

NORDIC TALENTS

7

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- 1** **Ville's Session
Diary**
 - 2** **Promoting dialogue
in Belarus**
 - 3** **Nordic at
heart**
 - 4** **A shot in the arm
for Nordic research**
 - 5** **When people become
a commodity**
 - 6** **Doomsday vault and
the seeds of the world**
 - 7** **Borrow a lesbian and
confront prejudice**

7 Nordic Tales 2008

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Editor-in-chief: Silje Bergum Kinsten

Editors: Karin Arvidsson, Michael Funch,
Patrik Edman, Jesper Schou-Knudsen,
Mats Holmström and Gitte Merrild

Layout: Jette Koefoed/norden.org

Photo: Simon Jeppsen: cover, p. 28–30

Mari Tefre/Svalbard Global Seed Vault: p. 31

Karin Beate Nøsterud: p. 2–3, 24, 26–27, 36–39

Magnus Fröderberg: p. 6, 8

Johannes Jansson: p. 6, 8, 11, 32, 35

Cato Lein: p. 16

Joachim Clausen: p. 34

Torkil Sørensen: p. 12, 14–15

Gyldendal: p. 18

Photodisc: p. 20, 22, 23

Creas: p. 22

Nikolaj Bock: p. 23

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Nordic Council of Ministers

Store Strandstræde 18

DK-1255 Copenhagen K

Telephone (+45) 3396 0200

Fax (+45) 3396 0202

Nordic Council

Store Strandstræde 18

DK-1255 Copenhagen K

Telephone (+45) 3396 0400

Fax (+45) 3311 1870

www.norden.org

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 three autonomous areas: 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.



7	Foreword
8	Ville's Session Diary
12	Promoting dialogue in Belarus
16	Nordic at heart
20	A shot in the arm for Nordic research
24	When people become a commodity
28	Doomsday vault and the seeds of the world
32	Borrow a lesbian and confront prejudice
36	Facts about the Nordic Council of Ministers and Nordic Council



Cristina Husmark Pehrsson



Erkki Tuomioja

Foreword

A list of Nordic meetings and political decisions in any particular year would be a very long one indeed. Instead, we have selected just seven stories that vividly illustrate some of the positive achievements made by co-operation in 2008.

Greater mobility within the Region is a recurring theme in official co-operation. Mobility makes it easier to set up businesses and to recruit labour in other countries. It guarantees adequate social security and substantial flexibility, enabling citizens to relocate in order to study or work. It is, however, a highly complex area of policy. Although good progress has been made towards cross-border freedom of movement throughout the Region, a great deal of work still remains to be done.

Official Nordic bodies are heavily involved in partnerships with our neighbours in the East. The stories about the promotion of democracy in Belarus and partnerships with North-West Russia and the Baltic States are prime examples of this commitment.

The media has dubbed it the “Doomsday Vault”. What the facility located in the Norwegian permafrost on Svalbard actually does is safeguard seeds from almost all of the vegetables, fruits and other crops of the world.

Why not take out a police officer, a lesbian, or perhaps a Muslim? The Living Library project, which attracted major international attention and was exported around the world in 2008, provides opportunities to learn more about people we encounter in our daily lives, people about whom we perhaps know little or nothing.

Two of the stories – about efforts to improve the environment in the Baltic Sea, and a major international conference about visible climate change in Greenland and the Arctic Region – put the UN Climate Summit in Copenhagen in 2009 into perspective.

The financial crisis and climate change will necessitate major social change, making co-operation

on these global issues not just important, but in many cases critical. The value of Nordic partnerships is clearly illustrated when our countries work together in international arenas. Often, we make a greater impact when we act collectively. Co-operation – at inter-governmental level in the Nordic Council of Ministers and at inter-parliamentary level in the Nordic Council – has probably never been more important.

Some of the stories will continue well into the future, while others are more transitory though not necessarily less important. Some of them show how Nordic political decisions are immediately turned into tangible actions that have direct, positive effects on the way we live. Others take a longer view, describing work that may not reveal its true significance until future generations have long since come to take it for granted.

We hope you will enjoy reading these stories!

Cristina Husmark Pehrsson
Minister for Nordic Co-operation
The Nordic Council of Ministers 2008

Erkki Tuomioja
President of the
Nordic Council 2008

1. Ville's Session Diary



“

Asylum-seeking children without accompanying adults should not be deported unless their safety is guaranteed in the country to which they are returned.

Ville Niinistö kept a diary on the first day of the Nordic Council Session in Helsinki in October 2008. Ville is a Finnish Green member of the Centre Group and chairs the Citizens' and Consumer Rights Committee. The full Nordic Council gathers at the Session to discuss issues of common interest, as well as proposals submitted by the committees. The high point of the Nordic calendar, it entails three fascinating days of non-stop activity for the politicians and civil servants who attend.

Monday 27 October 2008

7.00

To avoid Sunday meetings, Session always starts with a quick-fire succession of meetings on Monday morning. The first is a 7am meeting of the executive of the Centre Group. As a Finnish Green MP, I'm a member of the Centre Group, and I also sit on its executive. The Council only meets four times a year, including the autumn Session, so the timetable has to be minutely planned to fit everything into the restricted timeframe.

The timing of this year's Session was far from ideal for me. The Finnish local elections were held on Sunday and I was standing in my hometown, Turku. Things went well for both me and the party, so I was in fine fettle when I left for Helsinki in the early hours of Monday morning.

8.00

The party group always meets right after the executive. I wolf down some breakfast before dashing off. I make it just in time.

Politically speaking, the Centre Group is the broadest on the

Council, with members from 19 different parties, including Christian democrats, environmentalists, centrists and liberals. Obviously, a balance has to be struck between the various outlooks, so we all have to be open to discussion and compromise. It's highly rewarding to be part of such a big party group – the backing of the Group allows me to accept greater responsibility for Council work than would be possible in a small, ideology-based group.

At the meeting, we plan our interventions at the Session, decide who will speak on which issues, and debate the Group's attitude to the issues we'll have to vote on later. We discuss the importance of creating space for topical political discussions and exchanges of views at both national and international level. With regards to EU work, the Nordic member countries, as well as Norway and Iceland, benefit from hearing the other Nordic countries' points of view and experiences on issues of mutual interest.

10.00

Straight after the Group meeting, I head to the room next door to chair a meeting of the Citizens' and

Consumer Rights Committee. As chair, it's my job, along with the vice-chair and secretary, to plan the content of the meeting in advance. The Citizens' Committee, one of five specialist committees, consists of representatives of the different party groups and deals with citizens' and consumers' rights, human rights, gender equality, immigration and refugees.

Today, we continue to delve into refugee and asylum policy, our theme for the year. Two specially invited Finnish experts talk about the situation facing asylum seekers in their country, comparing it with the findings from our summer visit to Warsaw. It's all highly informative and the focus is on asylum seekers' rights during the application procedure.

The Committee recognises the importance of the Nordic countries working together on asylum issues – we're all part of Schengen, so in the same area when it comes to processing asylum applications. If one Nordic country changes its regulations about migration and immigration, it may have practical consequences for the others. The

Committee has spent all year trying to get the Council and Council of Ministers to recognise the need for the Nordic countries to work more closely together on asylum issues.

We decide to propose that the Council recommends to the governments of the Region that they follow Norway's "best practice" – i.e. not expelling asylum-seeking children without accompanying adults, unless their safety is guaranteed in the country to which they are returned.

12.30

I grab a quick salad in my office, and then it's time to take my seat on the Nordic Youth Council (UNR) panel discussing Nordic language policy. The UNR has raised the issue of language in official Nordic co-operation, questioning the assumption that all Nordic citizens automatically understand each other. In reality, of course, it's not that simple. The UNR has adopted an open position on the use of English, as the resources just aren't there for interpretation between all of the Nordic languages. That made the Nordic Council sit up and pay attention!

A healthy discussion ensues about developing Nordic co-operation in ways that will allow everybody to join in. We agree that Nordic partnerships and our common heritage are more important than which languages we speak. We also agree on the need for simple and inspi-

ring ways of learning each other's languages.

14.00

In the afternoon, the President of the Council, Erkki Tuomioja, formally declares the 60th Session of the Nordic Council open in the parliament. The general debate that follows includes discussion of the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation's report and a report on obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement.

I make my comments to the ministers early in the debate, explaining my Committee's call for a Nordic forum on migration and refugee policy.

16.00

Next come reports by the foreign and defence ministers, including discussions of the global financial crisis and the situation in Iceland. An important and unique aspect of the Session, and of Nordic inter-parliamentary co-operation in general, is that it provides an opportunity for ministers to get together, and for everybody to listen to them and ask questions.

18.45

One Session tradition is to visit the Nordic embassies in the capital where the meeting is held. We Finns, who are "at home", split up between the Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic and Swedish embassies.

I've accepted an invitation to the Swedish embassy, and head there with my Swedish colleagues.

20.00

The evening continues in a less formal fashion with the Centre Group's traditional Session dinner. A long but interesting working day concludes with a proper dinner, good company and some fiddle and accordion music. Some of the others socialise into the night but I draw the day to a close and head home to recharge my batteries.

The most rewarding part of international political gatherings is often what goes on outside the conference rooms. What makes Nordic meetings – as opposed to other international forums – so special is our strong sense of affinity because we share so much in common. Debating topical issues with Nordic colleagues is vitally important to our day-to-day political work. Although we have so much in common, we also have our differences, so there's a great deal we can learn from each other.

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**The Committee
recognises the
importance of the
Nordic countries
working together
on asylum issues.**



2. Promoting dialogue in Belarus

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We want to help to
promote democracy
in Belarus. We don't
hide the fact.

A few years ago, bringing together the government and opposition in Belarus would have seemed virtually impossible. As President of the Nordic Council in 2007, Dagfinn Høybråten availed himself of the opportunity to fulfil a long-held desire to do something about the situation in Belarus. He helped establish a platform for dialogue between politicians from Belarus, the Nordic Region and the Baltic States. The first meeting was held in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 2008.

Democracy, freedom of speech, and tolerance are high on the Nordic agenda, so Nordic bodies are extremely active well beyond the Region's own borders. Belarus neighbours the Nordic and Baltic states, and has enjoyed links with both over the centuries. It also represents a significant challenge to the international community. Often referred to as "Europe's last dictatorship", Belarus is a police state – human rights abuses are commonplace, and the opposition are seldom allowed to make their voices heard.

Responsibility for our neighbours

"Engaging with our neighbours felt like a positive step," recalls Høybråten, when asked about the Nordic Council's involvement in Belarus. "Little progress had been made and an air of despondency pervaded discussions about the situation in the country. As Nordic MPs, we asked ourselves if there was anything we should be doing differently, or if there was something we'd missed, something we hadn't tried before. Could we get the opposition and the government in Belarus to meet each other under our auspices, for example?"

Aware of the way in which the Nordic Region had assumed responsibility in the three Baltic republics – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – when the Iron Curtain came down, Høybråten felt it was important to help promote democracy in Belarus too.

A conversation he had with the Belarus Speaker, Konoplev, during a conference in St Petersburg paved the way for dialogue between the government and opposition.

"After a chat about his favourite sport, handball, and the importance of sport as a way of bringing people together, I asked whether he could envisage a political conference that would involve the opposition as well. To my surprise, he replied that he could," says Høybråten, who is leader of the Christian Democratic Party in Norway, a member of the Norwegian parliament and a member of the Presidium of the Nordic Council.

The first meeting

The first meeting, which was held in Vilnius in 2008 and attended by members of the Belarus government and opposition as well as Nordic

and Baltic MPs, was a great success. Much of the discussion centred on environmental issues and the associated political challenges. Belarus is keen to learn from Nordic experiences in this policy area.

"It was quite a taxing encounter," says the former President of the Nordic Council. "Everybody was extremely enthusiastic. We tackled it with diplomacy and humour though, and in the end all the parties agreed to meet again."

The second meeting will be held in Vilnius in March 2009. This time, the themes will be the environment and the financial crisis, and delegates will discuss integrated solutions in both policy areas. Belarus has been hit hard by the global economic crisis – its currency was substantially devalued in January 2009.

Although it is useful for the Nordic Region, the Baltic States and Belarus to discuss mutual experiences of particular areas of policy, the Council's commitment is far more ambitious than that.

"We want to help to promote democracy in Belarus," says Høybråten.

“We don’t hide this fact – we are very open about it. We don’t have one message for the opposition and another for the government. It’s important to develop relationships. They will be hugely significant in the future. We don’t think we can save democracy single-handedly, but what we can do as parliamentarians from neighbouring countries is spread hope and build support for democracy and liberalisation in Belarus.”

Focus on human rights

According to Høybråten, there are signs that the regime is soften-

ing its stance. At present, these are small but symbolic steps – for example, political prisoners have been released, the movement that backed Alexander Milinkevich, the opposition candidate for President, has been allowed to register and minor concessions have been made towards the media.

However, despite these small improvements, Nordic parliamentarians are not afraid to train a critical spotlight on the human rights situation in Belarus.

“We don’t avoid difficult themes,” says Høybråten. “But we address them in a manner that ensures that we’ll be able to maintain a dialogue. In all our meetings, we remind the participants of our starting point – i.e. that we consider Belarus part of the European family but believe it should sign the European Convention on Human Rights. At the last meeting, we told the government



that we had noted the small improvements, but that the election in autumn 2008 had been neither free nor democratic.”

The advantage of the Nordic Council is that it allows parliamentarians to adopt different approaches than those offered by bilateral relations or at government level. Some of its achievements may well have been

impossible by any other means. To build on the network developed by the parliamentarians, Høybråten would like the Nordic Council of Ministers to establish a permanent presence in the area by opening a Nordic Information Office in Minsk, similar to the ones set up in the Baltic States. His proposal will be discussed at the April meetings of the Nordic Council.

Asked about the future of Belarus, the Norwegian politician replies:

“My vision is of Belarus as a full member of the European family – and that includes membership of the Council of Europe and signing the Convention on Human Rights. After all, the whole point of universal freedoms is that everybody should have them.”



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We consider Belarus part of the European family but believe it should sign the European Convention on Human Rights.

3. Nordic at heart



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The Nordic Region is a small, manageable, safe society in a peripheral part of the world.

Naja Marie Aidt, winner of the Nordic Council Literature Prize, has moved her heart, family and work from Copenhagen to New York. From her small apartment in Brooklyn, she talks about being Nordic and foreign in a multicultural melting pot.

Somewhere within New York's intense 24–7 rhythm there beats a Nordic heart. It belongs to the author and poet Naja Marie Aidt (45). In February 2008 she won the Nordic Council Literature Prize for her collection of short stories *Bavian* (Baboon). In autumn of the same year, she packed her relatively sheltered life into boxes and, along with her husband and two youngest children, left inner Copenhagen for the Eastern Seaboard.

"We had always dreamt of living abroad for a while," says Aidt, speaking from a tiny flat in Brooklyn. "I had my first kid when I was 18, so unlike my contemporaries I never got to travel when I was young. I've got some catching up to do."

Aidt is now enjoying an up-close-and-personal view of *the American way of life*. Her first few months in the Big Apple saw her effectively function as a project co-ordinator, as she found her feet and acclimatised to daily life in a big, chaotic city. Her two sons, aged six and 16, have started their new schools, and the teenager thinks high school is so cool that he is in no hurry to return to Denmark.

In 2009, Naja intends to find the time to explore her own métier. She describes herself as inquisitive about American literature and about the nature of modern American poetry. She has started getting to know people who will be able to pass on tips about what to read.

"I've started to write, and that's the most important thing," she says. "I have to find a brand-new place from which to write, and discover ways of integrating the city in which I live into my work. I've started with poetry, because poems allow you to incorporate things and abstractions on all sorts of levels and relate your experiences of being alien in a way that is less specific and personal."

Aidt has been writing all her life, and published her first poems in 1991. She explains the driving force behind her work:

"Well, it's fun! It's my work. Something's always going on inside my head, and it's absolutely natural for me to write and to think about everything as a possible source of literature. I don't have an objective or a special message that I consciously try to convey. It's the relationships between people that interest me –

communication or the lack of it, the ways in which we live together, both in small (family) groups and as a large collective, as a society. When I'm writing, I'm not sitting there analysing the subject matter. I just try to generate intensity, language and narratives, and make the text as strong as possible."

Aidt's writing always revolves around how modern people in the so-called civilised world live together and relate to each other. She describes *Bavian*, a collection of short stories, as an attempt to understand the mechanisms that cause people to act as egotistically as they do. When the secure, familiar world is suddenly alien – or when you suddenly find yourself a stranger in it – you lose your sense of security. You are, to put it mildly, challenged. Despairing. Bowled over. But also changed, transformed.

Living in New York has given Aidt first-hand experience of this sense of transformation.

"They say that New York drains a vast amount of your energy, but it gives it back too. So many different cultures are represented, and New Yorkers have absorbed the wildest

stories from all over the world. I now have a better understanding of how hard it is to move to a new culture. When you aren't 100% fluent in the language, you sound more stupid than you actually are, and losing my language like that was extremely hard. In a way, you lose your sovereignty. But it's also liberating to create a new life and start from scratch."

From the polar circle to the heart of the metropolis

Aidt's life has taken her from one of the most unspoiled areas of natural beauty on the planet to the skyscraper forest of New York. As a child she lived in Greenland, north of the polar circle, where winter was pitch-black and summer full of endless sunshine. In these extremes her parents would read all sorts of fairy tales to her at bedtime – Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish, Hans Christian Andersen, the Brothers Grimm, folk tales, Gypsy stories, *A Thousand and One Nights* ...

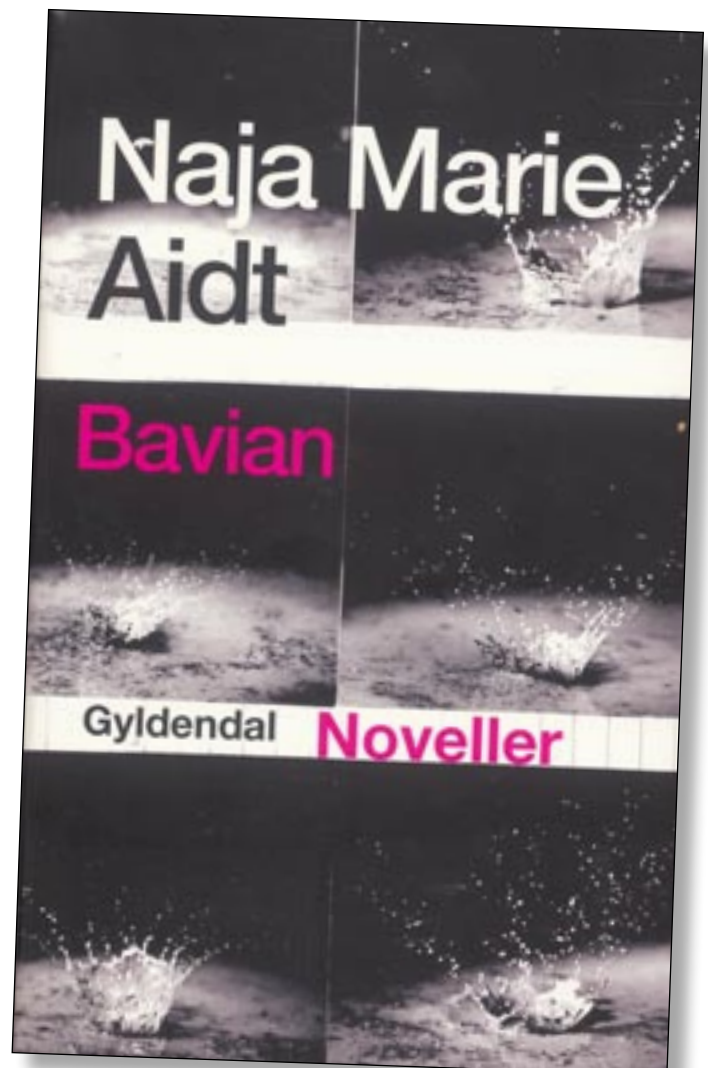
It was there that Aidt became hooked on literature. She realised that it has the power to dissipate both dark and light, that literature allows you to travel where you please, transforms the instantly recognisable and transports you to other moods and places, other worlds. Literature is an eternal consolation and a liberation.

"I came to Denmark, aged seven, from a tiny community. It was a huge culture shock, because I wasn't used to the big city. I think that particular move has had the most profound effect on me – and is the reason I started to write. Here, from New York, I now see that the Nordic Region is also a small, manageable, safe society in a peripheral part of

the world – but also that it is my heartbeat and I take its geography with me wherever I go and whatever I do. But at home, some people seem to think that the Nordic Region is the whole world – and it's not! We know surprisingly little about other cultures, even those present in our own countries. There are 100 nationalities at my youngest son's school. There's also a very clearly defined *American space*, where everybody has to follow the rules and fit in. But otherwise you can be, dress and believe what you want. This is really healthy, especially when you come from a country full

of stay-at-homes. You are constantly encouraged to retain your national identity and be proud of its distinctive character. People spend very little time being ashamed of themselves around here!"

Naja Marie Aidt and her family intend to stay in New York for about three years.





**We know surprisingly
little about other cultures,
even those present in our
own countries.**

Works

Så længe jeg er ung, 1991, poems
Et vanskeligt møde, 1992, poems
Vandmærket, 1993, short stories
Det tredje landskab, 1994, poems
Tilgang, 1995, short stories
Huset overfor, 1996, poems
Rejse for en fremmed, 1999, poems
Begyndelsen til en historie, 2002, poems
Balladen om Bianca, 2002, poems
Rundt på gulvet, 2004, drama
Zakarias 1–5, 2005, children's books
Bavian, 2006, short stories
Tag og kys det hele fra os, 2006, poems
Hvor er Villy?, 2006, children's book
Poesibog, 2008, poems

4. A shot in the arm for Nordic research

“

It is not just an altruistic exercise – it is also an investment in jobs and export.

The Council of Ministers' Excellence in Research Initiative (ERI) serves as a shot in the arm for research in the Region. It aims to take Nordic research to an even higher level, and to put the Region's researchers at the forefront of work on climate, energy and environment solutions.

The primary focus of the ERI is to address climate change. The second phase, which is currently at the planning stage, will look at health and welfare issues.

The problems that the initiative will address are global in nature, and this is certainly not simply an altruistic exercise – it is also an investment in jobs and exports.

“The Excellence in Research Initiative provides us with a Nordic platform that will enable us all to complement each other,” says Rolf Annerberg, one of the driving forces behind the process, and chair of the ERI steering group. “It will put the Region at the forefront of European research and innovation, and will create many new jobs.”

Research councils, funding bodies and academics from the other Nordic countries are providing support for the project at national level.

Added Nordic value

A number of Nordic institutions have key roles. NordForsk, the Nordic Innovation Centre (NICe) and Nordic Energy Research in Oslo promote research and innovation in a number of sectors. They participate in EU projects to which the Nordic Council of Ministers' institutions supply data and expertise, and in projects where Nordic entrepreneurs, researchers and universi-

ties co-operate across borders to generate synergies and results that would not be possible for individual institutions.

One key contribution from the Nordic institutions is seed money.

“NordForsk provides grants for project development, and the rubber-stamp this implies can help multiply a project's funding base tenfold,” says Liisa Hakamies-Blomqvist, Director of NordForsk.

A new era requires new strategies

The Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, launched The Green Economy Initiative in October 2008. Dubbed the *Green New Deal*, it challenges world leaders to develop programmes that promote renewable energy to help stimulate the global economy out of the current recession.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) has declared that “we need a global revolution in energy supply and consumption”.

The Nordic contribution

Although Nordic expertise in renewable energy means the Region is well placed to promote green growth, the Nordic nations could be even better at developing and using new environmental technology.

The ERI will help cement the Region's leading position, and innovation will be just as important as research in that process.

“Greater Nordic input, working with innovation on the basis of users' needs, can be the key to sustainable growth and a new green economy in the Region,” says the Director of NICe, Ivar H. Kristensen.

NICe is hopeful that the ERI will create a platform that will engage Nordic business in innovation work at Nordic level.

Prioritisation tool

DKK 385 million over five years is not really that much, considering the many billions spent on research by the five Nordic countries. In 2007 alone, their combined research and development budgets were well over DKK 40 billion.

However, the point of the ERI and its funding programmes is to focus and promote world-class research in the Region.

The initiative adds an entirely new dimension to co-operation on research and innovation. It is not a stand-alone programme. Nor is it designed merely to serve as a framework for research and innovation in practice, but is also a platform for policy development and prioritisation.



The ERI will also play a role in determining which areas of research and priorities will be promoted and focused on at Nordic, European and global levels.

The climate, energy and the environment

The Nordic Region has a great deal to offer during the first phase of the ERI, which will focus on climate, energy and the environment.

“By using the unique models developed in the Nordic Region and focusing on the energy systems of the future, each country will be able to make a contribution based on its particular technological expertise,” says Birte Holst, director of Nordic Energy Research.

Given the Region’s strengths in climate, sustainable-energy and energy-efficiency work, it is no surprise that the initial focus will be on those subjects.

“If we link these endeavours through the academic networks of established national centres, we will

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Five countries speak more loudly than one – and a joint Nordic research environment will make further and faster progress than the individual nations are capable of on their own.

be more effective and more visible than we currently are as individual nations,” she adds.

In practical terms, this means that a body has been established that will help set a joint agenda for Nordic research and provide input into global research policy.

Collective research and development is based on the principle that five countries speak more loudly than one – and that a joint Nordic research environment will make further and faster progress than the individual nations are capable of on their own.

FACTS:

Sustainable growth

The Excellence in Research Initiative was approved in October 2008 and launched by the prime ministers at the Globalisation Forum in Iceland, February 2009.

In a previous statement, the prime ministers said:

“The Nordic Region has the potential to be a world leader in work on climate change. A sustainable Nordic model for meeting climate challenges will demonstrate the potential for combining reduced emissions with economic growth.”

FACTS:

Focus areas

The first phase of the ERI consists of six sub-programmes:

- Impact studies and adaptation to climate change
- Interaction between climate change, ice, snow and glaciers
- Nano-technology and energy efficiency
- Large-scale integration of wind power
- Sustainable bio-energy
- Capture and storage of carbon dioxide.

5. When people become a commodity



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At our Reden International crisis centre we've had 170 women who the police think are trafficking victims.

Globalisation has made a huge impact on the Nordic market for sexual services. More women from abroad are now active in the Nordic market, and the politicians are struggling to keep legislation up-to-date and cut down on prostitution and human trafficking.

The Nordic prostitution markets have become internationalised over the last decade, according to the first joint Nordic research programme on the topic, a wide-ranging project entitled *Prostitution in the Nordic Region*.

Prostitutes have become mobile and travel of their own accord – or are forced to work in the most profitable markets. For example, a pronounced shift was noted in Denmark when Romania joined the European Union on 1 January 2007. Within weeks, coaches began to arrive full of Romanian women selling sexual services, just as women from Russia, the Baltic states, Nigeria and elsewhere had come to the Nordic Region a decade earlier.

Unhelpful regulations

Dorit Otzen manages a drop-in advice centre called *Reden* in Copenhagen, which has been involved in Nordic partnerships for a quarter of a century. She has seen the number of Eastern European and African prostitutes in the city rise sharply since 1997. The nature of the industry and its moral code have changed dramatically, because many of the foreign women will do anything – and will do it cheaply.

Trafficking victims are only discovered during police raids, but the number of unrecorded foreign women active in the Danish market is incredibly high.

“At our Reden International crisis centre we’ve had 170 women who the police think are trafficking victims,” Otzen continues. “They give nothing away, but if their papers are forged then they must have been paid for by traffickers. These women couldn’t afford them otherwise. Because of the papers they’re treated like criminals and deported within 100 days.”

Otzen believes that the biggest single problem in the war on trafficking is the fact that the regulations for granting residence permits contained in the Aliens Act are incompatible with the aims of the 2007 Danish action plan to combat human trafficking.

“The law provides the women with no security. They are sent home – and often fall victim to trafficking again,” she explains.

Trans-national partnerships

The dynamics of trafficking have changed in recent years. Nowadays, any given country can be a country of origin, a transit station, a recipient nation and witness domestic trafficking – all at the same time.

The Nordic Region and the Adjacent Areas face many of the same trafficking problems, so they must be tackled on a trans-national level. The Nordic Council and Council of Min-

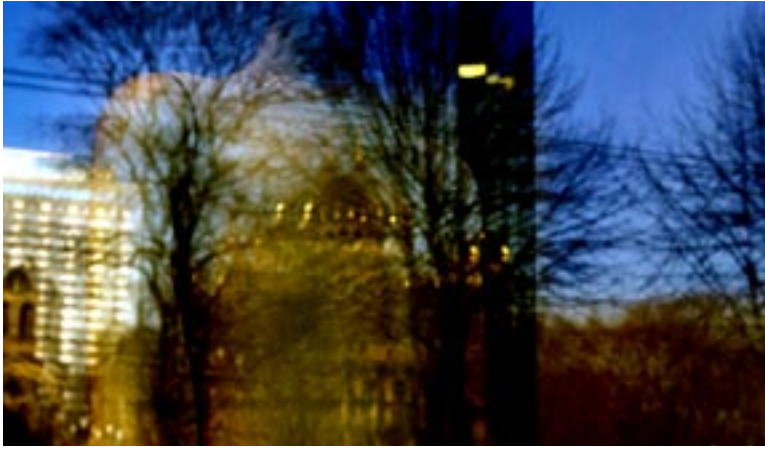
isters work with Russia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on this issue.

Trafficking for purposes of prostitution means that the women are caught up in the world of organised international crime. As revealed in the *Prostitution in the Nordic Region* report, foreign women enter the Region illegally, and are classified as criminals as a result.

Social problem or legal problem?

The Nordic countries have traditionally defined prostitution as a social problem and addressed it by providing women with social services. Over the last decade, the focus has shifted – legislators are now less concerned with how much prostitutes earn from sex and focus more on criminalising the purchasing of sexual services. However, the different countries deploy different arguments.

“In Sweden a decade ago, prostitution was seen as part of the debate about gender and equality, and purchasing sexual services was considered chauvinist,” explains May-Len Skilbrei, a researcher at the Institute for Labour and Social Research (FAFO) in Oslo and project manager for *Prostitution in the Nordic Region* at the Nordic Gender Institute (NIKK). “The other countries placed greater emphasis on the perils of trafficking and on criminalising the purchase of



sexual services as a means of controlling and reducing prostitution. By stopping people paying for sex of various types, it was hoped to reduce both trafficking and foreign prostitution.”

Delayed legislation

The research project also revealed that legislators find it difficult to keep up with market trends in sexual services. It is exceedingly difficult to build up a clear picture of the trafficking situation, as nobody really knows how many people are involved. All of the data is based on estimates by the social services.

“The protracted nature of the legislative process makes it too difficult for the legislators to keep up-to-date with market trends,” Skilbrei says. “Take pimping, for example – the ban on advertising prostitution and on renting out property for use in prostitution was not introduced until several years after both had become widespread.”

She thinks the politicians have been far too busy targeting laws at specific sectors of the prostitution market.

“General legislation refined by real-life precedents would be preferable. That way, you wouldn’t have to stipulate specific conditions in each and every amended version of the

act. For example, we have an overarching law that outlaws murder. We don’t have individual bans on different ways of killing. But to combat the phenomenon of prostitution, the politicians have passed law after law just to show that they’re doing something.”

The project manager praises *Prostitution in the Nordic Region* for establishing a joint Nordic body of knowledge about how the countries deal with prostitution and trafficking, and believes it can serve as the basis for future policies.

FACTS:

Prostitution in the Nordic Region

The ministers responsible for gender equality commissioned the Nordic Gender Institute (NIKK) to map out similarities and differences between prostitution policies in the Region. The results of the research were presented at a conference in Stockholm in October 2008.

Legislation in the Nordic Region

Sweden criminalised the purchasing of sexual services in 1999; Norway in 2009. Finnish law bans the purchasing of sex from victims of trafficking, and the matter has been raised in the Danish parliament. Iceland decriminalised prostitution in 2007.

In 2003, the UN’s Palermo protocol criminalised human trafficking and this has formed the basis for the Nordic countries’ laws on human trafficking. All of the Nordic countries have passed laws against trafficking and child prostitution.

NIKK bridges the gap between Nordic gender research and actual gender-equality policy

Link:

NIKK

The conference report:
www.norden.org/pub/sk/showpub.asp?pubnr=2008:739



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The Nordic Region and the Adjacent Areas face many of the same trafficking problems, so they must be tackled on a trans-national level.

6. Doomsday vault and the seeds of the world



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It's an emergency reserve store for the seeds of the world. It ensures that we'll still have food – even in the event of war, natural disaster or other threats.

Superman was right – if you want to protect something, build an Arctic fortress. The same thinking lay behind the secure storage facility on the Svalbard archipelago in the far north of Norway, where the world’s corn, rice and wheat seeds are now protected from obliteration in an era of climate change.

The Svalbard facility consists of three large halls more than a hundred metres underground. Although built by Norway, which also owns the facility, the Nordic Council of Ministers plays a key role in its activities, and the Nordic Genetic Resource Centre (NordGen) is responsible for its day-to-day operations and administration.

“We have contacts with seed banks all over the world,” says Jessica Kathle, director of NordGen. “We write contracts, explain how to ship the seeds, and process them on arrival.”

The Svalbard facility, inaugurated in February 2008, was proclaimed the seventh best innovation in the world by *Time* magazine. It has received massive media attention – everyone from major international news agencies to local papers has carried in-depth stories about the Arctic seed store. Kathle thinks that the huge interest is due to the facility’s simple function and message – the store makes an important contribution to guaranteeing global food supplies.

“It’s an emergency reserve store for the seeds of the world. It ensures that we’ll still have food – even in the event of war, natural disaster or other threats. These days, we’re all aware of the threat that climate change poses to our genetic resources,” she says.

Diversity under threat

Climate change and natural disasters present an ever-increasing threat to biodiversity. The Svalbard facility is designed to guarantee that important species are not exterminated by droughts, plant disease, floods, etc. If a particular type of corn is wiped out by drought, for example, it can be re-established using seeds from Svalbard.

However, it is only possible to store certain species in the three halls. They must be seed-based plants, which means that it is impossible to store some of the most important food products in the world, e.g. bananas, cassava and yams.

Huge capacity

The site is perfect for storage purposes. The combination of perma-

frost and the vault’s location deep within the mountains guarantees that the seeds will stay frozen even during a power cut.

Dubbed the *Doomsday Vault* by the media, the facility is capable of storing up to 4.5 million seed samples. Effectively, this means it is able to preserve seeds from more or less all of the world’s crops. One particular objective is to preserve seeds from developing countries where both extreme natural phenomena and political instability constitute threats to biological diversity – Kenya, for example, sent thousands of seeds to Svalbard.

“Kenya sent seeds to us at a time when the country was virtually in a state of civil war,” says operations coordinator Ola Westengen.

“This shows how important people consider Svalbard to be.”

Superman is no doubt pleased with the Arctic fortress on Svalbard. He doesn’t have to worry about standing guard over the seeds of the world and can use his superpowers for other purposes.



FACTS:

- The Nordic prime ministers laid the foundation stone on 19 June 2006. The facility was inaugurated on 26 February 2008.
- The three parties behind the facility are the Norwegian state, NordGen and the Global Crop Diversity Trust.
- The facility has the capacity to store 4.5 million seed samples and more than 2 billion seeds.
- Svalbard today preserves seeds from more than 200 countries, from all parts of the world.
- NordGen runs a public database containing information about all the seeds stored on Svalbard.
- In early 2009, there were just over 320,000 seed samples in the facility.
- The biggest single number of samples stored here is of different species of rice – approximately 70,000.
- NordGen was launched in 2008 as a result of the restructuring of Nordic co-operation on genetic resources. It is a merger of the Nordic Gene Bank Farm Animals, the Nordic Gene Bank and the Nordic Council for Forest Reproductive Material.
- As well as its work on Svalbard, NordGen works with the preservation and sustainable use of farm animals, forestry and plants, and runs the Nordic countries' gene banks from its Swedish headquarters.

LINKS:

The Svalbard Seed Vault:
www.seedvault.no

NordGen:
www.nordgen.org

Global Crop Diversity Trust:
www.croptrust.org

The Seed Portal:
www.nordgen.org/sgsv





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Kenya sent seeds to us at a time when the country was virtually in a state of civil war. This shows how important people consider Svalbard to be.

7. Borrow a lesbian and confront prejudice



“

**We need bridge-
building and
dialogue now.**

What do lesbians get up to in bed? Are they all butch? You may have heard all sorts of stuff about how lesbians live their lives, but have you ever sat down and talked to one? The Living Library lets you borrow a lesbian and confront your prejudices.

The inspiration behind the Living Library – where you borrow people instead of books – was the desire to encourage people to confront their worst prejudices. The idea was to engage and involve people, to get them talking to each other, not only in the Nordic Region but all around the world. In 2008, with the help of funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Living Library made its international breakthrough.

To work in practice, a Living Library requires courage – both from the ‘reader’, in daring to pose personal questions, and from the ‘book’, in providing candid replies.

“It was a bit weird talking to a stranger about some of these things, but I felt it was important to break down prejudices and common misconceptions,” says Kiera Harburn, referring to some of the most common questions she was asked during Britain’s first Living Library event, at Swiss Cottage in London in April 2008.

“How do you know you are gay? Is it a choice? What do lesbians do in bed? I found the thought of being

asked anything quite daunting,” says Kiera. “I kept reminding myself that the ‘readers’ had to agree to follow the rules, including that they must return the ‘book’ to the library in the same condition as it was in when they borrowed it, and that as a book I could end the loan if I felt I was being mistreated.”

A platform for the vulnerable

A few critical voices have suggested that the Living Library concept may well define borrowers’ attitudes in advance and generate new prejudices in the process. One of the people who came up with the concept, Ronni Abergel (35) from Denmark, disagrees.

“The Living Library is exclusively a platform for the excluded. It uses a face-to-face encounter to shed light on how they feel and what their lives are like. It acts as a mirror. It’s all about enabling people to stand up and tell their own stories.”

Kiera Harburn has done just that. As a lesbian with experience of homophobia, she felt it was important to take part as a ‘book’ because she thinks it is essential to confront

and challenge prejudice in a civilised society.

“Prejudice is illogical and unacceptable, and it leads people to do terrible things to each other,” she says.

The last loan of the day

One group of British borrowers made a particularly deep impression on Kiera.

“My last ‘loan’ of the day was by four pre-teens – three boys and a girl. When I realised who the ‘readers’ were, I thought, ‘Oh my God! This is going to be awful!’ I felt really anxious, thinking they were going to give me such a hard time, but being aware of how much homophobia there is in schools, I decided it was important to go ahead with the loan. At first they asked me what it was like being gay?; how did I know?; was I bullied at school? Once I had answered these questions, much to my surprise, one of the boys turned to his friend and said, ‘So do you get it now? There’s nothing wrong with it.’ I was so relieved!”

Around the world

The idea has grown since 2000, and is now a great success all over the world. Australia, Great Britain, Japan



and the USA are just some of the countries where the Living Library has taken off.

Abergel, a journalism student and prevention consultant, spends much of his free time promoting the Library, travelling the world to help run events. In autumn 2008, he was invited to Kyoto in Japan.

"I found that the Japanese have a very diplomatic way of communicating, which made me realise the limitations of my own forms of communication," Ronni reveals over a cup of tea in a Copenhagen café.

"They even came up with their own slogan – 'Understanding diversity'. The Japanese are less likely to admit to having a prejudice, but are perfectly happy to say that they wish to understand the differences between themselves and others. I actually think their slogan is better than 'Take out a prejudice', which we usually use. I'll be taking that one on board."

Ronni sees a new approach to the concept every time he visits a new Living Library event. "Each country and culture incorporates its own elements. In the USA, for example, bells rang every 30 minutes so participants didn't have to keep track of time."

Japanese politeness

Noriko (53) borrowed two homeless people during Japan's first Living

Library, in Kyoto. She recalls that she didn't dare pose all the questions that sprang to mind when her 'books' said that they were willing to take any old job to get out of their way of life, but were not willing to study or learn new skills.

"I wanted to ask them 'What do they see as the point of work? Why do people work?'" she says. "But they seemed like abstract questions and I couldn't bring myself to ask them. I had the impression that they actually would be unwilling to take just any old job to feed themselves and their families. But I felt questions like that might have been impolite."

Noriko feels that the Living Library gave her an insight into an unfamiliar world, and helped her understand that being unemployed is not synonymous with an inability to work. It was not the only prejudice to bite the dust.

"The homeless in the parks in Tokyo stand out a mile off. I used to think they wore filthy clothes. But the ones I met had clean hair and wore clean clothes," says Noriko, who would gladly take part in a Library again.

Volunteer network

The Living Library is based on a network of volunteers and receives funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), the Council

of Europe and others. NCM funds the Library to promote core Nordic values such as democracy, freedom of speech, tolerance and human rights.

Ronni thinks this support has been absolutely crucial. He's now ready to reach far more people.

"The reason that a number of us spend time helping out with the Living Library is that it takes such a long time to spread the word. We need bridge-building and dialogue now. I want this concept to spread over the whole world and reach everywhere there is a need for it."

At the end of August 2009, the Living Library will return to its roots with an outdoor festival in the Royal Gardens in Copenhagen. Two of the sponsors will be the Nordic Cultural Fund and the City of Copenhagen.

FACTS:

- The Living Library is a Nordic-developed method of initiating meetings and stimulating dialogue between strangers.
- Instead of borrowing a book, you borrow a person. The people on loan regularly encounter prejudices in their lives.
- The aim is to break down prejudice through dialogue.
- The first Living Library event was held during the 2000 Roskilde Festival in Denmark, under the auspices of Stop Violence.
- The Nordic Council of Ministers has, through the Nordic Children's and Youth Committee (NORDBUK), funded several incarnations of the Living Library, as well as an organisers' handbook and the website living-library.org.
- The method is described in the free publication *The Living Library: A Handbook for Organisers*, which is published by NCM and the Council of Europe. It is available in the Nordic languages at www.norden.org, and in other languages, e.g. English, German and French, at <http://eycb.coe.int>.

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As a book I could end the loan if I felt I was being mistreated.



Facts about the Nordic Council of Ministers ...

The Nordic Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers (NCM) is the forum for formal co-operation between the Nordic governments. However, informal consultation and exchanges of information also play a key role in Nordic activities.

The purpose of the NCM is to promote Nordic co-operation, the collective Nordic identity and Nordic interests in the world at large. Decisions are reached by consensus.

A separate Council of Ministers coordinates work on each topic upon which the countries have agreed to collaborate. The Prime Ministers have the ultimate responsibility for the NCM but in practice the responsibility is delegated to the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation and their representatives, the Nordic Com-

mittee for Co-operation. Most of the Councils of Ministers meet several times a year. They are aided in all their work by Committees of Senior Officials and by the Council of Ministers' Secretariat.

The NCM currently consists of the following Councils of Ministers:

- Economy and Finance
- Social and Health Policy
- Business, Energy and Regional Policy
- Fishery and Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry
- The Environment
- Gender Equality
- Culture
- Legislation
- Education, Training and Research
- Working Life
- The Ministers for Nordic Co-operation

Ministers for Nordic Co-operation as per February 2009

Bertel Haarder, Denmark
 Jógvan á Lakjuni, the Faroe Islands
 Jan Vapaavuori, Finland
 Per Berthelsen, Greenland
 Kolbrún Halldórsdóttir, Iceland
 Heidi Grande Røys, Norway
 Cristina Husmark Pehrsson, Sweden
 Runar Karlsson, Åland



... and the Nordic Council

The Nordic Council

The Nordic Council (NC) is a political forum for co-operation between Nordic parliamentarians and their governments. The NC holds a plenary Session once a year, at which parliamentarians meet with Nordic ministers. The rest of the year, the work of the Council is done by five permanent committees and the Presidium.

The NC takes initiatives on and discusses political issues. It suggests the direction in which Nordic co-operation should progress, and monitors whether the governments comply with its decisions. The NC works in many policy fields, e.g. the environment, social and health policy, culture, education and training, children and young people, business, gender equality, justice, international co-operation and welfare.

The Presidium of the Nordic Council, as per February 2009

Niels Sindal, The Social Democratic Group, Denmark
 Marion Pedersen, The Centre Group, Denmark
 Christina Gestrin, The Centre Group, Finland
 Erkki Tuomioja, The Social Democratic Group, Finland
 Árni Páll Árnason, The Social Democratic Group, Iceland
 Kjartan Ólafsson, The Conservative Group, Iceland
 Berit Brørby, The Social Democratic Group, Norway
 Dagfinn Høybråten, The Centre Group, Norway
 Inge Lønning, The Conservative Group, Norway
 Rolf Reikvam, The Left-Socialist Green Group, Norway
 Sinikka Bohlin, President, The Social Democratic Group, Sweden
 Kent Olsson, Vice President, The Conservative Group, Sweden
 Johan Linander, The Centre Group, Sweden









norden

Nordic Council of Ministers
Nordic Council

Store Strandstræde 18
DK-1255 Copenhagen K
www.norden.org