

NORDIC VOICES

THE GLOBAL VOICE OF THE
NORDIC REGION

Bodil Tingsby

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Nordic co-operation

Nordic co-operation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, the economy, and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and aims at creating a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe. .

Nordic co-operation seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Common Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

Nordic Council of Ministers

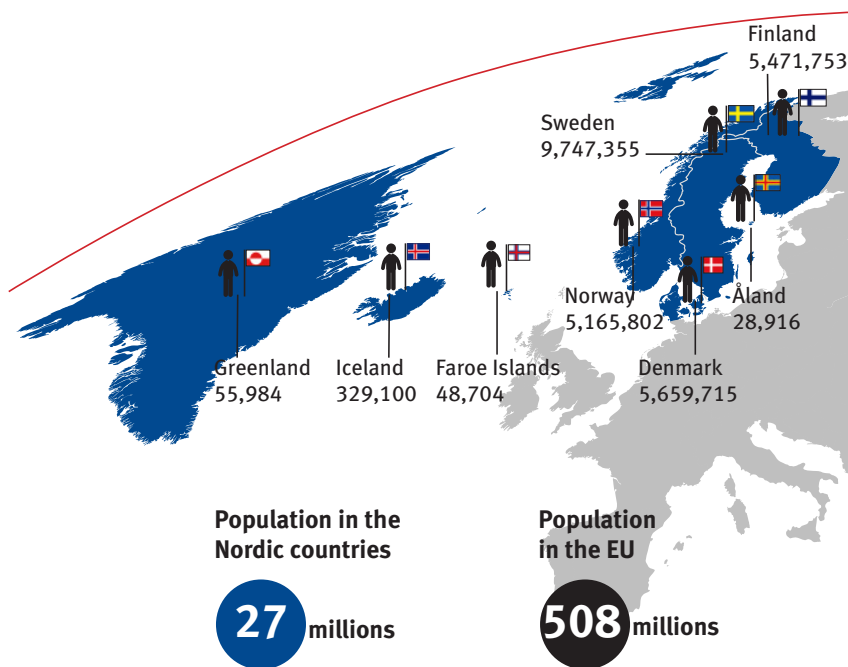
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THE GLOBAL VOICE OF THE
NORDIC
REGION

FOREWORD

Like ripples on the water, Nordic literature and culture are spreading around the globe. The creative industries and other, similar enterprises make use of genuine Nordic values such as sustainability, security, equality, and creativity in their international marketing.

In the pursuit of solutions to the recent financial crisis, the world looked north to the Nordic Model – a model that appears to have combined welfare with competitiveness. And everyone wanted to know how.

What we do know is that the Nordic Model is not something constant or fixed. It is a platform based on a belief in shared social responsibility and equitable distribution – a solid foundation from which we can find solutions to new challenges.

In fact, there is no homogeneous Nordic Model. The Nordic Region is a cocktail of countries that are in many ways very different but which have an ability to zero in on what goes well together, on what unites and strengthens.

Increased global interest in everything Nordic has prompted the Nordic co-operation to develop a common strategy for the international branding of the Nordic Region: *The Nordic Perspective*. This strategy addresses the Nordic Region and its desire to maintain good relations with the rest of the world, because something that small countries like ours have always known is that we're stronger together.

In *Nordic voices – the global voice of the Nordic Region*, the strategy is expanded upon with the thoughts and experiences of people who have succeeded in the international arena for many years, as well as of those who are carrying on the tradition. We hope their stories and the strategy may serve to support all of you in your encounters with the world and help you to act Nordic. Whether it concerns political co-operation, research, investments, trade, tourism, cultural exchanges, or similar, we can all help to make the Nordic voice heard globally.



ANNE BERNER

*Finnish Minister for Nordic Co-operation,
Chairperson of the Nordic Council of Ministers 2016*



HENRIK DAM KRISTENSEN

*President of the Nordic Council 2016
Danish presidency*



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NORDIC VOICES

According to the Secretary-General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, the countries of the Nordic Region are the strongest countries in the UN's 70-year history. "This is a fact that commands respect and strengthens you as a region," he said.

The individuals in this book, all of whom are active in various international arenas, are testament to the great interest in the Nordic Region and the fact that the global Nordic voice is now perhaps more important than ever.

In the aftermath of the economic crisis, there was increased curiosity in the so-called Nordic Model. It had shown that it was able, far better than most others, to regenerate itself, provide welfare, contribute to innovative solutions for sustainable development, and pave the way for creativity within areas such as literature, film, fashion, and food. Who hadn't heard of Nordic noir, Nordic design, Nordic cuisine? And who hadn't wondered how it had all come about?

Times were hard. Nations, organisations, and companies were hungry for good ideas and this seemed like a model that could deliver on a wide scale.

The Nordic governments decided to take the opportunity to further establish the Nordic Region on the map. A common strategy for the international branding of the Nordic Region – *The Nordic Perspective* – was developed, which this book describes. Additionally, this book conveys encounters with people who can contribute to a deeper understanding of what the Nordic Region is and how it can play a role in regional and global development.

The voices in this book belong to people with extensive experience working in major international organisations, people who are carrying the baton forward on its journey, people who are leading the political co-operation in the Nordic Region, and people who perhaps don't realise how Nordic they actually are. Let's call these people the children of the Nordic Model.



MARTTI AHTISAARI

"It doesn't matter that the Nordic countries are all different. We share a set of values based on equality and fairness."



GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND

"Politics has never been idyllic and the Nordic Region is no idyll. The era of globalisation is presenting us with new challenges and we must take this on board. We must dare to tackle things that seem complicated."



JAN ELIASSON

"Over the years we have fought gladly and often, not least Sweden and Denmark. But for over two centuries now we've known that this is a bad idea. Instead we've demonstrated that co-operation, not war, is the source of prosperity."



CHRISTIAN FRIIS BACH

"Now more than ever we need the backing of classic Nordic values such as the equality of all people. We mustn't do what Myrdal wrote about – saying one thing yet doing another."



BJARKE INGELS

"We're adding something Nordic to the world, but undoubtedly the world is adding something to us as well."



DAVID ZAHLE

"It wasn't until we started working internationally that we realised how fundamental it is for Nordic architects to try to think about everyone's access to a view, daylight, and a social life."



STEINUNN SIGURÐADÓTTIR

"The world of fashion is centred on the world's major cities, not a little Greenlandic village of 250 people. Yet more captivating images of fashion have rarely been seen."



SARAH COOPER & NINA GORFER

"The Nordic Region is a great place for creativity."



MARIA STRØMME

"It often takes time for doctoral students from other parts of the world to let go of their faith in authority. In fact, we benefit very little from them initially. It's only when they start thinking for themselves rather than doing what the professor says that they begin to bloom!"



BRITT BOHLIN

"In view of the influx of new cultures we're currently experiencing, it will be exciting to see how our creative expressions and industries change and evolve in the future – and to this end, Nordic politics as well."



HENRIK DAM KRISTENSEN

"The Nordic Model has been criticised time and time again. I remember the oil crisis of the 1970s, the financial crises, and globalisation. Analyses have shown that after each attack, the Nordic Region has emerged from difficult times all the stronger. Altered, but intact."



DAGFINN HØYBRÅTEN

"Trust has been a fundamental reason for the success of the Nordic Region's welfare model. In an open society where people trust one another, there's little need for control. There's freedom for creative thinking and for cross-border co-operation. Trust creates security, and security fosters efficiency."

"What has been termed the Nordic Model is not what we are, but what we do."



THE NORDIC PERSPECTIVE

To discover where the Nordic Region is on the map, turn the globe towards you so that you have a northern perspective. Going from east to west you'll find Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland, and from west to east, the autonomous Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Åland, all united by a vast sea. For a long time the Nordic region slept under the cover of the inland ice, but around 13,000 years ago, some explorers ventured northwards. They came from the south and the east. Their descendants carried on westwards across land and sea. People also came from the west and went to Greenland.

The harsh climate and their hard work gave these northerners a story similar to that of most people. Periods of war, unrest, and starvation were overcome thanks to an indomitable desire to create a good life for themselves and society as a whole. It's people working together that built what is now known as the Nordic Model.

One thing is for sure – the Nordic welfare states would never have been able to take their place among the world's leading economies had it not been for good relations with the rest of the world. Just like today, people came from other countries and brought new ideas and new knowledge. Business and the exchange of experiences, knowledge, and ideas were and continue to be the way forwards.

Each of the Nordic countries is small, yet good at working together. Now we are also able to share a strategy that explains who we are, what we can contribute, and what we would like to develop together with others. This strategy has been titled *The Nordic Perspective*.

The strategy is born

It was in May 2014 that the Nordic prime ministers met in Mývatn in Iceland. At the same time, thousands of migratory birds were arriving to spend the summer in these nutrient-rich wetlands. It was a time when the ministers of the Nordic countries could celebrate their successes, which were reflected in the countries being ranked among the world's best in terms of quality of life, creativity, sustainability, and competitiveness. But since ministers are always thinking ahead, they now wanted to give higher priority to joint Nordic efforts in the global arena. In order to continue being competitive and to maintain a global influence, they had every reason to put their heads together. A task that was picked up by the ministers for Nordic co-operation.

The international perspective has been a prominent aspect of Nordic co-operation since the inception of the Nordic Council – a platform for parliamentarians – in 1952, and within

the Nordic Council of Ministers – a platform for governmental co-operation – since 1971. The central role of the environment, co-operation with the Baltic countries, and involvement in the Arctic are just a few examples of this.

The direction of the prime ministers had touched upon these and other areas, but now they wanted to try a new instrument, one that is sometimes referred to as regional branding.

Efforts to develop a strategy for the international branding of the Nordic Region were already under way, and in October of the same year the strategy was adopted at the Session for Nordic co-operation.

The Nordic Region as a brand

Professional branding can enable even countries and regions to be called brands, a fact that can be hard to chew, but maybe easier to swallow when you hear that it's not directly related to goods and services. Such goods and services do indeed come from somewhere, but they aren't the sum of what creates a country's or a region's brand. This is created by people's actions. By being genuine and demonstrating that you practice what you preach, you gain respect and evoke positive associations in those who listen to your ideas or who buy what you sell.

This is why in terms of its size the Nordic Region plays an exceptionally important role internationally. It is therefore a strong brand, something that has to be nurtured.

Building a strong brand takes time, and the constant nurturing must never lose sight of the brand's roots. Given that in Mývatn they were standing on lava stone formations more than two millennia old, the prime ministers maybe had the perfect perspective for their ideas as to the way forward. The Nordic legacy of many years of co-operation and development would form the basis for future efforts. But new times demand new tools.

The strategy for the international branding of the Nordic Region builds on a common story of the Region and on a set of values that was developed by way of comprehensive anchoring work among several participants not only in the Region itself but also in the rest of the world. Through the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Nordic governments are responsible for developing and co-ordinating the strategy, but it is designed for all kinds of enterprises who want to appear as Nordic in an international context.

*From The Nordic Perspective,
the strategy for the international
branding of the Nordic Region*

THE NORDIC STORY

In the northern part of the Northern Hemisphere lives a relatively small group of people on large areas of land connected by an even larger area of water. This is a way to describe the five countries of the Nordic region – Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Iceland, and Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland – with a combined population of 27 million people. However, to complete the picture, it must be added that the countries have together developed into welfare societies positioned among the leading economies in the world.

The tough climate, with its long and dark winters but also the intensive light of the summer, and the riches of the seas, forests, mountains and fields, have created the special bond between Nordic people and nature. A distinct need for space with room to breathe – on the sea, in the mountains or in the forest – has influenced today's protective attitude to the environment and natural resources.

In the modern Nordic region, we seek sustainable environmental technology solutions, while the sustainability approach also affects the relationship to health and food. Anyone coming to the Nordic region to work, study or carry out research discovers the importance placed by business and society on the ability to lead a human and balanced life, with time for both career and social relationships. And we hope that anyone coming here as a tourist will gladly become an ambassador for Nordic nature and culture. The relationship to nature, to the conditions imposed by the Nordic space, also features widely in literature, music, art, design and architecture. Art and creativity are really what are now helping to put the Nordic region on the world map, both the traditional Nordic and the one influenced by the meeting with the new, modern and increasingly multicultural Nordic region. Demand for what is sometimes called Nordic Noir in literature and films has never been greater.

Our common history is far from conflict-free, but today we can celebrate more than 200 years of peace between our countries. Give and take, finding pragmatic solutions that benefit all parties, is a trade mark, and we are proud that prominent people from the Nordic region are able to contribute in current mediation processes between opposing parties in conflicts. The Nordic countries aim to show engagement and presence in peacekeeping organisations, and we believe that aid in solidarity with vulnerable people creates a better world. In Norway, the Peace Prize in memory of Alfred Nobel is awarded every year. An ability to constantly reform in order to meet new challenges is a characteristic of the Nordic Model. Changes in society as a whole, such as The Reformation and popular move-

ments, including the workers' movement, came first in historical terms, but soon everyone was supporting the model. The Nordic Model is characterised today by a public sector that provides its citizens with welfare services and a social safety net. The labour market is highly regulated by collective agreements between labour market parties. Combined with healthy state finances, the model has enabled a high and equal standard of living, high and gender-equal levels of employment, and extensive investments in education and research. The aim is a healthy life with opportunities for development, for both the individual and society.

Naturally, we are not alone in finding new welfare solutions but, nevertheless, the Nordic Model is often cited as a role model, a "super model".¹¹ One eye-catching example is how the high level of employment among women contributes to both gender equality and a high standard of living. The security provided by the social safety net is also said to promote innovative power in the Nordic region. People dare to and can think in new ways, because their entire existence is not at stake. Free education lays the foundation for a high and broad level of expertise, and a world-leading focus on research enables us to live in modern and high-tech communities up here in the north.

It was committed people who formed associations and developed democracy. In small societies with many associations, like those in the Nordic region, flat hierarchies could be built up, and the communal construction of the welfare society required openness, transparency and freedom to express opinions verbally and in writing. The transparency is the fundamental explanation for the low level of corruption. The openness has generated trust in other people, in politicians and in the legal system – a trust that is unique in the world.

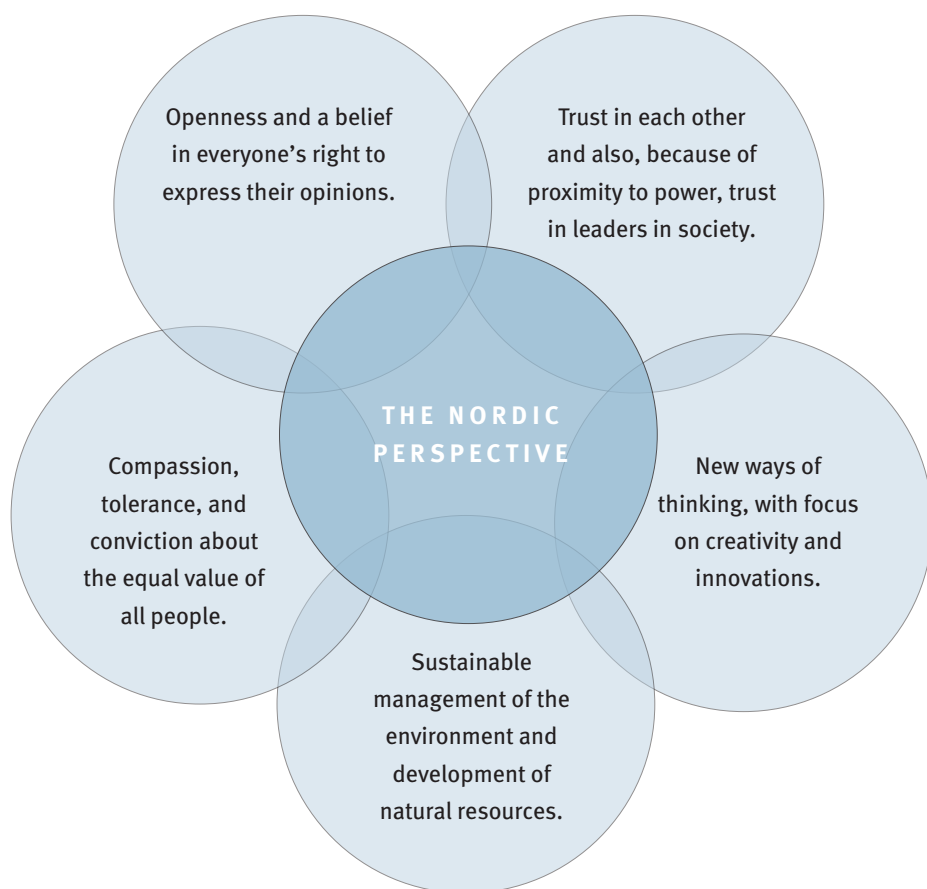
Although each Nordic country has gone, and continues to go, its own way – for example, three countries are EU members and the others are not, three countries are members of NATO and the others are not – there is an unwavering desire to work together. Here too, the popular movements were first off the mark, when the Nordic Association was formed at the start of the last century. After two world wars, the feeling of closeness and interdependence was strengthened, and formal co-operation began between governments and parliamentarians. Quickly, and long before the European collaboration, this gave the Nordic region a passport union, a common labour market, and coordinated solutions for social security.

We have not just built welfare in collaboration with each other, but also with others. How could small countries like ours otherwise exist and survive? We have always been, and always will be, dependent on each other's knowledge, goods and friendship.

We have long experience of collaborating to improve conditions, and of building a societal model that offers people a dignified and meaningful life with opportunities for development. We believe we have something to offer those who are also looking for solutions to the challenges ahead. This concerns everything from ideas, knowledge, and sharing of experiences, to innovative and sustainable solutions.

It has been said that we have come this far by being Nordic, so that, quite simply, is what we should continue to be – Nordic. Naturally, our location on the planet and our history have provided us with our own and unique perspective. We perhaps do the same things as many others, but we do them our way, from a joint platform that defines our particular strengths:

- *Openness* and a belief in everyone's right to express their opinions.
- *Trust* in each other and also, because of proximity to power, trust in leaders in society.
- *Compassion*, tolerance, and conviction about the equal value of all people.
- *Sustainable management* of the environment and development of natural resources.
- *New ways of thinking*, with focus on creativity and innovations.



THE STRATEGY'S PRIORITY AREAS

The foundation for the branding strategy was laid with a story about the Nordic Region and a bouquet of shared values. Furthermore, areas were to be identified that could benefit from co-operation. Each country already had its own priorities for its relations with the world, and the Nordic strategy did not set out to compete with these. Quite the opposite, in fact. Co-operation would give the individual strategies greater value.

The Nordic Model

At first it was easy. Everyone was convinced that the *Nordic Model* should be the ace that we show the world. This is the foundation we stand on and the very essence of the Nordic welfare society's identity.

The central idea – of a society that involves everyone and remunerates citizens for their participation and share of the responsibility with equitable prosperity – has long been questioned and challenged, yet has shown itself to be robust enough to result in good, long-term quality of life and competitiveness. We should signal to the world that we also want to address any future strain on this model, and on society as a whole, as part of a global co-operation. Everything will be increasingly connected in the future world.

Trust in authority and between people is a topic that is brought up several times in this book. This, according to researchers, is the basis of the Nordic Model, and perhaps it is therefore also its most vulnerable component. Can the state still be trusted if there's no longer enough money, despite high levels of taxation?

So far, the story of the model has been about finding solutions – new solutions. Within the Nordic co-operation right now there are efforts to bolster the individual countries' plans to rejuvenate welfare. More specifically, this could concern looking at how resources for specialised and expensive medical care can be distributed. Demographic developments in our part of the world are expected to jeopardise future opportunities for good healthcare for everyone, and the Nordic way forward must be linked to the path chosen by the rest of the world.

Openness, transparency, and the world's lowest level of corruption are said to form one of the cornerstones of trust. In 2016 we celebrate the world's oldest freedom of the press legislation. It was 250 years ago that the citizens of Sweden and Finland (at that time one and the same country) were first able to demand greater access to public documents. What happens to freedom of expression and law and order in an increasingly radicalised and polarised society? This is yet another fundamental question the relevance of which stretches much further than the borders of the Nordic Region.

The Nordic Region as a knowledge society

The Region is investing widely in education, a very large share on research, and is one of the world's most innovative regions. But human resources need to be replenished. This is why the next priority is *the Nordic Region as a knowledge society*.

Once again, demographics crop up. A shortage of young people creates a need for a brain gain. One magnet is study and research environments with flat hierarchies, and another is a social security system that allows both sexes to combine family life and a career. A third is that the Nordic countries, in principle, represent a single market for studying, research, and work. This makes it easy to begin your stay in the Region in one country and to continue your career in another. This is thanks to the Nordic co-operation.

The countries of the Nordic Region cannot and will not demand that those who come to the Region for their education or research careers remain in the Region forever. Rather, this is seen as a contribution to higher levels of education globally, as people return home with increased knowledge under their belts.

Nordic creativity and innovation

The rationale behind having *Nordic creativity and innovation* as the third priority is the hope of replenishing not only financial resources but also human capital. Sweden accounts for the most patents in the Nordic Region, while Denmark is best at turning research findings into something tangible. Overall, more innovations need to be turned into actual products and services.

In areas such as the healthcare, green technology, and the creative industries, there is a high level of inventiveness just waiting for a chance to create new types of work. Production conversion and new economic instruments can further serve to reduce a threat to welfare – unemployment.

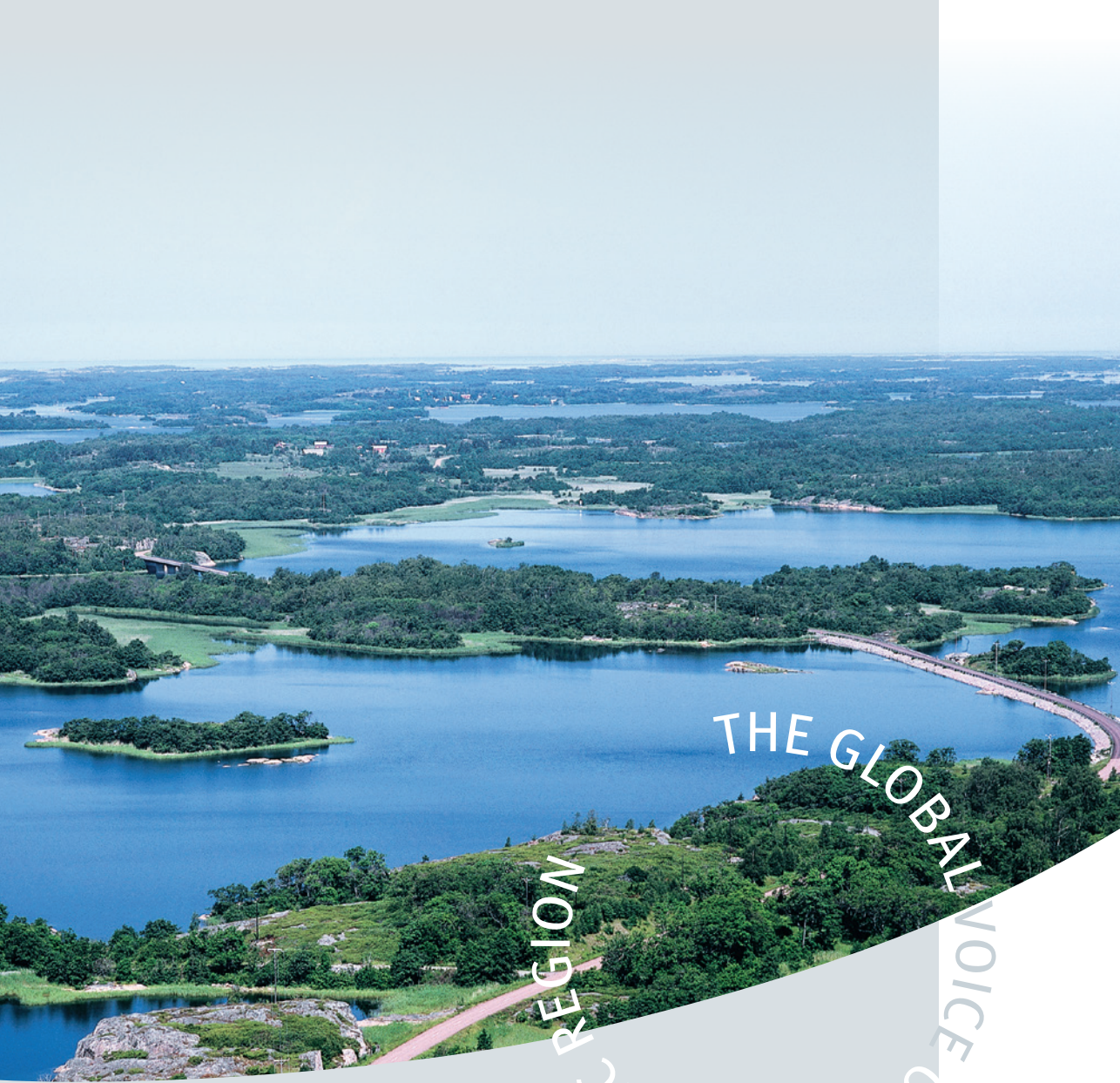
Nordic culture and nature

There's no shame in immediately thinking of the tourism industry when considering priority number four, *Nordic culture and nature*. Tourism is a growing source of income, and few areas are as well adapted to Nordic co-operation. A desire to see the icebergs of Greenland may then trigger curiosity about Norway's fjords, while experiencing a sauna at one of Finland's thousands of lakes may open a tourist's eyes to Nordic Design. Similarly, a visit to Astrid Lindgren's world may result in a desire to find out more about the role of children in Nordic society, and so on. Gaining a greater insight into one aspect of the Nordic Region may make people curious about the Region as a whole and ultimately serve to open the door to increased trade and the international exchange of ideas. If the Nordic Council gets what it is hoping for, a new common website for Nordic tourism will soon be launched.

But the heading Nordic culture and nature says more than this. Neither tourism nor the way in which other industries are run in the Nordic Region may have an adverse effect on

natural or cultural landscapes. Northerners, who have historically depended on a life lived in harmony with nature, are trying to keep an eye on this.

Nothing explains who we are better than culture does, and the strategy seeks to convey just how important culture is to openness and the collective good. It can contribute both to understanding between people and to tolerance as a weapon against the enemy of all development – war.



THE GLOBAL VOICE OF THE NORDIC REGION

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When UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says that the Nordic countries are the strongest in the history of the UN, he is, of course, not referring to the traditional measures of a country's power. Rather, he is speaking in terms of a strong and committed voice for peace, development, human equality, and practising what you preach.

No guaranteed peace

The fact that the countries have co-existed peacefully for more than two centuries is unique, but not obvious. In 1814, after the long years of Europe's fervent Napoleonic wars, a lacerated Nordic Region began to assume its current form. The path to the present day has been plagued by world wars, civil wars, and internal tensions.

Relationships between Denmark and the autonomous the Faroe Islands and Greenland, as well as between Finland and the autonomous Åland, are still not entirely free of conflict. Yet for every conflict that arose on this path, peaceful solutions were found, albeit once or twice through the League of Nations. It wasn't until 1921 that Åland was transferred to Finland and not to Sweden. Only in 2009 a reform was adopted that gave Greenland more autonomy from Denmark.

On the small island state of Åland there is a Peace Institute that has studied how developments towards increased autonomy have taken place peacefully. A new study, *The Nordic autonomous regions from a peace perspective*, argues that there is something to be drawn from such experiences in this troubled world. The key words seem to be "the desire to stick to a compromise over time."

Voices for peace and justice

The people you will now meet were clearly in Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's thoughts when he wrote the speech on the keen support for peace and justice in the Nordic Region.

Martti Ahtisaari, Gro Harlem Brundtland, and Jan Eliasson are three giants of politics, diplomacy, and international engagement who can make difficult situations sound so simple, if only there is the will to resolve them.

Having the resolve and being engaged are two key themes for Christian Friis Bach as well – one of those carrying the baton further along on its journey. But he is worried. Worried that the global voice of the Nordic Region will no longer be loud enough.



GLOBAL VOICE OF THE NORDIC REG

INJUSTICE BEHIND EVERY CONFLICT

MARTTI AHTISAARI

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“We in the Nordic Region have a duty to encourage the world,” says Nobel Peace Prize laureate Martti Ahtisaari. “In hindsight, it may seem as though we had extremely good conditions for building a welfare society, but that’s not true. At the beginning of the last century, we were among the poorest and most underdeveloped nations in Europe, but we were able to make a change.” Then he makes a remark that fits so well with what his Nordic colleagues say in this book: “It’s easy, if you have the will to do it.”

– It doesn’t matter that the Nordic countries are all different. We share a set of values based on equality and fairness.

If you’re losing faith in the possibility of a better world, it helps to meet a man like Martti Ahtisaari. During his Finnish childhood, memories of the bloody, brutal civil war of 1918 were fresh and real. From his office at the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) in Helsinki, he watches the ferries sailing to and from the sea fortress of Suomenlinna, which is more than just a reminder of Swedish and later Russian rule or an attraction on UNESCO’s list of world heritage sites. This is where prisoners in the civil war were tortured and executed in their thousands, if they hadn’t yet died of hunger or disease.

The situation of the Finnish people of that time is comparable with the situation that many others are finding themselves in today. Two parties within the country clashed as part of a larger conflict, with bitterness and hatred ensuing. Gradually, over the decades that followed, Finland was able to develop a welfare system that is now part of the much-admired Nordic Model. Most important of all is that trust was restored between the people and power, and between the people themselves.

It was his ability to manage conflicts and crises that won Martti Ahtisaari the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008. After a long career in diplomacy and mediation that began in Tanzania in the 1970s and went on to encompass other continents and countries, such as Iraq and Indonesia, Martti Ahtisaari served as the UN’s chief negotiator in Kosovo up until the year of the peace prize. He has now brought along his wealth of experience as a colleague of Gro Harlem Brundtland in the group of world leaders known as *The Elders*.

During his six years as Finnish president during the 1990s, world citizen Martti Ahtisaari revitalised his country’s role on the international stage thanks to the positive referendum outcome for Finland’s membership in the EU and his many global contacts. In other

words, he continued along the path of the Nordic tradition of international engagement, which began after the Second World War.

“Nordic diplomats of my generation became like a family in the 60s and 70s. We were driven by our commitment to a better world for everyone, but our meetings around the world also strengthened the sense of ‘Nordic’. I still meet up with them every year – Thorvald Stoltenberg and the others.”

Martti Ahtisaari knows too much about the world to say that it would be better if only everyone did as the Nordic countries do. “It’s not that simple, but we can try to inspire others.”

He has come across the claim that the Nordic countries’ successful co-operation in the construction of the so-called Nordic welfare model is down to their great similarities. He understands how, from the outside, a geographical cluster of small countries that share roughly the same history and similar languages may be perceived as homogeneous, but if one delves more deeply, then the historical conflicts and cultural and linguistic minorities, as well as the differences in forms of government and attitudes towards issues such as migration, all come to the fore. For years, Sweden has been the most open to the rest of the world, and its current share “per capita” of foreign-born residents is higher than in the UK.

“It doesn’t matter that the Nordic countries are all different. We share a set of values based on equality and fairness.”

When in this context we discuss the future – the ultra-nationalist tendencies emerging in the wake of globalisation in general, and specifically the challenges of the movement of refugees and integration – he laconically replies:

“We have seen these tendencies before, and they stuck around for a while.”

His taciturn Finnish tone conveys his seriousness. I notice his emphasis on each syllable when he talks about how vital it now is that the political leadership takes an honest look at itself and asks whether it has treated people correctly and whether it has listened well enough to understand what needs to be done so that everyone feels they are a part of the social model that has actually proved that inclusion benefits everyone.

“It is not only others but also our own politicians who would now benefit from acting a little more Nordic.”

With six decades of experience in the crisis regions of the world, Martti stresses that inequity lies behind every conflict. Poverty and the need for economic development may play a role in this, as may a lack of democratic governance. Addressing both is key. These efforts lead to long-term good only if they are administered by responsible politicians who have their sights set on equitable distribution. “The decisive factor is how assets are distributed and how democracy is used,” he says, adding that the Nordic Model is a good example. It has not been developed in a vacuum but through hard work and the earnest commitment of politicians, civil society, and labour market participants.

“The Nordic enigma” has proven to be a fruitful marriage between a market economy and high taxation. The majority of reports, and reality itself, show that the fair and equita-

ble distribution of a nation's resources not only supports good health, long life, and a good quality of life, but it also supports competitiveness.

Life in the Nordic countries is far from problem-free. The Region is part of a world that is undergoing fundamental change and, just like everyone else, it is constantly facing new challenges. If we are ever to achieve global justice, we need to share our experiences, assimilate those of others, and learn from each other.

In the Nordic Region, strong states have been paired with an engaged civil society that demands transparency and participation. Openness, order, and clarity have created a sense of trust which scholars now regard as unique. This trust is thought to contribute to the efficiency that has helped the Nordic countries to cope with economic crises relatively well. Societies based on trust between people and power can more readily adapt to rapid change. People who perceive that society is fair are more prepared to pitch in.

Martti Ahtisaari returns to the example of Finland. From the rubble of war sprouted a “universal” social policy that aimed to give everyone, regardless of their background, the prospect of a good life. Investing in the schooling and health of every child would give them the opportunity to contribute in the future as adults. In contrast with the course of development in many other countries, the Finnish people's access to education, healthcare, and other forms of social security should not depend on membership in any group. Tax revenues should be fairly distributed to benefit everyone, as well as to investments that set the nation's wheels in motion. Unemployment was and still remains the worst enemy of welfare.



Martti Ahtisaari's acceptance speech upon being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.
Photo: John McConnico

The open exchange of experiences within Nordic co-operation has contributed to the countries' ability to detect risks and find solutions early on, not only for the benefit of the individual countries but for the benefit of the Region as a whole. This pragmatic approach has constantly changed and prepared the foundation of the Nordic Model for new challenges.

"Economically and politically, the countries have not followed the same path, but the Nordic welfare model is not about party politics," Martti Ahtisaari emphasises. "It's about giving everyone an equal chance. Then it's up to the individual to make the most of this chance and of their life."

This is what Martti has done. Despite his simple upbringing in what is now Russian Vyborg, he still had the opportunity to go to elementary school and on to university, eventually to become a Nobel Prize winner and president.



Photo: Johannes Jansson

MARTTI AHTISAARI

Born to a Finnish mother and father with Norwegian roots, Viborg, Finland (Russia) (1937)

Elementary school teacher (1956)

Aid worker in Pakistan (1960–63)

Various roles in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (1965–73)

Finnish ambassador to Tanzania (1973–76)

Development issues in the service of the UN and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, particularly in Namibia (1977–1993)

President of Finland (1994–2000)

Founder of the Crisis Management Initiative, CMI (2000)

Nobel Peace Prize (2008)

DID YOU KNOW ...

... that public schools were introduced in Denmark in 1814, in Sweden in 1842, in Norway in 1889, in Finland in 1898 and in Iceland in 1907. The oldest act on education is Norwegian and dates to 1739

... that the oldest act on healthcare in the Nordic Region is Swedish and dates to 1874. In Denmark, a medical fund for those on low incomes was established in 1892

... that general paediatric healthcare was introduced in Denmark in 1927, in Sweden and Finland in 1937, in Iceland in 1944 and in Norway in 1972 (paediatric healthcare in Norway had been managed previously by way of non-profit organisations from the start of the century).



THE GLOBAL VOICE OF THE NORDIC REGION

SUSTAINABILITY AND EQUALITY ARE WORTHWHILE

GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND

“We Elders have seen huge changes in our lifetimes. We know that there’s an alternative, that something done wrong can be put right.”

This is Gro Harlem Brundtland’s motto for the group of world leaders of whom she is the vice chair, *The Elders*. And she knows what she’s talking about, this woman who has worked tirelessly for a humane and sustainable future, and who continues to do so. “We can overcome anything if we do our homework,” responds Gro when asked what we can do that will most benefit the future.

Hard work continues to imbue Gro Harlem Brundtland’s life, and this despite her being well into her golden years. Among her many roles she is a founding member of *The Elders*, a group of world leaders who in their twilight years have decided to continue working for peace and human rights.

The group was founded by Nelson Mandela, led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and is now chaired by former Secretary-General of the UN Kofi Annan. Gro Harlem Brundtland’s involvement has included efforts in the Middle East, Myanmar (Burma), and – most recently – participation in the meeting that formulated the UN’s new sustainable development goals.

Gro Harlem Brundtland will forever be associated with the phrase “sustainable development”. In fact, she is sometimes referred to as *the godmother of sustainable development*. During a break between two of her three terms as Norwegian Prime Minister, she was appointed by the UN General Assembly to lead the efforts that resulted in the report *Our Common Future*. Few remember the title, as it came to be known as The Brundtland Report, forming the basis for the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro and coining the term sustainable development.

The report made the socio-economic perspective become part of global environmental work. Economic development must be part of, and not a threat to, sustainable development.

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– Politics has never been idyllic and the Nordic Region is no idyll. The era of globalisation is presenting us with new challenges and we must take this on board. We must dare to tackle things that seem complicated.

Yet this started back home in the Nordic Region. With her background as a doctor, and driven by keen political involvement, she became Norwegian Minister for the Environment for a five-year period in 1974. Five years that were to become very dramatic. In 1977 a bore hole in the North Sea sprang a leak. It took just over seven arduous days before a valve arrived on site and *Bravo* (Ekofisk B) stopped spurting out oil. These events shaped the environment minister's perspective that economic development and the environment had to go hand in hand.

She always returns to how central it is to both demonstrate and prove that reforms pay off. Political will is important, but it is only with the help of facts and figures that things get done. *The Brundtland Report* was able to convince the world that it was worth investing in people, the environment, and sustainable development for all.

This is also how Gro Harlem Brundtland pushed the issue of gender equality. In 1981 she became the first woman prime minister in Norway and the Nordic Region, and she was the centre of attention when she appointed women to eight out of 18 cabinet posts. "If you really want to achieve something in politics, you have to be a role model." Gro Harlem Brundtland says this as often as she points out how crucial it is to work doggedly to unearth the facts. Facts that convince.

"There are those who don't believe in gender equality, who don't see it as an integral human right. This is why it's so good that our Nordic Model both demonstrates and proves that a gender-equal society pays off both from a human perspective and a purely socio-economic perspective."

She remembers the 1980s, when the US in particular pointed to the Nordic countries as an example of how competitiveness was undermined by a system of strong state governance. It was indeed a difficult time, but she says that it had nothing to do with the Region's social model. It was a time of international crisis – the price of oil had plummeted, Norway had borrowed too much, and interest rates were high. These were hard times that demanded hard work. Development had to be financed, and the cost of welfare had to be paid.

"But we did it."

By working together with the other Nordic countries, Norway managed to protect the Nordic model of welfare, and then in conjunction with the economic crisis in 2008, international opinion changed direction once again. Many world leaders were interested in how having an egalitarian society can be a competitive advantage.

Gro Harlem Brundtland says she has never doubted the advantages of the Nordic Model, recalling that even before 2008 the OECD had used statistics-based facts to demonstrate that the Nordic countries were leading the way in competitiveness. "Yet it has required endless debate to convince the economic sphere of this," she says.

"It is positive and important that Norway and the other Nordic countries are able to demonstrate that an egalitarian social model is economically beneficial, but for me as a politician the driving force has never been the economy itself. It has been the struggle for a just society."

More and more countries are constructing models similar to the Nordic model, with all the ingredients that come together to form social security. Gro Harlem Brundtland also recalls the constant development that the model has undergone. As a politician, she belonged to Norway's social democratic Labour Party, yet social development occurred across party lines and in co-operation with the actors in the labour market. She gladly talks about the exceptionally effective co-operation she had during the crisis years with Carl Bildt, the conservative Prime Minister of Sweden.

Something which economists point out as being particularly unique to the Nordic Region is trust – trust between the people, and between the people and those in power. Gro Harlem Brundtland also speaks of this as a pillar of Nordic society. To this she adds words such as *balance* and *harmony* between social actors. Politics and the labour market meet in an open and responsible debate in the Nordic countries. The various interests are bandied about until solutions can be found for a balanced and inclusive policy by virtue of neutral and common numerical data. It is through this pragmatic approach that decisions can be reached and progress made.

Although there are elements of this thinking in many countries today, Gro Harlem Brundtland, like many others, highlights the unique ability of the Nordic countries to work together with a focus on common interests. As prime minister she lost the battle for Norwegian membership of the EU, although this, as she points out now, is perhaps why regional Nordic co-operation now means so much. And thanks to this, we have a solid foundation for perpetuating our strong international voice. “But,” she says, “this means we must pre-



Gro Harlem Brundtland visits an orphanage in Myanmar (Burma). Photo: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Norway

pare together to present a common voice – something which requires the genuine support of the prime ministers and, once again, hard work.”

“Politics has never been idyllic , and the Nordic Region is no idyll. The era of globalisation is presenting us with new challenges and we must take this on board. We must dare to tackle things that seem complicated.” These are the profound concluding remarks from a woman who has truly stood tall during tough times.

After an intense and exciting interview, my thoughts are left to set sail. As I take the bus home from where Gro Harlem Brundtland lives on Bygdøy, outside central Oslo, I see signs pointing the way to the Viking Ship Museum. The woman whom I've just spoken with across her kitchen table, and who is known as the Mother of the nation, also shares an island with the Oseberg ship. It was in this ship that the woman believed to be the grandmother of Harald Fairhair was found. In my mind I can hear the beating wings of history.



GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND:

Born to a Swedish mother and Norwegian father,
Oslo, Norway (1939)

Norway's Minister for the Environment (1974–79)

Leader of the Norwegian Labour Party (1981–92)

Norwegian Prime Minister (1981–81, 1986–89, 1990–96)

Director-General of the World Health Organization (1998–2003)

UN special envoy for climate change (2007–10)

The Elders, Vice-President (since 2007)

Photo: Utrikesministeriet, Norge

DID YOU KNOW...

... that the Nordic economies have almost doubled in size since 1995, while carbon dioxide emissions have fallen by almost 20 percent

... that the Nordic countries are 25 years ahead of the rest of the world when it comes to reducing carbon dioxide emissions from the production of electricity

... that the Nordic countries are the best equipped to achieve UN sustainable development goals.

DID YOU KNOW...

... that the number of fathers taking parental leave to care for their newborn children has more than doubled in the Nordic Region since 1996

... that Iceland, Norway, and Sweden have already reached the Europe 2020 Strategy target of 75% of women being active in the labour market

... that despite the equality of the Nordic Region, there are considerably more men in parliament, on boards of directors and holding senior management positions.



THE GLOBAL VOICE OF THE NORDIC REGION

NOT WITHOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

JAN ELIASSON

With time we can reach a height where we will see the wood for the trees. At the age of 75, UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson is zipping through the organisation's corridors between meetings to squeeze in an interview with the Nordic Council of Ministers. At the moment his work is dealing with new global sustainable development goals, long-term thinking, and seeing not obstacles but opportunities.

Much of Jan Eliasson's professional life has taken place on the international stage. He ranks just a shade below his Nordic predecessors Trygve Lie and Dag Hammarskjöld, both former Secretary-Generals, yet he beats them hands down when it comes to time and experience.

Mediator, UN Ambassador, Swedish Ambassador to the US, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and now Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's hand-picked specialist in sustainability and crisis management on an extended mandate.

From Jan Eliasson's American perspective, the Nordic Model has become part of the current US election campaign, with front-running Democratic candidates Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders speaking of the model as a possible solution to some of America's welfare problems. This stands in contrast with the past, when the Nordic countries were described as watered-down versions of the communist system offering little by way of individual freedom.

Jan Eliasson equates the interest in the Nordic Region with the ebb and flow of the tide. In many respects, we set the tone for international debate in the 60s and 70s. Interest began to wane in the late 80s, but now it is booming once again. With the onset of the economic crisis of 2008, the world turned its eyes to the Nordic Model and what it stands for.

This interest and increased awareness are also evident around the UN negotiating table. In discussions on sustainability targets and the need for a transparent and efficient

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– Over the years we have fought gladly and often, not least Sweden and Denmark. But for over two centuries now we've known that this is a bad idea. Instead we've demonstrated that co-operation, not war, is the source of prosperity.

public sector within a sound and sustainable society, Jan Eliasson is not the only one citing the example of the Nordic countries. He states that he is merely being forthright about the Nordic countries' record. To prove that the model is possible in even the most vulnerable parts of the world, he reminds us in the interview that in the 1920s, the Nordic countries were among the poorest in Europe. Then, in the 50s and 60s, the Nordic welfare states were developed, in which respect Jan Eliasson emphasises three main aspects:

- Development of an infrastructure that also generated work.
- Construction of a constitutional state and a system of fair and equal distribution.
- Effective, honest institutions which people were prepared to pay taxes to support.

All three aspects are reflected in the UN's 17 new global sustainable development goals, and on the crackling phone line he stresses how important an effective public sector is. It is in everyone's interests, even private interests, and it creates the all-important trust in the state and society we live in.

"Trust not only creates sound and secure nation states, but it also creates peace," Jan Eliasson says, and he points to his role as a mediator in regions such as Darfur, the Balkans, and the Middle East in relation to his Swedish upbringing. "While travel between many of the countries on our planet is difficult and dangerous, it is not only possible but also a pleasure to travel to a neighbouring Nordic country – to a cabin in Norway, by ferry to Finland, to the hot springs of Iceland, or even to see a ballet performance in Denmark." Jan's choice of examples makes it clear that he has fond memories of them all.

As a mediator, Jan Eliasson has first-hand experience of what a lack of neighbourliness can lead to, and he believes that good neighbourly relations are not only key to develop-



United Nations, New York. Photo: UN Photo/Andrea Brizzi

ment, but also to international peace and understanding. Every crisis has a regional dimension, and when neighbours begin working together, we can end up with a completely different situation.

Here too he refers to the history of the Nordic Region.

“Over the years we have fought gladly and often, not least Sweden and Denmark. But for over two centuries now we’ve known that this is a bad idea. Instead we’ve demonstrated that co-operation, not war, is the source of prosperity.”

As President of the UN General Assembly, Jan Eliasson played a part in formulating the phrase:

“There is no peace without development, there is no development without peace, and there is no peace and development without human rights.”

The legendary mediation and extensive peacekeeping activities of the Nordic countries have rested firmly on these three pillars – pillars on which Jan Eliasson wants us to focus more strongly. He refers not least to Martti Ahtisaari’s key efforts in the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), but also to the many years of hard work by the Nordic countries. He feels that there is an awful lot more to do to prevent and resolve conflicts.

One challenge that Jan Eliasson sees the world facing lies within the Nordic Region’s own latitudes. In the Arctic. Due to climate change the ice is melting, sea levels are rising, and transport routes between Europe and Asia are becoming shorter. The ice sheets are receding and exposing natural resources in the form of exploitable minerals. The Arctic is facing major geo-economic and geopolitical change. This is an area where the Nordic countries must co-operate so that valuable experiences can be made use of. This requires



Jan Eliasson, UN, Photo: UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

the complete and expert Nordic involvement in the environment, human rights, and international legal system.

A pensive pause arises at this point in the conversation. And afterwards I understand that Jan Eliasson, with his wealth of experience, can see it coming. He can see that the situation within the Nordic countries is increasingly likely to need conflict resolution skills. It will not be merely a case of travelling to foreign trouble spots and then be able to return home to safety.

“This is a politically sensitive issue,” he says thoughtfully, and it is something he wants to emphasise, adding that “the survival of an effective and fair Nordic Region hinges on how successfully we can manage migration policy.”



JAN ELIASSON:

Born in Gothenburg, Sweden (1940)
to a dressmaker and metalworker
Swedish ambassador to the UN (1988–92)
Swedish Cabinet Secretary (1994–2000)
Swedish Ambassador to Washington (2000–05)
President of the UN General Assembly (2005–06)
Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs (2006)
Deputy Secretary-General of the UN (since 2012)

UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

DID YOU KNOW ...

... that the UN's first two Secretary-Generals were from the Nordic Region, Trygve Lie of Norway and Dag Hammarskjöld of Sweden

... that The last two Secretary Generals of NATO are from the Nordic Region, Anders Fogh Rasmussen of Denmark and Jens Stoltenberg of Norway.



THE GLOBAL VOICE OF THE
NORDIC REGION

NEW TIMES REQUIRE FRESH NORDIC EFFORTS

CHRISTIAN FRIIS BACH

Given their size, the Nordic countries command a formidable international position.

Within the UN, Christian Friis Bach represents the third generation of powerful Nordic voices. In his opinion, the Nordic belief in international co-operation matters more than ever. “We mustn’t jeopardise this now,” he says, sincerely worried about current events.

Christian Friis Bach’s career may seem colourful. But his background in agronomics, journalism, international economics, and farming, together with his strong commitment to organisations for the environment, aid, and human rights, and his Danish ministerial post for development aid, has paved the way to his current role as Under-Secretary-General of the UN, or more precisely, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe, UNECE. Yet this does not prevent his work from also involving the US and Canada in the West, and Russia in the East.

He thus presides over an organisation that contributes to global development that is not only economically sustainable but also technically and socially sustainable by way of co-operation and the sharing of experience. Part of his job is implementing what the nations of the UN have agreed at major conferences and meetings. “And this must be managed rationally,” he says when the conversation turns to the UN’s need for efficiency.

The Nordic Region has made concrete contributions to development in areas such as trade, transport, labour, and the environment. He cites the convention on air pollution, called the Espoo Convention, which requires countries to share information and technological development to reduce long-distance air pollution, and obligates countries to inform their neighbours of any plans that may have an environmental effect. He also mentions the Aarhus Convention, which safeguards citizens’ rights to transparency and to having an influence on environmental decisions at all levels. The two conventions bear the names of Nordic cities – Espoo in Finland and Århus in Denmark.

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– Now more than ever we need the backing of classic Nordic values such as the equality of all people. We mustn’t do what Myrdal wrote about – saying one thing yet doing another.

“The belief that dialogue combined with practical and pragmatic co-operation is the path to peace and prosperity is a classic Nordic idea,” Christian says. “Talk to one another, learn from one another, travel to one another, trade with one another.” In his case, this takes form and can be measured in the number of conventions, norms, and standards ratified, and in the statistics on technological and economic development. But it is based on the values of fairness and respect for the equality of everyone. Everyone is entitled to a share of the pie, and everyone is responsible for a healthy and sustainable future.

The then Norwegian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Trygve Lie, was the UN’s first Secretary-General in 1946. The following year the Swede Gunnar Myrdal was the first person appointed to assume the role now occupied by the Dane Christian Friis Bach. Gunnar Myrdal received the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for his doctrine on historical works in economics. To put it in plain language, his work can be said to link economic theory with the policy of creating a sociologically orientated economy. More broadly, his books drew attention to the problems of the Third World, while his pioneering *An American Dilemma* (1938–44) problematises the collision between racist practices in the US and the fundamental American values of freedom, equality, and fairness before the law.

Christian Friis Bach points out that this is a typically Nordic way of administering an economy that is politically engaged and keenly supportive of sustainability, especially in a year when the UN’s new sustainability goals and climate change negotiations in Paris (COP21) are high on the agenda, and when the world is faced with an unprecedented number of refugees – 60 million.

“Now more than ever we need the backing of classic Nordic values such as the equality of all people. We mustn’t do what Myrdal wrote about – saying one thing yet doing another.”

Christian Friis Bach was sent to this year’s Session of the Nordic Council in Reykjavik, Iceland, by the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, to convey the image of the Nordic countries as the strongest in the UN’s 70-year history. In his speech he conveyed Ban Ki-moon’s compliment: “The common Nordic support for human rights commands respect and strengthens you as a region.”

As his speech continued, we heard how Under-Secretary-General Friis Bach encouraged the Assembly to roll up its sleeves. “The power of strong nations such as the Nordic countries stems in part from co-operation in managing situations within the countries themselves, as well as from their ability to take the lead on the international stage.” He suggested that the Nordic Region, with its organisational skills and pragmatism, would decide to initiate a holistic approach to managing the global refugee crisis. “No country can do this alone. Without sustainable joint solutions, the migration crisis risks becoming a crisis in global solidarity.”

The encouraging words from the podium may not be contentious, but they are in any case met with doubt and concern in our special interview. He is unable to provide numbers, but from where he is standing in Geneva, he sees a Nordic trend of evading a

global perspective. Of lying low and acting too cautiously within the growing groups of nations that are all vying for time to make themselves heard. Historically strong players have been joined by participants from the BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India, and China – as well as South Africa and the newest members of the EU. These nations are taking their seats around the negotiating table and are demanding a radically different influence than what they had just a few years ago.

“I don’t think it’s dawned on the Nordic countries how small they’re becoming.”

“The world is changing at a furious pace,” Christian says, “and new times require fresh efforts.” “It’s impressive how nations such as the Nordic countries have sometimes been able to sing in tune just by gathering for the occasional lunch ahead of meetings. They have become acutely aware of each other’s commonalities thanks to long-term and continuous co-operation. But that’s no longer enough. Greater co-ordination is needed in order to systematically appear as a bloc and make one’s voice heard in the future. And this is something we’re actually quite good at.”

He thinks he can see a contradiction in the Nordic self-image. On the one hand, we can be quite proud of what we’ve accomplished. Almost self-righteous. On the other hand, we fail to see our potential for increased exchanges with the rest of the world. In his current work, Christian meets ministers, business leaders, and other international players from around the globe, and wherever he finds himself, he is fascinated by the huge level of interest in the Nordic model.

“Greater investment in marketing the Nordic Model internationally would give us more and better relationships outside the Region.”



Christian Friis Bach, 2015 Session, Reykjavik, Iceland. Photo: Magnus Frøederberg

“The model’s inclusive form of democracy is in great demand in the world today,” he continues. This can be linked directly to what Martti Ahtisaari addresses in this book. “Democratic models that include civil society and which are based on everyone’s universal right to a good start in life, education, healthcare, and a social safety net when needed are what create strong and sustainable societies. Unfortunately, in today’s world, we see many attempts at democracy which result instead in the exclusion of certain groups, which in turn leads only to war and conflict.”

There are many people who want to speak to Christian, and so his time for this interview is coming to an end. But he concludes by emphasising how much more we should invest internationally in the gem that is the Nordic Model. He stays on a while longer, and seems to remind himself of what he has said about a changing world, adding that we also have to learn from our own past. “The world is looking to the Nordic Region with hopes for the future, and it’s up to us to take action and hold on to the values of a sustainable and inclusive way of thinking, despite the challenges we face.”



Photo: Johannes Jansson

CHRISTIAN FRIIS BACH:

Born in Rødovre, Denmark (1966)

Ph.D. in International Economics, University of Copenhagen (1996)

Danish Parliament, Deputy Group Leader of the Danish Social Liberal Party (2011–15)

Danish Minister for Development Co-operation (2011–13)

UN Economic Commission for Europe, UNECE (2013)

DID YOU KNOW ...

... that according to the Legatum Institute, Norway is the most prosperous country in the world, Denmark is the third, Sweden the fifth, Finland the ninth, and Iceland the twelfth

... that according to the World Economic Forum, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden rank around tenth place among the world's most competitive countries, with Iceland among the top 20 to 30

... that four of the Nordic countries are among the ten leading countries in the provision of aid as a percentage of GDP (Sweden 1st – 1.1%; Norway 2nd – 0.99%; Denmark 4th – 0.85%; Finland 7th – 0.6%).



THE GLOBAL VOICE OF THE NORDIC REGION

STEP BY STEP

“Things take time,” wrote the Danish poet, scientist, designer, and philosopher Piet Hein in a form of poetry he called “grook”.

Martti Ahtisaari in his interview raised the issue of the media’s role in the social climate. In no way does he question the important independent and investigative role of journalism; what he questions is conflict-seeking to the point of absurdity. This gives a negative, one-sided picture of reality and can instil a groundless fear in people. A fear that can become dangerous. That can make us build walls.

In the short term it can be easy to despair. Despair that we seem unable to stem the threat. But this isn’t true.

There are clever, creative, and courageous individuals who are constantly treading new and alternative paths which do not come to a stop at a country’s administrative borders. Progress has always been made in encounters between people. Not just in the global present.

Here we will make a quick triple jump through time in Nordic history to show some past examples.

In 1895 the Swedish chemist, inventor, and industrialist Alfred Nobel sat down and wrote his will. Since then, nearly 900 Nobel prizes in physics, chemistry, physiology/medicine, literature, peace work, and later also the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, have been awarded to the world’s top representatives in their fields. It seems to have been important for a world citizen like Alfred Nobel to think globally:

“... It is my express wish that in awarding the prizes, no consideration is given to nationhood of any kind, so that the most worthy shall receive the prize, whether Scandinavian or not ...”

Since then, in December of each year, the world’s attention turns to Norway, which awards the peace prize, and to Sweden, which awards the remaining prizes and hosts the ultimate celebration of literature and research. The Nordic Region has been firmly put on the map for progress and development.

A century ago in 1915, a power cable was laid between Denmark and Sweden, representing the beginning of the Region’s unique common electricity market. The Nordic Region was recently named a climate pioneer by World Energy Outlook, and when the Nordic countries’ ministers for the environment went to Paris to attend the UN-led climate negotiations, they took a common declaration with them.

The Nordic countries brought statistical evidence to show that an effective climate policy on reducing emissions need not compromise welfare, and also gave assurances of the continuation of their strong measures to ensure climate sustainability. The Nordic ministers

raised a note of caution regarding the Arctic in particular. The temperature in Greenland is increasing twice as fast as the average for the rest of the world.

Not so long ago, Nordic culture enjoyed a phenomenal success at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC. This four-week festival in 2013 was called NOR-DIC COOL. Nordic co-operation had crossed the Atlantic with a total of 750 performances, seminars, and exhibitions, and the festival's experienced curator, Alicia Adams, said she felt an almost complete sense of cohesion in the artistic expressions of the Nordic countries. In particular she was fascinated by how clearly they expressed values such as equality, openness, and reverence for nature.

There were 200,000 visitors to the Kennedy Center. A total of 30 million Americans enjoyed media that conveyed Nordic innovations and that debated and commented on Nordic culture and values both during the four-week festival and for a long time thereafter. In the famous TV series *House of Cards* you can see how the Kennedy Center was lit up in a northern lights display by the Danish lighting designer Jesper Kongshaug.

Two of the people in the next section of this book were there – fashion designer Steinunn Sigurðadóttir and architect Bjarke Ingels, both of whom have become stars in their fields.

As for the third person in this section, Maria Strømme, it was her childhood proximity to an endless sea that sowed the seeds of her research career. She is now striving to mimic nature in her search for sustainable nano products.

Three role models and three steps in the direction of a much wanted future.



THE GLOBAL VOICE OF THE NORDIC REGION

CREATING THE FUTURE THEY WANT TO LIVE IN

BIG

BJARKE INGELS GROUP

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– We’re adding something Nordic to the world, but undoubtedly the world is adding something to us as well.

DESIGN BY BEING NORDIC. It could be just one more of the many epithets that architect Bjarke Ingels and his group, BIG, have received or stumbled upon themselves. He is far from the only star born in the cosmos that is Nordic architecture, but right now he is arguably the biggest and brightest. BIG IS MORE.

When I saw the longest queue you could imagine waiting to see one of the several hundred performances and lectures of the NORDIC COOL festival in Washington, DC in 2013, I had no idea that Bjarke Ingels had evolved from a rising star to become the rock star of architecture, and now a global superstar. Nor was it something I would have guessed when he appeared on stage with his hair on end and his clothes looking a bit of a mess. He must have come a long way in them.

There had certainly been an iron available when he was in London recently, where he became the youngest architect ever to deliver the prestigious Royal Academy’s annual lecture on architecture. But who cares about clothes when the projects under your belt include Google’s new headquarters in Silicon Valley and Two World Trade Center in Manhattan?



Bjarke Ingels. Photo: Steve Benesty

BIG – the Bjarke Ingels Group – was founded ten years ago, when Bjarke Ingels was 30. The group, then numbering 40, used one of Carlsberg’s old factories in Copenhagen as their base. Now 300 strong, this team from over 25 different countries is mostly based among the skyscrapers of New York. And, according to architecture critic Michael Kimmelman in the *New York Times*, this is the one firm of architects that is doing the most to shape the future character of the city.

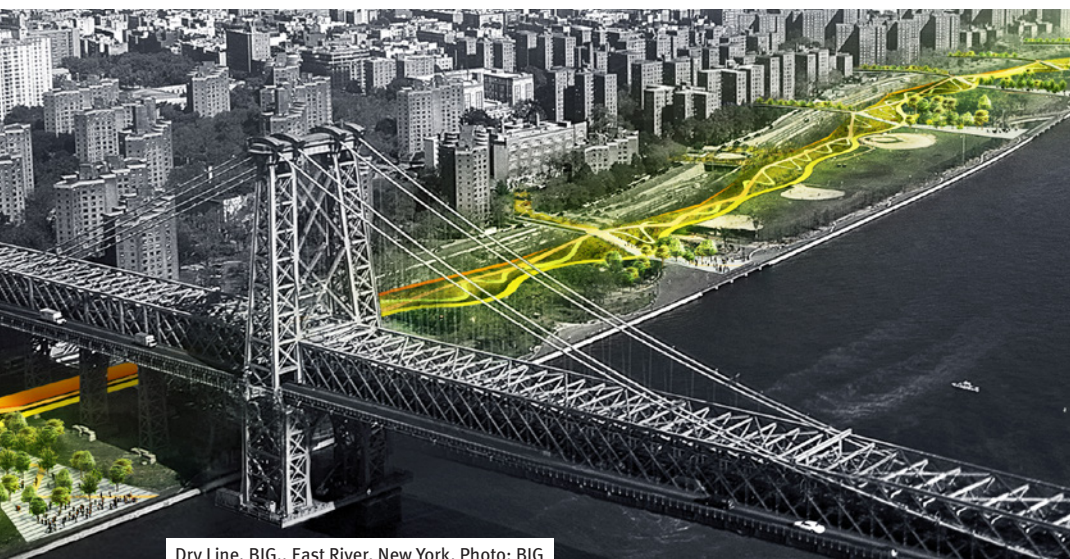
“At an age when most architects are still looking for their first job, you’re building Two World Trade Center, West 57th Street by the Hudson River, and Dry Line along the East River.”

A story like Dry Line makes a good starting point for describing the skein of knowledge, creativity, innovation, and playfulness that makes up Bjarke and his group. It all started with Hurricane Sandy in 2012. She rolled in over the city unexpectedly and took back the reclaimed land along the East River. The question that arose was how people could protect themselves against future storms.

BIG’s winning reconstruction idea did not emerge from calculation programmes and models.

Rather, a film shows the team going out to meet the people living and working in the area, much like a team of television reporters. They wanted to learn about people’s experiences of the disaster and what they felt would protect them, as well as to get an idea of what to do with the wrecked coastal strip.

DESIGN BY INFORMATION is Bjarke Ingels’s name for this working method and for him it’s not actually anything new. Approaching an assignment by just solving the problems described by the client has never been BIG’s way of doing things. Bjarke’s close friend and partner, David Zahle, likens the initial phase of work to the day-to-day tasks of a journalist or researcher. “A site or location’s past and present story and the people’s hopes for



Dry Line, BIG., East River, New York. Photo: BIG

the future are just two pieces of the puzzle. Others include the geological, geographical, technological, economic, and legal conditions. Then a creative process, or rather an evolutionary process, begins, which pushes the project to its absolute limits, then pragmatically reins it in again. This takes time, but it guarantees that creativity is managed with knowledge and intelligence. The result is a design which corresponds to the requested function. Or which does more. Usually more.”

“When everything is ready and the model is in place, the design often seems so obvious. Few are aware that we’ve had to kiss fifty frogs to get to this point.”

David Zahle says that this behaviour is probably quite Nordic. He remembers children being encouraged to think critically at school. “There’s no loss of face for thinking the wrong thing. Better that than not thinking at all.”

Nowadays Bjarke Ingels and the others are often asked to speak to leaders in other professions around the world. And when they do, they like to emphasise time and security as two key tools for creativity. “If companies and communities want to be innovative, they would be well advised to loosen the reins, show some trust, and make space for creativity. It’s the results that count.”

In this case, the result along the East River is a meandering green oasis where businesspeople and the public can come together. The idea of putting people at the centre – not only of the buildings but also of the surroundings – is a common theme that features in earlier projects such as Copenhagen’s harbour baths and now Google’s new headquarters. “Each object is placed within a social infrastructure. When you think about it, this too is a typically Nordic way of thinking,” comments David. “There’s something democratic about the notion of everyone having access to the entire city or site.”



Idannis Ghasialis and David Zahle. BIG. Photo: Vita Thomsen

DESIGN BY SOCIAL RESPONSABILITY was one of the topics in a lecture to architecture students at Harvard University, which was attended by Cat Huang. The speaker, Bjarke Ingels, saved her from returning to study molecular biology and medicine.

She uses the word “saved” because, despite the darkness, she is glad to have lived in Copenhagen for six winters. The light summer nights and the workplace outweigh this. Both the city and BIG have taught her to look at architecture in a completely new way.

“I love my hometown of Austin, Texas, but coming to Copenhagen was like learning to see again.”

Unlike US cities, which heave with cars, Copenhagen accommodates pedestrians and cyclists alike. “So many bikes!” Cat exclaims. Her new-found Nordic experience is that builders are expected to plan for social spaces, and that everyone is expected to take joint responsibility for them. Contractors in the US are offered tax breaks for adding public spaces to sites, yet people still want these spaces to appear private.

The social aspect is something that Cat Huang is now adding to all the projects she is responsible for. One such project is a residential area in Taiwan, where there are green roofs whose shapes are suggestive of the surrounding mountains. The positions and angles are designed to give as many people as possible as wide a sea view as possible.

“It wasn’t until we started working internationally that we realised how fundamental it is for Nordic architects to try to think about everyone’s access to views, daylight, and a social life.”

“It’s something automatic,” David Zahle says, “and it goes deeper than the lessons we had in architecture. It’s about the belief in the equal value of every person, and this is probably BIG’s most important brand.”



Architect Cat Huang at BIG's office in Copenhagen. Photo: Vita Thomsen

Aesthetics are not adversely affected by such serious and socially centred thinking. Quite the opposite, in fact. Ground for Dry Line is expected first to be broken in 2017. The project will both beautify and enhance the East River coastline. By popular request, New York residents will have ten miles where they can come together and socialise, while the structure itself will be able to withstand future storms. This could be called DESIGN BY SUSTAINABILITY, but BIG goes much further.

“DESIGN BY HEDONISTIC SUSTAINABILITY,” Bjarke says before an audience of sparkly-eyed architecture students at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. He says that he used to come up against the American attitude that socially sustainable construction was just something engaged in by the semi-socialist, pure-wool Nordic countries. But gradually it has been realised that individualistic needs can be combined with collective, material, and immaterial needs. As the slides of the PowerPoint presentation are clicked through, the audience’s ears are aurally stunned. One image after another shows iconic landmarks in Utah, Vancouver, You-name-it. Buildings that are towering, flat, curved, tetra-shaped, sunken – buildings that not only give the client a place in history, but also give nature a chance.

Many people talk about sustainable construction. But by adding the word “hedonistic” early on, BIG wants to signal that sustainability in no way means being boring, wearing wooden shoes, and taking cold showers. Bjarke and David’s parents’ generation very much treated sustainability and the environment in terms of what you *couldn’t* do rather than what you *wanted* to do. “Much like the Ten Commandments,” David comments.

“With our approach to sustainability, life can be more fun and buildings more beautiful.”

The district heating plant that is currently under construction in his home city of Copenhagen brings all the mottos together under one roof. “In such an up and coming area,



Googles headquarter, BIG. Photo: BIG

people should feel that they've got an awesome building for a neighbour. In the winter, the roof transforms into a piste thanks to its ski-slope shape. It might even put Denmark on the slalom map! If nothing else, the kids can have some fun. The city's rubbish is recycled here to generate heat and the only emission is carbon dioxide. This can't be recycled."

"So right now a chimney is being built to release the carbon dioxide and steam in the form of smoke rings."

No, this isn't just a playful solution stumbled upon during the office party. It's much more than this. The team at BIG believes that one of the reasons for the lack of environmental engagement is that emissions into the air are rarely seen. "And what can't be seen, doesn't exist," Bjarke Ingels says with a gesture that speaks volumes. Carbon dioxide emissions from the district heating plant in Copenhagen could also have been hidden, but BIG wanted to draw attention to the problem, to sound a warning, and encourage people's involvement.

"Like Indian smoke signals that warn of impending danger."

DESIGN BY COMMUNICATION has spread BIG's reputation far beyond the confines of its own profession. As the Danish author Aksel Sandemose alluded to what he termed The Law of Jante, some contend, with a hint of jealousy, that this reputation is simply what differentiates BIG from the rest. Bjarke Ingels, who wanted to be not only a cartoonist but also a comics writer, is indeed very adept at expressing himself. Rap and funny sentences encapsulate complex messages and give many outside the academic sphere a chance to understand what architecture can do to help.

But as the saying goes, actions speak louder than words. David talks about how important it is to listen to and learn from one another. This has been crucial for BIG in venturing out into the international market and working together with so many different cultures.

"We're adding something Nordic to the world, but undoubtedly the world is adding something to us as well."

BIG's architects belong to the communication generation, and they are skilled at using communication as a marketing tool. What we don't see is that this is also a method of working. This communicative ability combined with all the other skills an architect must have enables all parties to a process to be involved. Complex and detailed technical, legal, and economic terms have their place. A shared vision of the project's objectives and purpose gives everyone involved an opportunity to realise something together. To be part of building a cathedral.

Perhaps that was a little ridiculous, but in the hailstorm of wise and well-informed questions from architecture students in Washington, I ventured to ask Bjarke Ingels about his own vision. What kind of a cathedral would he and BIG build?

"One that makes the world we live in a little more like our dreams," he answered.

His colleague David Zahle uses words like "change the world". In some ways, these words imply an architect's lack of political or financial power, but what the architect actually does possess is the power within the ideas. When a building is constructed in an innovative and environmentally friendly way, it stands as a concrete example that this is possible,

and people can then start to demand these new things as a standard. In the recent book *Hot and cold*, the traditional world map is replaced with a climate map and a description of how buildings should be constructed and cities planned in different climate zones. This is a progressive way of influencing and addressing a changed climate in the future.

“As an architect, you are part of creating a future world that you would like to live in yourself. Is that BIG ENOUGH?”



Photo: Thomas Loof

BJARKE INGELS:

Born in Copenhagen (1974)

Education: Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen,
Técnica Superior de Arquitectura, Barcelona

Worked with Rem Koolhaas, Rotterdam (1998–2001)

PLOT, own firm of architects with Julien de Smedt (2001–05)

BIG – Bjarke Ingels Group (since 2006)

Awards: Golden Lion, Venice Biennale of Architecture (2004),
World Architecture Festival (2008, 2011), MIPIM, Cannes (2009),
DETAIL Prize (2014), American Institute of Architects National
Honor Award (2015), Royal Institute of British Architects Euro-
pean National Award (2015) – among hundreds of other awards

OTHER NORDIC ARCHITECTS:

Jørn Utzon, Denmark, projects including the Sydney Opera House

Alvar Aalto, Finland, projects including Baker House, MIT, Boston

Eero Saarinen, Finland, projects including JFK airport, New York

Ralph Erskine, Sweden, projects including Byker Wall, Newcastle

Arnstein Arneberg, Norway, projects including the UN Security
Council chamber

Snøhetta, Norway, founders Kjetil Traedal Thorsen and Craig
Dykens, projects including Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Le Monde in
Paris, Barack Obama Presidential Center



THE GLOBAL VOICE
OF THE NORDIC
REGION

IF ONLY THE WORLD KNEW

THE WEATHER DIARIES –
NORDIC FASHION BIENNALE

The people of the Faroe Islands have thirty words for fog. This may seem a strange statement to introduce an article about fashion. Yet it is no more odd than the title of the third West Nordic fashion exhibition at the Nordic Fashion Biennial in Frankfurt in 2014 – The Weather Diaries.

Nordic House in Reykjavik knew what they wanted when they turned to Sarah Cooper and Nina Gorfer to curate and photograph a Nordic fashion exhibition, a biennial event to be held in Frankfurt, Germany starting in 2014. Their photo exhibition on Kyrgyzstan at the Hasselblad Center in Gothenburg had bewitched Icelandic fashion designer Steinunn Sigurðadóttir. Here were two young artists who had a unique ability to bring the profound up to the surface. And this was exactly how Steinunn Sigurðadóttir wanted to portray West Nordic haute couture.

Sarah Cooper and Nina Gorfer very nearly said no. Each had come to Gothenburg to continue their education at HDK, the School of Design and Crafts – Sarah from the US, ready to give up her life as a New York music producer in the name of love, and Nina from Austria on the basis of a gut feeling that the best education was to be found in the Nordic Region. They found one another in their pursuit of crossing the documentary image with the artistic, and the investigative approach with the intuitive. And fashion was hardly a good fit with all this.

“Fashion is a bit of a no-no in artistic circles, yet we changed our minds when we met with the fashion designers from the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Iceland. Fashion can absolutely be an expression of art and creativity. And it uses its symbolic language to tell a story of the human condition.”

When they realised that the project would give them free rein and plenty of time for analysis, they accepted. They saw that they could raise the assignment to the cultural level and investigate the very essence of creativity behind West Nordic fashion design. And in the process, their initial hesitation turned into another type of frustration. They were

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– The world of fashion is centred on the world’s major cities, not a little Greenlandic village of 250 people. Yet more captivating images of fashion have rarely been seen.

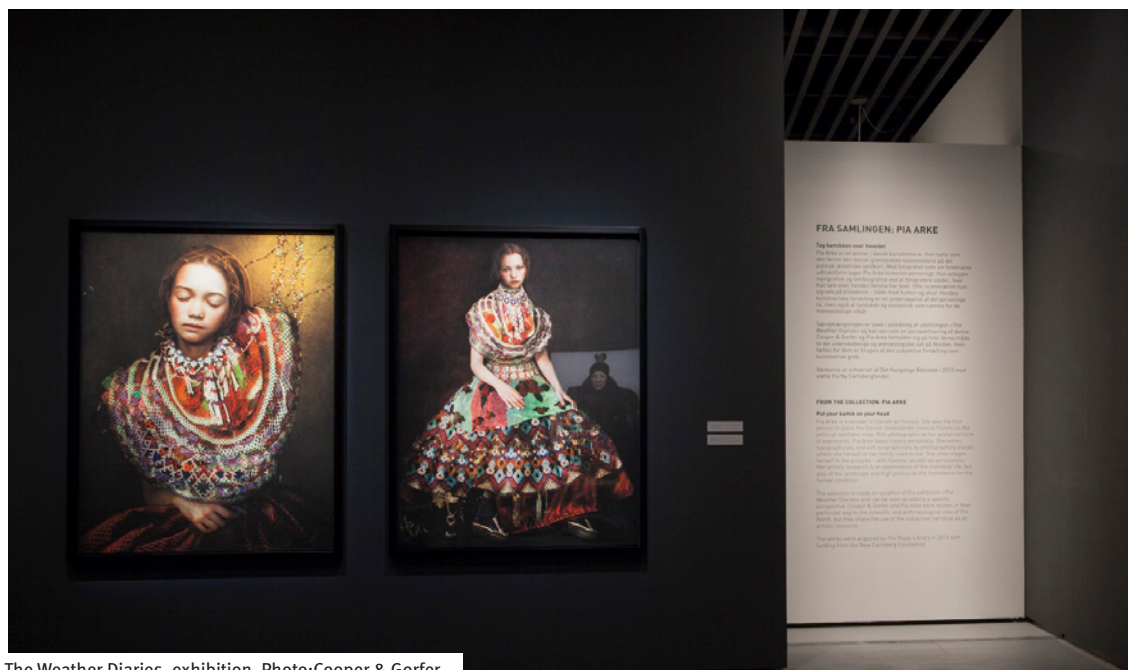
surprised by the creativity and originality of the fashion designers on the three islands, and found themselves increasingly wanting to discuss something that the fashion world should know but which Paris didn't have a clue about.

"The rest of the world is barely even aware of the existence of the people living here, and yet they're creating something that has the potential to enhance and renew the catwalk."

"The exhibition hasn't arrived on the catwalk yet. For this to happen someone from a major fashion house has to become aware of it, and that hasn't happened yet," Sarah Cooper explains. By contrast, the art and museum world has already opened its doors to what was first shown at the Nordic Fashion Biennial at the Museum of Applied Art in Frankfurt, Germany in 2014. The tour, which has already visited Copenhagen in Denmark, Tórshavn in the Faroe Islands, and Apeldoorn in the Netherlands, will go on to visit Reykjavik in Iceland and Beijing in China, as well as Seattle and numerous other places in the US. The book that accompanies and expands on the story of the exhibition's images, clothing, and creators also bears the name – *The Weather Diaries*.

Icelandic fashion designer Steinunn Sigurðadóttir attends the première at the CODA Museum in Apeldoorn on the outskirts of Amsterdam. In a speech she explains how she was dumbfounded by just how successfully the two artists have succeeded in finding each designer's aesthetic and personal journey.

"The world of fashion is centred on the world's major cities, not a little Greenlandic village of 250 people. Yet more captivating images of fashion have rarely been seen."



The Weather Diaries, exhibition. Photo:Cooper & Gorfer

The discerning opening night audience seem to agree. One audience member with champagne glass in hand pretends to be part of this crowd of Dutch art and fashion lovers but is actually eavesdropping and hears words such as “exotic”, “modern”, “Rembrandt”, “unique”. And audible sighs. The images render people speechless, and at an installation of a woman’s white dress, covered in white snowfall and the occasional black fabric bow, the guests flock around the fashion designer and opening speaker, Steinunn Sígurðadóttir.

Steinunn Sígurðadóttir began her journey knitting at home with her grandmother. As always happens in folklore, tradition was carried on, and for Steinunn this meant the Parsons School of Design in New York and the Calvin Klein, Gucci, and La Perla fashion houses. In Apeldoorn she talks about her childhood winters, when the snowflakes fell like light feathers to form a white magic over the black volcanic earth.

“My background made me different. I stuck firm to what I had become, and this became my success.”

She is still one of the greats, but after more than twenty years travelling back and forth between New York, Paris, London, Florence, and Milan, she is now back in Reykjavik. Full time. She may miss the expert teams that can be found in the major fashion houses, but she knows they’re just a flight away.

She understands what people from other and more central parts of the world mean when they refer to Iceland as an isolated island, but she refutes this. The ocean is still there, and she believes that the Viking’s desire to discover is still in the blood of every Icelander. And today it’s easy to get away. And to come back home.



“In fact, there’s no better place for a designer to be. Right now, Reykjavik is a melting pot of artists, designers, musicians, and authors.”

“If only the world knew,” she adds. Despite being at the centre of the world’s fashion map, she is only one of many. This is why she wants Nordic fashion designers to join forces and show exactly what a creative industry they are. Music, film, computer gaming, and the culinary arts have all done just that, in part with the support of Nordic co-operation, and they have been rewarded with success.

Perspectives vary with the horizon. Sarah Cooper and Nina Gorfer have found the isolation of the three islands to be a source of creativity. Privacy, the time to listen to stories about one’s own roots, scope for imagination, the opportunity to develop the unique.

Of the fashion designers featured in the exhibition and book, Nikolaj Kristensen from Nuussuaq, Greenland, lives the furthest away. Yet he doesn’t seem to see it like this, nor does he lack an audience. He threads bead after bead on wire using a technique that has the potential to create a Greenlandic haute couture, but the clothes he makes are for his daughter. It’s a type of therapy for him as well.

The colourful glass beads of Greenland’s national dress date back to a time when fur from Greenland was traded for glass beads brought by the colonial power. Nikolaj’s hands are creating something new.

Gudrun Ludvig, who got her big break with Italian *Vogue*, talks about how as a child she would sit at the window in Faroese Suthuroy, waiting for the ferry that would berth in the harbour each week. The boat brought new faces, new fashions and new hats.

Bibi Chemnitz is proud of her Greenlandic roots, but she is not one of the fanatics who, in protest against Danish influence, is hell-bent on holding on to all the old traditions. Occasionally she will anger someone or other with her modern take on Greenlandic patterns and sealskin traditions.

In the book, she shares the story of the hunter who went to a photo exhibition depicting the people of the village. He became enamoured of his own portrait, wondering who it portrayed.

These northern fashion designers each in their own way tell a story of how a life on the periphery can make room for the unique. The wheels spin more slowly and free up more time. This is something which the exhibition’s instigators recognise in themselves.

The tempo is faster in Vienna and New York. They were prepared to face a new culture in Sweden, but not to the extent that it would be difficult to become part of society. “Trust



STEINUNN, The Feather Portrait. Photo: Cooper&Gorfer

and friendships are developed much more slowly here,” Sarah Cooper says, and she is happy that she found a friend and colleague in Nina. They shared a vision of the future as artists, and an ambition to create something profound and well thought through. And this was the opportunity they got.

“The Nordic Region is a great place for creativity.”

The pressure is not so full-on. Not so long ago, Sarah’s life as a music producer in New York was full of the notion “need it here, need it now.” Her own momentum rarely had a chance. In her new life, she has begun to respect that creativity takes time, that the peace of a walk is precisely what may be needed to strip away everything unnecessary and give herself access to the very core. This is a healthy climate for successful ideas. But maybe not always for refuelling. Her colleague Nina has moved to Berlin for a while to seek new inspiration.

The fashion designer Hrafnhildur Arnadóttir, aka Shoplifter, cites a similar need for contrast. Her CV includes co-operation with the Icelandic superstar Björk, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMa) in New York, and the Design Network Aimez-Vous-Avec-Ferveur, whose list includes both Madonna and Lady Gaga. She says today’s Icelandic designers are extreme: creatively a bit crazy. Maybe because they were listening to their grandparents’ tales of living in caves at the same time as they were experiencing Iceland’s becoming the country with the highest level of computer use *per capita* in the world. Life can feel like a rollercoaster, and her way of handling this is to live in New York with the knowledge that she can always return to Iceland. And in Iceland, knowing that there’s another world out there within easy reach.

When Sarah Cooper and Nina Gorfer describe their meetings with the fashion designers of the Nordic islands, they speak of a boundlessness that is influenced by the forces of nature. This far north, people know that it’s not up to them to set the conditions for existence. Everything can be blown away in a storm, or buried in lava during the next volcanic eruption. Freely translated, Icelandic artist Rúi says:

“... Modern man has succeeded in curbing many forces. But there are even stronger elements. They created the earth and they are still at work.”

An intimate relationship with nature is a Nordic trait developed in the harsh conditions of the long, cold winter months and in the summer rush to take advantage of the harvest and the sun. In modern times, legislation that has given everyone the right to the mountains, forests, land, and sea has made it easy and pleasurable for us to spend our leisure time in nature. This relationship is built on respect and responsibility.

The Nordic countries are indeed small, but they command respect on the global stage in issues relating to the climate, energy, and the environment. The Nordic Region practices what it preaches. Emissions targets are met and support for the development of sustainable alternatives is bearing innovative fruit. The same applies to the Nordic textile and fashion industry. Conscious that they represent one of the most polluting industries around, major companies such as H&M and trade associations including the Nordic Fashion Association



Mundi, *Mundi sinking*. Photo: Cooper&Gorfer

are setting tough environmental targets for the future. The New Nordic Fashion project is showing the world that sustainable fashion can be cool, sexy, and modern. The Nordic Nexus Centre proposes the future Arctic production of sustainable textiles made of fish skin and milk fibres.

Sarah Cooper and Nina Gorfer's working method includes extensive research. They listen to people's stories, interpret the symbols around them, and immerse themselves in the atmosphere of the places where people want them to go.

In the tales they listened to from the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Iceland, the total dependence on nature was a clear theme. But it goes beyond even this – man was part of the forces of nature.

One moment you are soothed by Mother Nature's calm and sunny embrace, and the next she throws your life into the stormy sea. From the underworld she hisses and whispers to her people and obscures the view in shrouds of mist. The islanders' diaries have always been filled with vivid descriptions of the weather – Weather Diaries.



Photo: Florian Siebeck

STEINUNN SIGURÐADÓTTIR:

Born in Reykjavik, Iceland (1960)

Education: Parsons School of Design, New York (1982–86)

Polo/Ralph Lauren, designer (1987–88)

Calvin Klein, director, senior designer (1989–95)

Gucci Group, director, senior designer (1995–2000)

La Perla, Design director (2000–02)

STEINUNN, own collection (since 2000)

Exhibitions and lectures worldwide

DID YOU KNOW ...

... that the Nordic Region has won 30 Academy Awards, of which Sweden has won 20

... that the Nordic Region has won 21 of 45 medals in the French Bocuse d'Or World Cooking Championships (Norway 9, Sweden 6, Denmark 5, Iceland 1)

... that the world's biggest music prize is Swedish – the Birgit Nilsson prize worth USD 1 million

... that between 3.5% and 5% of people in the Nordic Region work in the cultural sector. The EU average is 3%.



GLOBAL VOICE OF THE
NORDIC REG

DARE TO BE FIRST

MARIA STRØMME

“Big breakthroughs will be made by those who can think out of the box; they’ll probably have got their education in a small hamlet in India rather than at one of the world’s leading universities,” laughs Maria Strømme as we discuss the future of research. And one might well ask “Why not Lofoten?” when listening to her speak about her own progress.

Maria Strømme was born in Svolvær in Lofoten, in the far north of Norway, where the stars appear closer in the night sky, and the views from the mountains are so far-reaching you can see Earth curve on the Atlantic horizon. Walking along the cliffs that plunge into the sea, little Maria had the peace to think, and to decide to make a difference: to influence the future. After getting the best marks in Norway in maths and physics, as well as the best results in the national tests in both subjects, she quickly progressed to her appointment as a professor of nanotechnology – a technology whose unit of length called the nanometre can be accommodated 20,000 times in a human cell, but which, despite its small size, is predicted to result in the next big leap in technology.

Maria Strømme is keen that this article should not talk only about her. At our meeting, she demonstrates that research is a team effort by assembling the brains behind ENESCA, the algae battery project. She is aware nonetheless that her energy and efficiency often make her the leading lady. In 2004, this also made her the youngest-ever professor in technology at Uppsala University in Sweden.

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– It often takes time for doctoral students from other parts of the world to let go of their faith in authority. In fact, we benefit very little from them initially. It’s only when they start thinking for themselves rather than doing what the professor says that they begin to bloom!



Maria Strømme. Photo: Mikael Wallerstedt

A few years later, together with her colleagues she discovered something known as “the impossible material”, which has been eluding researchers for over a hundred years. With a dose of ignorance, youthful irreverence, and a little carelessness, they left the experiment to its own devices for a weekend. This led to the solution and to a substance called Upsalite. In other words, we might say that Maria Strømme and her colleagues managed to think out of the box. They succeeded in creating a huge number of pores a nanometre-wide and the disarray needed in magnesium carbonate for the material to improve the solubility of medicines for the benefit of the human body.

Maria Strømme’s research has come down squarely in the field of medicine. Nanotechnology can improve and simplify diagnoses; it can make medicines more targeted and so address a challenge that Maria describes as one of the toughest we face – society’s adaptation to an ageing population.

The second challenge is energy supply. If we are to achieve a sustainable future, we need to harvest and store energy in a completely new way, as well as use renewable materials such as green algae.

In an effort to get this surprised interviewer to think differently, Maria Strømme’s ENES-CA team at Uppsala University’s Ångström Laboratory explains that although the algae is in itself an environmental problem, with the help of nanotechnology it has a role to play in the batteries of the future.

“Nature itself is so smart. Thanks to new technology, we can study it in close detail and mimic it in order to create new and more sustainable materials that are able to store energy.”

In Uppsala, the city where the world-famous botanist Carl Linnaeus and all the pupils he inspired once found a way to systematise nature’s plants, contemporary researchers are now examining plants to the smallest nano detail under electron microscopes in order to copy their structure and restore nature’s way of forming sustainable and ingeniously energy-efficient materials. Materials which can be made into batteries using renewable green algae as the raw material.

“But don’t think along the lines of the batteries we put in torches or cars,” they say. “No, think instead of energy being stored within the functional material, the packaging or ...” Here the research team hesitates. How much do they dare reveal before patenting their findings?

There is a good deal of creativity and innovation in the Nordic Region, with survey after survey putting the Nordic countries at the top of international rankings. A list of the world’s 15 most innovative cities contains no fewer than three in Sweden, surpassed only by Germany and the UK.

The research team at the Ångström Laboratory sees some clear reasons for this. Thanks to the so-called “teacher exception”, researchers retain the intellectual property rights (IPR) to their findings and can patent them. This fosters a willingness to turn theory into

practice and the production of products. The brains behind one such success story – Skype founder Niklas Zennström – was made a 2015 alumnus by Uppsala University.

“We’re surrounded by researchers who are also successful entrepreneurs. This is inspiring,” says Albert Mihranyan, who arrived from the Armenian capital Yerevan 15 years ago and has stayed ever since.

Maria Strømme’s research team is made up of people from around the globe and representing a variety of disciplines. Successful research depends on interdisciplinarity and diversity. Navel-gazing and inbreeding create barriers – one hardly even thinks about the country one is in or where the people are from. The important thing is being in the right research team.

Small nations like the Nordic countries have difficulty in attracting renowned senior researchers. Wages are too low and the giants are assigned the resources they need where they are. The situation is different for those who are younger, especially for those around the age where they are thinking of starting a family. The Nordic Region’s social safety net, which includes childcare and paid parental leave, enables both parents to work. The Region allows people to pursue a career and to enjoy time with their families.

Paradoxically, perhaps, it seems that the lower degree of coercion fosters creativity and innovation. The team draws a comparison with China, where researchers are essentially human fountains of papers and publications. Chemistry professor Leif Nyholm says that the Nordic Region cannot compete with this. He adds: “But by taking the time to think, we can develop ideas based on what others have already done and turn these into usable applications.”

In addition, the flatter and less hierarchical organisations of the Nordic Region definitely contribute to innovation. Too much respect for authority inhibits creativity.



Albert Mihranyan, Maria Strømme, and Leif Nyholm. Photo: Mikael Wallerstedt

“It often takes time for doctoral students from other parts of the world to let go of their faith in authority. In fact, we benefit very little from them initially. It’s only when they start thinking for themselves rather than doing what the professor says that they begin to bloom!”

Mateo Santurio acts as a bridge between ENESCA’s research and real-world applications. He came to Sweden as a child refugee from Uruguay in the 1980s. He went on to obtain an M.Sc. with entrepreneurial training and is part of a holding company that is currently looking for an industrial partner for the algae batteries.

This shouldn’t be difficult considering the Nordic Region’s placement at the top of innovation rankings. But it’s not that simple. Industry and financiers are still attracted to the sugar cubes of the IT world. Not only is there so much still to develop, but also old enough to be understood by many. Nanotechnology is at a stage of the computers of the 1960s.

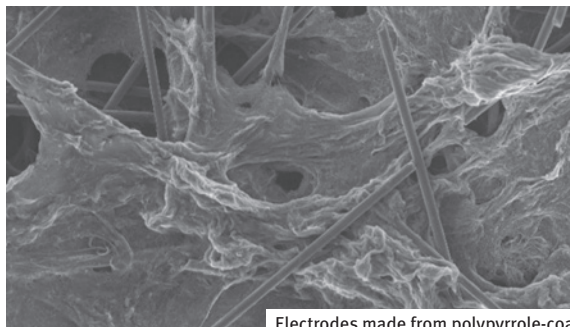
“It’s really, really hard to find a pioneer who dares to ask about and invest in something completely new.”

The research policies are different in each of the Nordic countries. Maria Strømme’s view is that Denmark is streets ahead when it comes to materialising and supporting businesses based on research findings. On the whole, the Nordic Region is good at capturing the new and fledgling businesses known as start-ups. Then the problems arise. Breakthroughs in the Key Enabling Technologies (KET) category – which the nano-researchers in Uppsala are pursuing – take time to develop and require stamina from those financing and developing new industrial methods.

“As soon as they start to become profitable, companies get bought up by financiers from other countries, and new and pioneering production based on Nordic taxpayer-funded research just flies out the window.”

The Nordic ministers for industry are aware of this problem and are investing in a joint programme for innovation and industrial policy. The countries have different strengths, and they can accomplish more together than on their own.

This is something Maria Strømme agrees with, and she tells us how half of her research time is now spent in an attempt to address issues like this. It is about creating clusters and funds with the goal of providing enough energy for a sound future society. Because this is what Maria wants. To make a difference. To influence the future.



Electrodes made from polypyrrole-coated cellulose plus carbon fibres
Image: ENESCA project



Photo: Mikael Wallerstedt

MARIA STRØMME:

Born in Svolvær, Lofoten, Norway (1970)

PhD in physics from Uppsala University (1997)

Professor of nanotechnology at Uppsala University 2004

(Sweden's youngest-ever professor of a technology)

Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences

(2011, Vice President 2015)

Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences Gold Medal (2012)

Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, member (2013)

30 patents (2015)

Approximately 210 international scientific articles (2015)

Board member of several national and international research councils

DID YOU KNOW ...

... that according to the Legatum Institute, the Nordic countries are ranked the best in the world for entrepreneurs:

Sweden 1, Denmark 2, Iceland 4, Norway 5, Finland 8

... that the Nordic Region also ranks highly for innovation according to The Global Innovation Index: Sweden 3, Finland 6, Denmark 10, Iceland 13, Norway 20

... that the Nordic Region files for the greatest number of patents in Europe. The number of patents filed with the European Patent Office per million inhabitants ranks Finland second, Sweden fourth, Denmark fifth, and Norway fifteenth.



THE GLOBAL VOICE OF THE NORDIC REGION

ON THE CREST OF THE WAVE

The Nordic Council of Ministers was formed in 1971, nineteen years after the Nordic Council. Since then, it can be said that Nordic co-operation has had both a government and a parliament.

The Nordic Council comprises 87 representatives from the Nordic parliaments. They raise questions and propel the political debate. At the Nordic Council's annual sessions, a budget of DKK 1 billion – equivalent to EUR 134 million – is set aside for Nordic co-operation.

The government, i.e. the Nordic Council of Ministers, is actually comprised of eleven separate councils of ministers that are led overall by the Nordic prime ministers. Education, research, and culture are key focus areas, but activities cover most of the political spectrum with the exception of foreign policy.

International relations are another matter, however, and this is why the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers may be tasked with taking care of the strategy for the international branding of the Nordic Region: *the Nordic Perspective*.

This makes the strategy a political product, although it is designed for everyone who wants to appear as part of the Nordic brand. The strategy's preliminary phase attracted considerable interest among participants in both the public and private sectors. In most cases, as a representative of an individual Nordic country one will be perceived as small in the global market. But as part of a region with 27 million inhabitants, a common market, a strong economy, and very similar conditions, you become more interesting.

"The further away you are, the more Nordic you are," one working group has said.

Surveys have shown that northerners take Nordic co-operation for granted and that it is almost unanimously liked. This is the case even though very few people know exactly what Nordic co-operation is about. So the cow is fine so long as she stays in her stall.

The principle of consensus says that nothing can be decided at the Nordic level that is not supported by everyone, and the tone is more that of dialogue than hot debate – progress is pragmatic. The logic of high-speed media and the age of big headlines may be two reasons for a life in the shadows.

But a light aimed at the results reveals several joint steps that have been taken towards a modern and vibrant Nordic Region. A few minutes spent at the Nordic Region's website www.norden.org are enough to convince anyone. Here are just a few examples:

- Passport Union (1957)
- Nordic Council prizes – support for culture and the environment
- Integrated labour market (1962)
- Common social rights

- Nordic Investment Bank
- Nordic Ecolabel – environmental certification
- Common education market
- Exchange of information with all tax havens

With the leaders of the Nordic co-operation as our cicerones, we can conclude with a look at Nordic co-operation now and going forwards. The Director of the Nordic Council Britt Bohlin, its current president Henrik Dam Kristensen, and Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers Dagfinn Høybråten describe Nordic co-operation as a wave-like movement. After a number of years focusing on European co-operation, there is now a growing interest in Nordic co-operation. There is no doubt about this, nor about the significance of the Nordic Region's voice in the world.



GLOBAL VOICE OF THE
NORDIC R

IN THE SPIRIT OF NORDIC PRAGMATISM

BRITT BOHLIN OCH
HENRIK DAM KRISTENSEN

Britt Bohlin is a relative newcomer as the Director of the Nordic Council. From day one her mantra has been “Revitalise the council with more pinpointed debates and sharper policies.” Now she is unable to hide a certain unease about the current situation. When we meet there’s just one week left until the Session – the large annual meeting of the Nordic co-operation – and the northward flow of refugees in Europe has changed the whole agenda. During this difficult period she hopes that the climate for debate will be one of moderation and balance.

“It went well,” she says when we meet the week after. The refugee issue remains extremely difficult. It is perhaps the most divisive factor among the Nordic countries.

All the political parties in all the countries’ parliaments are represented in the Nordic Council, which means that debate can be just as polarised at the council meetings as in the countries themselves

“But to sum up, we once again drew close as a Nordic family. The Session was the right arena at the right time for discussing this issue.”

No one was expecting a ready-made solution. But after a debate between the prime ministers and Nordic MPs that took twice as long as planned, some common ground was found and consensus was achieved in the true spirit of Nordic pragmatism.

Ultimately, it is about giving asylum to those who really need it. It is now possible to continue with practical, concrete efforts towards sharing experiences and developing joint solutions for better and more effective procedures to deal with the situation, as well as the quest for agreement on which countries are safe for refugees to return to.

If Britt Bohlin is a fresher in the context of Nordic co-operation, then next year’s president elect, the Dane Henrik Dam Kristensen, is a dab hand. With short breaks in between, he has held various ministerial and parliamentary posts in both the Nordic Council and the Council of Ministers since the early 1990s. He believes it was absolutely right to devote so much time to the refugee issue at this year’s Session. “The Nordic arena must provide the opportunity for dialogue on those matters that are relevant to the countries. But in finding a solution to the problem the Nordic countries can isolate themselves. Addressing the

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– The Nordic arena must provide the opportunity for dialogue on those matters that are relevant to the countries

challenges of the Region must be supplemented by a strong commitment at the international level.”

He takes time to answer the question of whether he sees the developments as a threat to Nordic welfare.

“The Nordic Model has been criticised time and time again. I remember the oil crisis of the 1970s, the financial crises, globalisation. Analyses have shown that after each attack the Nordic Region emerges from difficult times all the stronger. Altered, but intact.”

Britt Bohlin may be a newcomer in the Nordic context, but she has several years of experience as a Swedish politician and has no doubt that Nordic values will survive the current situation. “Not just one but several generations of Nordic citizens have developed the Nordic welfare model and become accustomed to living in a good society. People won’t want to destroy this,” she says, “and the only way forwards is to continue including everyone in the welfare system.”

“This demands a lot of policy. Responsibility rests on the shoulders of those who have chosen a career as politicians, and everyone has an obligation to empathise with their fellow man.”

As the county governor of Jämtland in Sweden, Britt Bohlin was deeply involved in efforts to arrange accommodation for unaccompanied refugee children, and she is among those who believe that these children and young people are part of the salvation of the future welfare state. “With their ageing populations, the Nordic countries are depending on the willingness of young people from other countries to move in. And this is something the Nordic countries can cope with. It is neither the first time nor the last that the Nordic Region is opening its doors to external manpower.”

Henrik Dam Kristiansen says, “Foreign policy doesn’t really belong in Nordic co-operation. It is more of a national concern. Yet this does not stand

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– In view of the influx of new cultures we’re currently experiencing, it will be exciting to see how our creative expressions and industries change and evolve in the future – and to this end, Nordic politics as well.



Britt Bohlin, director, Nordic Council.
Photo:: Vita Thomsen

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– The Nordic Model has been criticised time and time again. I remember the oil crisis of the 1970s, the financial crises, and globalisation. Analyses have shown that after each attack, the Nordic Region has emerged from difficult times all the stronger. Altered, but intact.”



Henrik Dam Kristensen, President, Nordic Council. Photo: Johannes Jansson

in the way of a deep-rooted and long-standing commitment to issues concerning international relations.” When he comes to describing the dividing line between the two, he says that it is a matter of distance. “Anything that may directly affect the Nordic Region must also be debated by and subject to the influence of Nordic MPs.”

Going forwards he sees a need for greater commitment to what is happening in the Arctic, where a sizeable geographical part of the Nordic Region is located. “The effect of global climate change on the Region is already noticeable, and we can expect further disruption to human, animal, and plant life.” The melting of the polar ice caps is expected to make access to valuable minerals and other natural resources easier, and the tug of war over territories is by all accounts an issue of a highly international nature. Yet everything from the social aspects of everyday life to the threats to maritime safety ensuing from melting ice opening up new routes between Europe and Asia should be points on the parliamentary agenda of Nordic co-operation going forwards.

Developments in the neighbouring Baltic states and security around the Baltic Sea have long been issues discussed around the table of the Nordic Council. And Henrik Dam Kristensen does not see this subsiding. Quite the opposite, in fact.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nordic co-operation was actively involved in securing the Baltic countries’ independence and their restructuring into democracies. Nordic offices were opened in each country. Nordic investment funds were channelled primarily into environmental initiatives such as sewage treatment plants and infrastructure. The offices in St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad appeared to be on the same path until Russia decided to classify this Nordic presence as the activity of a foreign agent.



The Nordic Council's "Oscar": 2013/2015. Photo: Johannes Jansson/Magnus Fröderberg

“Dialogue with Russia has since been put on the backburner, but it is nevertheless there, and important,” Britt Bohlin says. “We believe in the Nordic Council as a forum for dialogue.”

Culture, the aspect of the Nordic Region which is perhaps most in the global spotlight right now, featured on another Nordic stage during the Session. At an event sometimes dubbed the Nordic Oscars, the Nordic Council prizes are awarded for the year’s best environmental initiative, best literary works for adults and children, best film, and best musical venture. Not just the best of each country, mind you, but the best in the whole of the Nordic Region. Each year adjudication committees with representatives from the five countries, the three autonomous areas, and the Saami agree on Nordic winners. This is a way of supporting and raising the profile of each other’s creatives in the Region.

There has been considerable focus on linguistic and cultural exchange between the Nordic countries since day one of Nordic co-operation’s more than sixty-year history. This has without a doubt strengthened the community and its mutual understanding. This cross-fertilisation and financial support have developed the cultural areas and enabled the creative industries to reap the rewards of success around the globe. Who hasn’t heard of *Nordic Noir*!

All the creative forms – theatre, dance, music, literature, film, design, fashion, and food – were encompassed in the major NORDIC COOL cultural festival at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC in 2013. This extensive co-operation between the centre and Nordic culture was the single greatest sign of the international appetite for Nordic creativity, and not least a sign of curiosity about what lies behind it.

“If you think about it, it becomes clear how a political focus on what is real can bear fruit. Just as the welfare model has given rise to competitiveness in general, faith in culture as a bearer of key values has spawned creative industries that attract the attention of the outside world to our Region.”

Thinking back to the Session for 2015, Britt Bohlin notes that the award ceremony was staged at Harpa, the Icelandic cultural centre. Iceland, who hosted the event, also held this year’s presidency of the Nordic Council. The ceremony was broadcast on Nordic public service channels, and this year, to cheers from the audience, it was Norwegian Jon Fosse’s turn to receive the scheme’s fifty-fourth literature prize. Many of his predecessors have gone on to become international bestsellers and even Nobel prize winners. The newest of the prizes – the children and young people’s literature prize – has been awarded for just three years. “Nevertheless there is every reason to believe that it will result in new little mermaids, Moomins, or even strong, independent girls like Pippi,” Britt says.

“In view of the influx of new cultures we’re currently experiencing, it will be exciting to see how our creative expressions and industries change and evolve in the future. And to this end, Nordic politics as well.”



Photo: Johannes Jansson

BRITT BOHLIN

Born in Dalskog, Sweden (1956)

Member of the Swedish Parliament (1988–2008)

Group leader for the Swedish Social Democratic Party
(2001–08)

County Governor, Jämtland county (2008–14)

Director of the Nordic Council (since 2014)



Photo: Johannes Jansson

HENRIK DAM KRISTENSEN

Born in Vorbasse, Denmark (1957)

Member of the Danish Parliament (1990–2004)

Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries (1994–96)

Minister for Food (1996–2000)

Minister for Social Affairs (2000–01)

Member of the European Parliament (2004–06)

President of the Nordic Council (2011)

Minister for Transport (2011–14)

Minister for Labour (since 2014)

President of the Nordic Council (2016)

DID YOU KNOW THAT NORDIC CO-OPERATION ...

... has contacts in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and the Visegrad Group (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia). The Nordic Council of Ministers has offices in the three Baltic countries

... has a regional border committee for co-operation with western neighbours: the Nordic Atlantic Cooperation (NORA)

... collaborates with organisations including the Arctic Council, the Barents Council, the Nordic Sami Institute (NSI), and the Nordic Institute of Maritime Law.

DID YOU KNOW ...

... that the Nordic Culture Fund and the Nordic Film & TV Fund are crucial for supporting Nordic culture and creative industries.



THE NORDIC REGION HAS BEEN GIVEN ANOTHER CHANCE

DAGFINN HØYBRÅTEN

Dagfinn Høybråten, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers, tells the story of when it dawned on him just what the value is of the Nordic Region. The Nordic countries' ability to work together so closely and in such a straightforward fashion is truly something worth upholding and passing on.

The occasion was a meeting of former Yugoslav countries on the Balkan Peninsula, attended by the countries' presidents and other leading representatives under the theme *The Nordic Model*. The questions the Secretary General faced then are the same that he faces today wherever he travels. In a globalised world, countries must maintain an international perspective if they are to influence social development, and small countries are well advised to form regions to make their voices heard. Why have the Nordic countries been so successful in this regard?

A standard response is that the Nordic countries are small and similar. This means we can recognise ourselves in each other, which is a good basis for co-operation. Yet our societies are also based on something even more meaningful – trust.

“Trust has been a fundamental reason for the success of the Nordic Region’s welfare model. In an open society where people trust one another, there’s little need for control. There’s freedom for creative thinking and for cross-border co-operation. Trust creates security, and security fosters efficiency.”

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Dagfinn Høybråten, Secretary-General. Nordic Council of Ministers. Photo: Johannes Jansson

Just as Rome wasn't built in a day, for regions that have recently emerged from severe conflicts, trust takes time. Although violent at times, the partially shared Nordic history has been characterised by peace between the countries for more than two centuries, with the nations learning from one another irrespective of national borders and differences of opinion. Their transition into modern democracies took place concurrently, and following the Second World War tangible progress was made in realising a long-discussed vision – formal Nordic co-operation.

Dagfinn Høybråten, a child of the 50s, did not play a part in this early progress, although he was soon treading the well-travelled path that lay before young Norwegians who wished to broaden their horizons.

“The world was bigger then. For the young people of today, the real world is at their feet, and the virtual world at their fingertips. Back then, the furthest we went on holiday was to a neighbouring country, we watched Swedish television, and pursued an international political career in Nordic co-operation.”

As a Norwegian youth representative, politician, government director, and minister, Dagfinn Høybråten has gone on to experience the peaks and troughs of Nordic co-operation. When, one at a time, three of the Nordic Region's five countries became members of the EU, the post-war enthusiasm faded. Many felt that Nordic co-operation had had its day. Yet it endured. It overcame new challenges and developed even further. The fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Soviet Union paved the way for the common involvement towards the Baltic states, and with the enlargement of the EU, the relevance of regional co-operation has enjoyed another boost.

“Nordic co-operation has now undergone a renaissance and been given another chance.”

This is a chance that Dagfinn Høybråten is going to take. It is this that has lured him back to Nordic co-operation to become Secretary General. With more pinpointed efforts, the agendas of the Councils of Ministers' meetings should become increasingly relevant. These should clarify the potential of Nordic co-operation and demonstrate the feasibility of bringing about something that the countries would be unable to achieve on their own or via other international organisations.

With clear objectives, knowledge, analytical capability, and large doses of perseverance, Dagfinn Høybråten's employees are able to raise awareness of problems that the Nordic Region's governments would do well to resolve together.

A few years ago, former Prime Minister of Norway Thorvald Stoltenberg compiled a strategic report on possible joint solutions in the field of defence and security. This method has inspired fellow countryman Dagfinn Høybråten. Following in Stoltenberg's footsteps, the former Swedish Minister for Social Affairs Bo Könberg has presented a report on the potential of the Nordic Region to address challenges to healthcare in the form of antibiotic abuse as well as expensive treatments and medications. This proactive method of revealing potential joint action has now created new political dynamism in one area after the next.

The combination of revitalised political engagement and the security of long-standing co-operation also seems to have created a readiness to address more acute contemporary challenges. After the attacks against freedom of expression and freedom of religion in Copenhagen in the spring of 2015, the immediate response was a joint Nordic programme against exclusion, marginalisation, and discrimination.

“In the Nordic Region there is no doubt in our minds that human rights apply to everyone. An attack against one religion is an attack on the freedom of religion overall. And this is something we are prepared to fight for.”

If one part of Dagfinn is striving to do good for Nordic citizens, another is seeking to raise the profile of the Region internationally. This vision is an example of the co-operation which, thanks to its importance to the Nordic Region, is becoming stronger and more visible internationally, and vice versa. 2015 is a year marked by the creation of new sustainability objectives as part of a UN framework and by global climate negotiations in Paris. Against this backdrop the Nordic countries are clearly demonstrating that it is possible to combine sustainable solutions with increased competitiveness while maintaining the same level of prosperity.

The environment and energy are two areas where the Nordic Region has the credibility that comes from practising what you preach. The knowledge and ideas cultivated through extensive co-operation between Nordic and international participants have been successfully implemented in the Region thanks to this practical and pragmatic co-operation. It inspires respect and, in turn, results in an opportunity to inspire others.

Dagfinn Høybråten has considerable experience of development efforts in the global arena. One such example is his role as chairman of the organisation GAVI, which works to increase the supply of vaccines to children in developing nations.

“It’s by working together in this world that we get things done, and we must never give up trying.”

This is the belief that prompted Dagfinn Høybråten to venture out into the world, as well as his message to Balkan presidents. Co-operation in the Nordic Region has contributed not only to the prosperity of the individual countries, but also to something that is being referred to as a model and which is attracting international interest. Yet as Dagfinn points out, this is not an isolated or static model. Small countries like those of the Nordic Region have only been able to develop thanks to good relations with the rest of the world, and this model has been continuously developed based on the challenges it has faced.

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– What has been termed the Nordic Model is not what we are, but what we do.



Photo: Johannes Jansson

DAGFINN HØYBRÅTEN:

Born in Oslo, Norway (1957)

Municipal Executive and Chief Administrative Officer (1990–96)

Director, National Social Insurance Board (1997, 2000–01)

Minister for Health and Labour (1997–2005)

Leader of the Christian Democratic Party of Norway (2004–11)

Member of the Norwegian Parliament (2005–13, of which Vice President 2011–13)

President of the Nordic Council (2007)

Chairman of the Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunisation (GAVI) (2011–15)

Secretary General, Nordic Council of Ministers (since 2013)

DID YOU KNOW...

... that according to a Eurobarometer survey looking at trust in the democratic institutions of EU members, the level of trust in the Nordic countries is high – Sweden 57%, Denmark 54%, Finland 50% – compared with, for example, Spain 11%, Greece 14%, Croatia 16%, and Italy 17%. The European average is 28%

... that compared with other members of the EU, the three Nordic members have the greatest trust in the EU as an institution.

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Nordic Voices

According to the Secretary-General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, the countries of the Nordic Region are the strongest countries in the UN's 70-year history. "This is a fact that commands respect and strengthens you as a region," he said.

The individuals in this book, all of whom are active in various international arenas, are testament to the great interest in the Nordic Region and the fact that the global Nordic voice is now perhaps more important than ever.

THE GLOBAL VOICE OF THE
NORDIC REGION

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