western economies also created ever-demanding societies. However, material possessions were not enough to satisfy need for more humane needs.

“Minimalism is not a style. It’s an attitude, a way of being, it’s a fundamental reaction against noise, visual noise, disorder, vulgarity. Minimalism is a pursuit of the essence of things not the appearance” —Massimo Vignelli (Barenbrug, 2021)

More material possessions, more money, or more objects in our lives did not satisfy our deeper needs. More followers, more likes, more popularism, more online friends we have never met in person; created a new paradox of loneliness. Online social networks and new global online culture have not satisfied our deeper hungers, pursuits of happiness and meaning. We started to carry our tablets, computers, smartphones with us all the times; our lives have become like our charger cables very busy, chaotic and tangled. People have hundreds and thousands of *Instagram* followers and *Facebook* friends; but loneliness is the new epidemic. ... more connected than ever, but also lonelier... Our closets are full of shoes and clothes which are never worn, and things we have never used. The more things in our lives, the busier our minds... The more digitally connected we are, the less connected we are to the nature, to our nature and ourselves... It is no wonder that *minimalism* has been a rising design trend and celebrated philosophy and life style in the recent years.

The modernist taste for *minimalist* design in a broad perspective originated in the early part of the 19th century with the *functionalist* movement in architecture and design. The *functionalist* movement was opposed to external ornamentation and all kinds of eclecticism within art and design. The functionalists believed that architecture and design should primarily be functional and devoid of superfluous ornamentation. From an aesthetic point of view, the functionalists found *minimalist* and *functionalist* design more appealing and formed an opposition to the aesthetic values of the *Art Nouveau* movement which were dominant in the early part of the 19th century. This taste in design is still one of the dominant discourses within taste in our present times (Thorlacius, 2007, p. 71).

Modernism was rooted to philosophy of Enlightenment, rationalism, empiricism and it was against convention, it was against traditions in all aspects of life; it was also a result of industrialization. Therefore, a functionalist, minimalist, mass production was an expected outcome in terms of design principles. Postmodernist idea, on the other hand, built on criticism of all social phenomena in terms of power structures and was a critique of modernist thought. Postmodernist view also suggested infinite interpretations and perspectives, therefore yielding to a multicultural understanding. Consequently, a multicultural, diverse, eclectic and inclusive design understanding could have been expected. However, in the recent years we see rather minimalist design trends, the *Mid 20th Century Modern* style in particular.

Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jasa (2020) explained that *Marxists* faced a strong opposition following violent student movements of 1960s and 1970s, so they went underground; *postmodernism* is a cover up for these *Marxists*, they just re-appeared with a new badge. Jasa also pointed that the emerging violence based on identity politics in Europe is not different than *Communist Manifesto* written over 200 years ago. He further explained "To build a new world order *Marxists* have to disintegrate nations, family structure, private property, private schools and religions, this is what they call *Cultural Marxism*" (Jasa, 2020). According to Jasa's explanations, The *World War I* did not bring about the realization of the *Marxist* dreams of the global working class joining forces and launching the revolution of the proletariat. Therefore, *leftist* sociologists gradually stripped *Marxism* off its economic component and replaced it with freshly infused sociology and psychology theories. Thus *Critical Theory*, also known as *Cultural Marxism* was created. According to *Max Horkheimer*, the traditional concept of family must be deconstructed, sexual norms, morality, Christian foundations, conservatism and patriotism must all be abolished. He was not alone, the intellectual name behind 1960s' student movements in France, *Herbert Marcuse*; created the concept '*The Great Refusal*' meaning to destroy all traditional values (Jasa, 2020).

Nonetheless, *postmodernism* was an idea against *modernism*; they preferred and adopted *modernist* design and *minimalism* since it serves to a hidden *Marxist* agenda efficiently. *Modernism* as a philosophy influenced many areas of life including art, design, science and philosophy. The *anti-traditionalist*, *anti-conventionalist* philosophy of *modernism* was rather a science-oriented, anthropometric approach; therefore *functionalism* was the new movement. *Modernist* philosophy purposefully

ignored cultural characteristics and cultural identity of design. Functionalism was also not aware, or may be ignorant of the 'cultural identity' concept. For example, not being able to analyze or notice inherited cultural characteristics in a design, they always perceived excess details as *decoration* or *ornamentation*. Therefore, they considered that the best design was *functional* and detached from all details including cultural roots and identity cues. The result was industrial, mass production oriented, *minimalist functionalism*, "functional but with no cultural cues, minimalist but without personality".

Today, it is almost impossible to tell cultural, geographical, historical, sociological origins and characteristics of a *minimalist* modern chair (Figure 2). Cultural inheritance in art and design is possible through unique details being transferred over generations. Abandonment of cultural identity and seeing design as just a matter of "engineering of function" may result in cultural dissolving. Nevertheless, this dissolving may not be a coincidence since it is a fundamental *Marxist* ideological tool. For a tendency toward minimalist functionalism, they had their own reasons; for modernists, it was "abandonment of tradition for progressiveness", for postmodernists, it was "attacking culture, erasing culture from the memory, rejecting consumerism, creating an egalitarian, genderless design".



Figure 2. Conventional design (i.e. Victorian style) vs. functionalist, minimalist design.

CONCLUSION

The uniquely Scandinavian social conformity norm, Janteloven has stronger influence on individual, society and the Scandinavian culture than expected. Hesitance of being different, feeling safe as being average and mediocre may be a clearreference for minimalist philosophy and design. The restrictiveness of Janteloven is also detrimental for expressive behavior. Reflections of Janteloven influence on

Norwegian culture show itself in many forms, such as lack of assertiveness, increased passive-aggressive behavior, passivity, democratic consciousness, egalitarian behavior, gender equality, kindness, tolerance and overall peace in the society.

Janteloven, as Scandinavian cultural code of behavior also reveals itself in Scandinavian aesthetical taste and style preferences, as in IKEA. Practicality, simplicity, functionality, sustainability, and accessibility within a modern and minimalist package may all be results of Scandinavian social code of behavior. The minimalist Scandinavian style show very Scandinavian cultural trait, non-distinctiveness; lack of cultural distinctiveness in society and in style may be a direct reflection of *Janteloven*.

If we look at the slogans of IKEA and its five pillars, we do not see any reference to culture. Instead, IKEA is rather focused on universal values and aspects of humanity and design. It is obvious that at IKEA, the new universal values such as *functionality, environmentalism* and *sustainability* is the new culture they want to create. Mass production, loss of uniqueness and identity were the criticized aspects of consumerism for long time. Once criticized, nowadays, the *Mid-Century Modern Style, functionalism* and *minimalism* are anew and rising trends all over the world. Maybe these traits are being considered as useful tools for the postmodernist era and being promoted as the new culture; *democratic, universal, social democratic* or even *socialist* aspects of design. Ideological associations between styles and trends may be clearly observed when discourses and styles examined carefully.

This study aimed to investigate relationships among *IKEA design, Janteloven, Scandinavian design, minimalism*, the *Mid-Century Style* and possible ideological connections such as *socialism, Cultural Marxism* and *postmodernism*. The research questions were investigated within this contextual frame. Content analyses of styles and discourses showed that there have been close associations between artistic styles, design and *Janteloven*. As influencing life styles, world views and behavioral traits; *Janteloven* seems to have influence and it is also a deciding factor on artistic style and design in Scandinavia (Research question 1).



Art Nouveau style Chair
(circa 1900)



Wassily Chair 1925-26,
by Marcel Breuer, Bauhaus School

Figure 3. Art Nouveau style vs. Bauhaus functionalism.

Ideological remarks and discourses were examined and it was revealed that artistic styles, trends and design may also be useful tools to procreate values and ideologies (Research question 2). Even certain styles may well be used throughout history by distinct and opposing ideologies conveniently (i.e. modernism, postmodernism). Especially, stylistic trends of furniture, fashion and architecture may be effective tools of proliferating ideologies because objects are the intermediaries in our shared experiences (Research question 3). Stylistic details and cues of certain cultures should be considered carefully since they are the elements of semiotics for cultural inheritance and procreation. Viewing design as only a matter of engineering will result in ignoring richness of cultural experiences behind the everyday objects. Not only individual identity but also cultural identity should be a significant part of design process within this context. Removing all cultural cues during design process for the sake of engineering a new style will usually end up *dry, bloodlessly institutional, minimalist, functionalist, modernist* point (Figure 3). However, this will also be a terminal point in design and will not let further creative progress. This might be why nowadays, *Mid-20th Century Modern Style* is trending as anew. In this study, it is documented that especially Cultural Marxist ideology, social democracy and socialism have special interest in using design and stylistic trends as a vehicle to influence society and individuals to indoctrinate ideology. Further qualitative studies are suggested to investigate ideological associations behind different societal and cultural values.

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Visual Resources:

Figure 2: Chairs (access links in order):

Victorian chair, <https://www.londonfine.co.uk/products/antique-armchair-19th-century-victorian-chair-walnut-needlepoint-circa-1850?variant=12497384538189>

Mid-Century Style chair, <https://www.eurway.com/paradigm-lounge-chair-blue-walnut>

Mid-Century Style chair, <https://emfurn.com/collections/iconic-modern-chairs/products/saarinen-style-tulip-dining-vinyl-side-chair>

Mid-Century Style chair, <https://www.lowes.com/pd/Versanora-Set-of-2-Minimalist-Contemporary-Side-Chair/1002011340>

IKEA chair, <https://www.ikea.com/ca/en/p/fanbyn-chair-white-s49228474/>
Access date: February 10, 2021.

Figure3: ArtNouveauChair, <https://auctions.webbs.co.nz/m/lot-details/index/catalog/149/lot/24381/A-Spectacular-Art-Nouveau-Chair?url=%2Fm%2Fview-auctions%2Fcatalog%2Fid%2F149%3Fcat%3D121%26page%3D1%26view%3Dlist>, Access date: February 10, 2021.

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