

Portrait

Scarpetta: The OECD has learned a lot from studying the Nordics

Theme

A metro from Malmö to Copenhagen

Editorial

When do we get a Council of Ministers for Transport?

News

Norwegian security guards dread work among violence and threats

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Theme: Nordic infrastructure



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When do we get a Council of Ministers for Transport?

If the prime ministers really want the Nordics to become the world's most integrated region, there should be a designated Nordic Council of Ministers for transport and infrastructure.

EDITORIAL

27.04.2023

BY BJÖRN LINDAHL, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Swedish MP Kjell-Arne Ottosson's message is crystal clear – and he has the full support of the Nordic Council, which unanimously agreed in 2018 to establish such a council of ministers.

It is really somewhat of an anomaly that it does not already exist. When the Nordic Council of Ministers was founded in 1971, there was already a communication committee in the Nordic Council and traffic issues were intensively debated.

Today there are 11 councils of ministers, and each country also appoints a Nordic cooperation minister. Since all the Nordic countries now look set to become Nato members, this should be reflected in the Helsinki Agreement. Why not make sure a council of ministers for transport and infrastructure is established at the same time?

Ottosson points out that right now many major plans are being assessed for the improvement of transport links within the Nordic region. He himself has just presented a motion in the Swedish parliament for a new, more direct and faster railway link between Oslo and Stockholm. The aim is to cut travel times to 2 hours, 55 minutes – hence the project name 2.55.

The most intensive work is being done in relation to links between Denmark and Sweden, however. No fewer than three tunnel projects under Öresund have been announced, partly in competition with each other. Fayme Alm takes us through the different projects and lets their proponents present their best arguments.

Marie Preisler caught the ferry from Karlskrona in Sweden to Klaipėda in Lithuania. The ferries are the workhorses ploughing through the Baltic Sea. They are also examples of how Nordic transport routes are increasingly run with foreign labour. If you fly south with Norwegian, the cabin crew are as likely to be Spanish as Scandinavian. The no-frills airline has contributed to an aviation model which is nearly

exclusively constructed like hubs with spokes, with capital cities being the hubs.

Could new traffic patterns emerge from the introduction of electric planes? Nordregio has mapped which air links will save the most time and be able to compete with other transport alternatives.

Public transport makes up only 4 per cent of Reykjavik's total traffic. Borgarlína is the name of a new *Rapid Transfer-system*, with busses running along designated lanes with frequent departures. The system will mean a considerable upgrade to the city's public transport system.

A new council of ministers would also mean more cooperation on other types of infrastructure. In Finland, the third reactor at the Olkiluoto nuclear power plant has finally been put into commercial operation after a lot of problems, making the country self-reliant on electricity once again. But for how long?

Electricity consumption will increase rapidly. Data storage is a new, big consumer of electricity. But the enthusiasm has cooled among Nordic municipalities, which used to be keen to attract that kind of industry with hopes of creating thousands of jobs. The question now is whether a huge amount of electricity consumed in smaller municipalities should be used to store TikTok videos. Facebook's Luleå data centre only employed some 90 people in the end.

Not all occupations are threatened by digitalisation. Take security guards. Researchers at the Oslo Work Research Institute have published a report that shows there were 2,500 security guards and 5,000 police officers in the 1980s. Security guards surpassed the number of police in 2015. That year, there were 11,000 security guards and 9,600 police.

There are still more police if you count full-time jobs, but security guards have taken over many of the less serious public order and control jobs that police have traditionally been re-

sponsible for. Read more about the challenges facing security guards.

Finally, we have interviewed Stefano Scarpetta who for the past ten years has been in charge of labour, employment and welfare at the OECD. He tells us the history of how his organisation, which used to value high growth measured in GDP the highest, has become a keen proponent of inclusive growth. He presents an argument that might even convince finance ministers:

“Inequality is not only detrimental to social cohesion. It might also undermine economic growth, which has always been the OECD's main objective,” he says.



A metro from Malmö to Copenhagen

The majority of Copenhagen's political parties recently agreed to assess how a new line on the city's metro system could be run to Malmö in Sweden. A decision is yet to be taken on another permanent link between the two countries – there are several alternatives.

THEME

27.04.2023

TEXT: FAYME ALM

Copenhagen got its driver-less metro system in 2002. For now, it consists of four lines. The city's politicians have now decided to launch an environmental impact assessment for another metro line, called M5. A possible future link to Malmö will also be assessed, which would make M5 an Öresundsmetro.

The next step in this process is a consultation process and negotiations with central government. Late this spring, the Copenhagen City Council will take the final and formal decision to launch the assessment.

Several proposals

The Öresundsmetro is not the first proposal for a permanent link between Denmark and Sweden. Two other cities in

Skåne County have proposed a new link between Skåne and Danish Zealand:

- Landskrona to Copenhagen, the Europaspåret project (The European Track)
- Helsingborg to Helsingør, the HH project

National inquiry before decision

It is still not clear which proposal the Danish and Swedish governments will agree on. What is clear is that the Swedish Transport Administration will investigate more than one proposal for another permanent link between Denmark and Sweden, based on a commission from the Swedish government's National Plan for Transport Infrastructure 2022-2033.

It says that it is a priority to investigate the “Capacity and redundancy for transport across Öresund, including a further in-depth study of the Helsingborg-Helsingør connection”.

“We will probably present the results of the assessment in the summer or autumn of 2025 as part of the proposed new national transport plan for the coming planning period,” Peter Bernström, head of social planning at the Swedish Transport Authority, tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

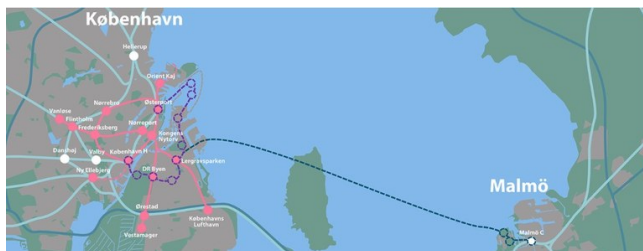
He confirms that the authority will assess several alternatives for a permanent link as well as look closer at a study of a possible at a Helsingborg-Helsingør link between Denmark and Sweden.

That study was a strategic analysis aimed at “creating a basis for continued political dialogue and possible decisions on further assessments with the goal of establishing a permanent connection between Helsingør and Helsingborg”, and was carried out by the Danish Road Directorate, the Danish Housing and Planning Authority and the Swedish Transport Administration. It was published in 2021.

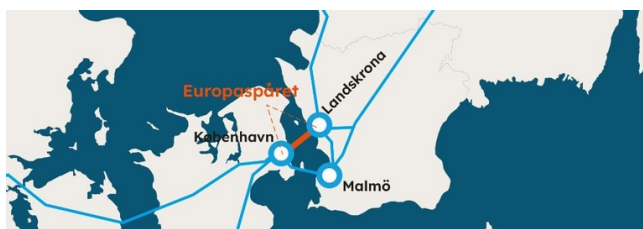
So how do the various proposals for a permanent link compare?



- A permanent link between Helsingborg and Helsingør – a 10-kilometre-long passenger train link including a 7-kilometre-long tunnel, plus a 16-kilometre-long motorway link including a 12-kilometre-long tunnel. Estimated cost: 57 billion Swedish kronor (€4.9bn). Source: The HH Group



- The Öresundsmetro between Malmö and Copenhagen – a metro for passenger traffic through a 23.8-kilometre-long two-track tunnel between Copenhagen and Malmö. Estimated cost: 40 billion Swedish kronor (€1.22bn). Source: Öresundsmetron



- Europaspåret (The European Track) between Landskrona and Copenhagen – a 19-kilometre-long train tunnel, possibly also a road tunnel. Estimated cost: 52 billion Swedish kronor (€4.55bn) for the railway part, 28 billion Swedish kronor (€2.5bn) for the road part. Source: Europaspåret



Which is the best alternative?

The Nordic Labour Journal put the same question to the project leaders for the three proposed new links between Sweden and Denmark. This is how they argue for their alternatives.

THEME

27.04.2023

TEXT: FAYME ALM

What are the advantages of your proposal?

Leif Gjesing for Öresundsmetro between Malmö and Copenhagen:

- The Öresundsmetro handles the local traffic and frees up space for goods and long-distance trains on the Öresund bridge.
- If the new metro line is linked with the Öresundsmetro it will connect with the available infrastructure on the Danish side and partially on the Swedish side. Two new metro stations in Västra hamnen (the western harbour) in Malmö need to be constructed.
- The journey between Copenhagen Central Station and Malmö C with the Öresundsmetro will take 23 minutes.

Hanne Skak Jensen for Europaspåret (The European Track) between Landskrona and Copenhagen:

- Europaspåret is the only proposal that can handle both goods and long-distance trains and therefore the only proposal that can solve the challenge of capacity and redundancy.

- A tunnel from Landskrona can be linked to the available rail networks in both Denmark and Sweden.
- Öresund is very shallow between Copenhagen and Landskrona. A tunnel here can have a relatively gentle slope. Long and heavy trains carrying goods cannot handle steep slopes.
- Europaspåret would allow regional trains to travel both via the Öresund bridge and via Landskrona, which would create a circle. If you are in Lund, you can travel to Copenhagen via Landskrona and be sure to arrive even at times when trains cannot travel across the Öresund bridge.

Sten Hansen for Fast HH-förbindelse (Helsingborg – Helsingør):

- This is the shortest distance across Öresund, only 4 kilometres, which means we have the best preconditions. A commuter ferry has long existed here.
- Fast HH-förbindelse is the only link that has been assessed by both countries as a user-financed alternative.
- Fast HH-förbindelse will be our small contribution to an integrated Nordic region. In

Helsingborg, the E4 and E6 roads meet.

From here you can travel to Norway or carry on north to the rest of Sweden and Finland. Skåne is a gateway to the rest of the Nordics.

- A tunnel would cut the journey from 25 minutes by ferry to 5 minutes.

How will the link be financed?

Leif Gjesing for Öresundsmetro between Malmö and Köpenhamn:

- Mainly through Öresundsmetro ticket sales, possibly EU support and financing from the Danish and Swedish states via possible surplus income from the Öresund bridge and its onshore facilities once these have been paid off.

Hanne Skak Jensen for Europaspåret between Landskrona and Copenhagen:

- With EU contributions and state loans which will be paid back through transport fees. It can all be paid back over 40 years according to our calculations.

Sten Hansen for Fast HH-förbindelse:

- In the same way as the Öresund bridge. That means user fees. So this new link will not be paid for over the Swedish or Danish national budgets.

The majority of Copenhagen politicians have decided to support an assessment of how an Öresundsmetro from Malmö might link directly to the existing Copenhagen metro. What do you think about that?

Leif Gjesing for Öresundsmetro between Malmö and Copenhagen:

- We welcome this and see two different conclusions. The positive one: A decision to create a link on the new M5 metro line in Copenhagen which opens for a political decision at a later date to build an Öresundsmetro to Malmö. The negative one: A decision not to create a link on the M5 metro line in Copenhagen. That would not mean that work on establishing an Öresundsmetro stops, but it will take longer to assess how to connect a metro from Malmö to the Copenhagen metro. A further possibility is to add switches in tunnels pointing to Malmö when the new line is being built.

Hanne Skak Jensen for Europaspåret between Landskrona and Copenhagen:

- We don't really see a metro as a competitive proposal, it is like comparing apples and oranges. Our proposal solves the issues of capacity and redundancy for long-distance and regional trains with another connection, while a metro cannot accommodate goods trains. That's why the metro cannot compete with our proposal.
- There is nothing stopping having both a metro and a Europaspår between Landskrona and Köpenhamn in the long term.

Sten Hansen for Fast HH-förbindelse:

- Positive. In Skåne there was an agreement called Skånebildens as early as 2015 which prioritised a permanent link between Helsingborg and Helsingør and a metro between Malmö and Copenhagen.

What is the next step?

Leif Gjesing for Öresundsmetro between Malmö and Copenhagen:

- The City of Malmö welcomes the decision to assess a connection and has offered to finance part of the environmental impact assessment for how the Öresundsmetro might link to M5. This is a big job which the City of Copenhagen is financing and organising together with the Danish government, which owns the Copenhagen metro. The cost is 150 million Danish kroner (€20.12m). 3 million are earmarked to find out how the metro can be linked to Malmö. The assessment is due to be published in 2024.

Hanne Skak Jensen for Europaspåret between Landskrona and Copenhagen:

- We believe there is a need to analyse the problems – what must be solved – and to find possible solutions in order to make the correct decisions. So we will continue to push the project both on regional and national levels in order to get it further up on the agenda. We try to find a way forward so that both Denmark and Sweden can agree on what is needed. This is a large and complex issue with many factors and many stakeholders.

Sten Hansen for Fast HH-förbindelse:

- For the Danish and Swedish governments to establish a joint commission to come up with more detailed assessments with precise policies. History shows that we might need more than one commission. And joint cooperation.

WHICH IS THE BEST ALTERNATIVE?

- In Helsingborg, we have had what we call a Request for Information, where we have asked consultancy firms, construction firms, investors, lawyers and others for advice. They are all involved with infrastructure in some shape or other. We are now drawing conclusions based on the views these 16 companies have given us. We will use this to plan and build large projects like a new permanent link between Helsingborg and Helsingør.
- Our politicians in Helsingborg are in constant dialogue with their party colleagues, they work with Skånes County politicians and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Southern Sweden.



Kjell-Arne Ottosson: Wants faster train connections and new Council of Ministers

The Nordic Council unanimously declared five years ago it wanted to create a council of ministers for transport and infrastructure as part of the Nordic cooperation. But so far the countries' prime ministers have not picked up on this, despite major infrastructure investments inside and between the countries.

THEME

27.04.2023

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

“A council of ministers for transport and infrastructure would offer a new way for Nordic ministers to meet and improve cooperation in this area. If our prime ministers want the Nordic region to be the most integrated region in the world, it is time to prove it,” says Kjell-Arne Ottosson, a member of the Swedish parliament from the Christian Democrats, and the Chairman of the Nordic Council's Committee for Growth and Development in the Nordic Region.

In 2018 in Iceland, a unanimous Nordic Council Session agreed to recommend that the Nordic Council of Ministers establish a designated council of ministers for transport and

infrastructure. All the parties, all party groups, all the countries and autonomous areas supported this. After that, nothing has happened apart from repeats of the recommendation.

Kjell-Arne Ottosson is one of the people driving the issue both during Nordic Council sessions and in the Swedish parliament.



The transport committee, with Kjell-Arne Ottosson to the left, gives a cheer during a debate on communication issues during the 2022 Nordic Council session in Helsinki. The parliamentarians wanted to create a council for ministers for transport and infrastructure. Photo: Björn Lindahl

“Several major infrastructure programmes in the Nordics are being planned or are in the pilot study phase. These are looking both at connecting the Nordic countries, for instance Oslo-Stockholm 2.55, the Öresund Region metro, as well as improving train links between Oslo and Hamburg. A designated council of ministers for transport and infrastructure would serve as an umbrella organisation and allow us to get an overview and closer cooperation,” says Kjell-Arne Ottosson.

The Pandemic did much damage

He lives near a border himself and is passionate about reducing border obstacles. His home lies in Årjäng municipality around 100 metres from the Norwegian border. His mother is Norwegian, his brother is married in Norway and Kjell-Arne Ottosson himself has taken time off from his job as a teacher in Rømskog in Norway.

His experience with the pandemic has also given him extra motivation to create stronger infrastructure cooperation between the Nordic countries.

“We live as if the border is not there. Here, your house might be in Sweden while your outbuilding is in Norway. Suddenly the border was shut and people could not travel to work, or say goodbye to their loved ones,” he says.

The closed border meant so much more than losing the border trade, although that was serious enough. 400 – 450 people losing their jobs in Töcksfors is equivalent to 120,000 people in Stockholm becoming unemployed. But what hit the hardest was not being able to see your closest family, says Kjell-Arne Ottosson.

The border was completely shut even though transmission rates were low where he lives. The closure created deep wounds between people living in an area where it has been possible to move freely for hundreds of years.

There are many stories. A Swede who had lived in Norway for 15 years could not have hotel breakfast with his Norwegian colleagues, despite the fact that he had not recently visited Sweden. Swedes in Norway had to carry high-vis vests so that they would be easy to spot.

Kjell-Arne Ottosson has felt the effects of the closed borders himself. When it reopened and he returned to his Norwegian home, he was met with an uncomfortable silence rather than being welcomed with the normal, everyday chat.

“Shutting people out like this is more dangerous than the infection, I think. Things are becoming normal again but there are still many who don’t dare look for jobs across the border. The wounds are still there, but the closer the links we create, the less risk we face for ending up in a similar situation as what we had during the pandemic.”

Anything linking people together is important

In a motion before the Swedish parliament, Kjell-Arne Ottosson writes that “we have a long way to go before we re-establish the contacts and heal the wounds, not least in the border areas”. In the motion, he calls for a new, more direct and faster railway link between Oslo and Stockholm.

The aim is to cut travel time to 2 hours and 55 minutes, hence the name of the project – Oslo-Sthlm 2.55. But this goes beyond quicker transit, less environmental impact than flying and expanding the labour market. A joint project for a faster train line would also mean cooperation across national borders, which will reestablish and strengthen contacts and help heal the wounds created by the pandemic.

He believes anything that links Nordic people together is important, so he continues to push the case for a council of ministers for transport and infrastructure.



Kjell-Arne Ottosson raises the issue of establishing a council of ministers for transport and infrastructure as often as he can. This also happened during the Nordic Council's special session in Reykjavik earlier this year. Photo: Eypór Árnason/norden.org

Kjell-Arne Ottosson has often tried to get an answer to what is stopping the creation of a council of ministers for transport

and infrastructure, including during a discussion with the then Minister for Infrastructure Tomas Eneroth from the Social Democrats.

Last winter, the Committee for Growth and Development in the Nordic Region invited the leaders and deputy leaders from all of the Nordic countries' transport committees in order to keep the issue of a designated council of ministers for transport and infrastructure alive.

“Many wanted this work to continue,” says Kjell-Arne Ottosson.

He has never got a proper answer to why the Nordic Council's unanimous recommendation has not yet been realised. Sweden's former Minister for Infrastructure Tomas Eneroth said he felt cooperation between the Nordic infrastructure ministers functioned well and informally without a designated council of ministers.

“Some civil servants have also claimed that cooperation deteriorates in a council of ministers, but if that were the case all councils of ministers ought to be closed down,” says Kjell-Arne Ottosson.

Now, with a new government in Sweden, Andreas Carlson from the Christian Democrats has taken over as Minister for Infrastructure.

“This allows me to apply pressure from within and move things forward that way,” says Kjell-Arne Ottosson.



Jump on the bus: Iceland's bold new transport plan

In Iceland, plans for a new public transport system to connect the capital region's population is being met with both excitement and criticism. Some 250,000 people live in the Capital Area (Reykjavik and the five municipalities in the region), which is roughly two-thirds of the country's entire population.

THEME

27.04.2023

TEXT: HALLGRÍMUR INDRIÐASON

In 2015, a 25-year regional plan for the Icelandic Capital Area was issued to address expected growth in population and jobs – focused on central areas and along the sustainable corridors. That means growing inwards rather than outwards.

A major part of that plan is a new high-quality public transport system, which has been called Borgarlína (City Line in English). These are long buses driving mostly in designated

lanes which will run frequently and connect the area's hotspots. It will be a massive upgrade from the current public transport system.



At the core of the Reykjavik public transport plan is a Bus Rapid Transfer-system, where busses have their own lanes.

Thorsteinn Hermannsson is the director of development at Transport for the Capital Area (Betri samgöngur) – a publicly owned company that supervises transport construction in the capital area. To explain the purpose of Borgarlína, it is necessary to look back in time, he says.

“The capital area has grown fast over the past decade, not only the population but also the area itself. And that has increased car dependency. Around 75 per cent of rides in the capital area are by car, which is unusually high in Europe.

“In the 1962 regional plan there is this sentence: ‘Until every adult has a car, we need public transport.’ So cars were considered the solution back then, and we have organised our lives and our urban development around that. So you can say that the capital area is basically similar to an American urban area in the distribution of housing and jobs, and how we travel between places.”

Hermannsson says that Borgarlína is not only a transport system but also a green urban development catalyst. That is part of the sustainability and economic efficiency which is the main goal of the regional plan.

“Borgarlína will be the new backbone of the public transport system that connects the so-called hotspots in the region.”

Inspired by Norway and Sweden

The preparation is in accordance with a transport agreement between the state and the municipalities, signed in 2019. Hermannsson says that agreement was based on examples from Norway and Sweden.

“The state and the municipalities agreed on the planning, investing, and financing of transport infrastructure for the next 15 years. Borgarlína is a part of that.”

Hermannsson says similar agreements were made in Oslo and Bergen in 1985, and in Gothenburg in 2013.

Borgarlína itself will connect the largest urban areas, explains Hermannsson.



Busses come in different sizes. The smallest of the Volvo busses above is 12 metres long and can carry 100 people. The largest is 30 metres long and can carry 300 people – the same as a wide-body aircraft. Illustration: Volvo

“It is based on the third generation Bus Rapid Transfer (BRT) system. The buses will be 18 to 24 meters long and will run every seven and a half minutes, mostly in designated lanes. There will be high-quality stations and mobility hubs where there is access for everyone, space for keeping bikes and real-time transport information. This should make you feel like you’re on a train station abroad.”

And speaking of trains, which Iceland does not have, Hermannsson says BRT is financially more efficient.

“It was decided to have this compromise instead of building a train system from scratch. But it is possible that some of these routes can become train routes in the future. We are not there yet, but the design allows for that possibility.”

And there are more options.

“In the future, 18 to 24-meter-long buses every seven and a half minutes could change to a self-driving bus every two minutes. And then it is better not to have rails. That also applies to the BRT of course, that when you don’t use rails, you don’t need a designated lane all the way. The train system would also cost three times more than the bus lanes,” says Hermannsson, who adds that he himself is a big fan of trains.

Not only transport but urban development

In addition to this, the municipalities have agreed to take the proximity to public transport into account when choosing building sites.

“That is the old way of doing things. Cities were previously built around public transport and Reykjavik is no exception to that rule. So Borgarlína is not only about strengthening public transport and changing people’s transport habits for environmental reasons. This is simply urban development. And the state joins us in this so it can coordinate with us from the very beginning.”

These plans have been controversial. Critics point out the cost – an estimated 70 billion ISK (€470 million). Also, some of the designated bus lanes will be existing car lanes, so there are worries that this might slow down car traffic.

“We need increased transport capacity. A bigger population does not necessarily mean that more cars are needed but we clearly need to move people between places. An 18-meter bus in a designated lane has far more capacity than 110 cars in a queue in that same lane.

In terms of the costs, Hermannsson says that transport is always expensive.

More practical solutions needed

“Here it might have worked if the population hadn’t exceeded 150,000. But that is not the case, and the population is still growing rapidly. And every car that is added to the streets delays the traffic already there.

one, because it's much cheaper for society when 30 to 100 people ride together on a bus like this than if they ride in 80 to 100 cars. This should eventually be a win-win situation for everyone."

"And everywhere the purpose is the same; better use of land and a good backbone in the public transport system. And that will connect to the existing bus system."

“When all this is ready, we will have a public transport system that is comparable with the systems in other Nordic countries if we do it properly. But then we can’t lower our demands in order to save money. If we deliver on the promise of a bus every seven and a half minutes, then we will be equal to the other Nordics.”

“We are now trying to increase the percentage of public transport from 5 to 10-12 per cent. But when we reach that, other cities might have reached 25 per cent. So we will still be 10-20 years behind them. But hopefully, we will get closer and closer as the years go by.”



Working on the Baltic Sea – long shifts and a close community

The ferries between the Nordics and the Baltics are important transport corridors and keep a lot of people in employment. One of the boats doing the crossing is Aura Seaways, where 52 crew live and work for four weeks at a time.

THEME

27.04.2023

TEXT AND PHOTO: MARIE PREISLER

Onboard the Aura Seaways ferry, the afternoon is buzzing with activity as usual. It is owned by the Danish shipping company DFDS and employs 52 people who are busy preparing the ferry for its next departure. Right now, it is docked at its terminal in Karlshamn on the Swedish south coast, and will soon set course towards the harbour city of Klaipeda in Lithuania.

This is an important goods and passenger route across the Baltic Sea. On the car deck, workers in yellow and black jackets emblazoned with the DFDS logo are busy guiding the last cars and trucks onboard.



The ferry is an important transport route across the Baltic Sea for goods and private cars.

The containers that will make the journey are already delivered and secured tightly, in case the ferry encounters heavy seas when it is in the middle of the Baltic Sea a few hours from now.

Ready for departure

Below the car deck, head engineer Henrikas Siurblys and his team of marine officers have begun starting up the vessel's four gigantic ship engines. On the upper decks, stewards have cleaned the cabins after the previous crossing. In all the cabins, white towels on recently made beds await the next group of passengers who have started to board.

In the kitchen, café, restaurant and bar on deck 9, service staff are getting ready to serve food and drink during the 13-hour crossing.

At the top – on the bridge on deck 11 – Captain Sergej Sved and his chief mate and second mate are getting the latest weather forecast and messages from the deck and machine control room. Through binoculars and the ship's radar screens, they monitor the shipping activity that the ferry will encounter when it soon sets sail.

A low rumble tells us the engines have started and are ready to move the 17,250 metric tonnes vessel. A light breeze is blowing as Aura Seaways slowly glides out from the Karlshamn harbour past a picturesque archipelago along a shipping lane that in some places is not much wider than the ferry itself, which measures nearly 32 metres across.

“The ship has top modern and fully automatic steering and controls systems, but we also use binoculars and steer the ship manually in all challenging situations. Entering and exiting ports require extreme precision, so we always steer the ship manually then,” explains the captain.



Captain Sergej Sved and crew on the bridge.

28 days at sea, 28 days at home

At 230 metres, it is longer than two football fields. It can carry 600 passengers, 273 lorry trailers and 73 cars. Aura Sea-

ways and its sister ship Luna Seaways are the largest and newest ferries in the DFDS fleet.

They sail each evening from one side of the Baltic Sea and arrive on the other side the next morning, where the staff empty the ship of cars and passengers, clean, maintain and prepare for the next sailing that same evening.

Aura Seaways has 52 crew, most of them from Lithuania. They live and work onboard for 28 days at a time. They then have 28 days of shore leave, when they abandon their staff cabins and go home for a 28 days break while another crew come aboard.

A lifestyle

Working like that is a lifestyle which does not become everyone. Some leave. Others become so attached to the freedom and the camaraderie with colleagues onboard that they do not want to return to an ordinary 8 to 5 job, five days a week with two days off, several crew tell us.

“I am just starting to miss my family when I have been onboard for 28 days, and after 28 days off I am ready to come back onboard – where we are also kind of a family,” explains electrical engineer Artur Kovalenko.

His superior in the machine control room, Henrikas Siurblys, nods in agreement. He has been at sea for 40 years and says that in many other offshore jobs, you spend far longer away from home. 28 days is a very nice amount of time, he agrees.



Engineer Artur Kovalenko (left) and Julius Urbonas (right) in the workshop next to the machine room.

Indree Vaskyte has had the same experience. She is 30 and head of service onboard. So far, she has spent nine years working for DFDS and on ferries, moving up from being a steward cleaning cabins. Today, she and her colleague are responsible for all the service onboard apart from catering. Before she joined DFDS, she cleaned ships for another company with an onshore base.

“I could no longer enjoy an ordinary job. We have to be one big team both day to day and when something unforeseen happens. It provides excitement and a sense of belonging that I really appreciate,” says Indree Vaskyte.

It can also be difficult to be 52 very different people living and working so closely together over a long period of time, she explains. You need to be very flexible, and as a female employee and middle management in a pretty male-dominated workplace, she also has to be a bit strict at times.

Should she get children, Indree Vaskyte would consider finding another job.

“Several of my colleagues onboard have children, but I’m not sure I can see myself working like this with small children, even if I sometimes can go home for a few hours when we are docked in Klaipeda as I live very near the ferry terminal. But it will be sad to say farewell. Working like this is a real adventure for me.”

In the kitchen onboard we meet 22-year-old Diana Petrikauskaite. She also does not have any children but does not think it would end her offshore career.

“If I have a child, my family would look after it when I am at work,” she says.



Diana Petrikauskaite and her colleagues make breakfast and dinner for the passengers every day.

Spends spare time onboard sleeping

The crew work 12-hour days and have 12 hours off. Spare time is mostly spent in their cabins and most of that time is spent sleeping, several of them tell us. The 12 hours of work are typically spread across several periods throughout the day and night. It is important to catch a few hours of sleep when you can. The staff eat in a common personnel room which resembles the passenger restaurant higher up on the ship.

Many of the crew live in Klaipeda and can in principle get home to see their families when the ship docks there for 11 hours every second day. They do, however, need the Captain’s permission to leave the ship during working hours.

“Crew are allowed to go onshore when needed as long as they take into consideration that during the hours we are docked there are many daily and important tasks to be solved as well as maintenance and safety procedures that we must follow, including regular fire drills,” explains the Captain.



The crew eat in the personnel salon – including Captain Sergej Sved.

The Captain’s word is law

DFDS is a large shipping company operating many ferry routes, divisions and management levels. But onboard, when it comes to the daily operation of the ship, the Captain is to all intents and purposes commander-in-chief. Not only is he responsible for steering the ship safely from harbour to harbour, he is also the de facto head of HR and has the last word in many personnel issues, he explains.

“As Captain, I am responsible for the entire ship and all the crew onboard, so I must decide on all kinds of things. But I always encourage new crew members to ask their nearest superior onboard whenever they are in doubt about something.”

Sergej Sved has been with DFDS for the past 13 years, the past nine years as Captain. This last year he has spent on Aura Seaways which has now left the Karlshamn ferry terminal. With barely a sound she glides out through the narrow shipping lane with cliffs and small islands on both sides. While the Swedish coast disappears behind us, the Captain allows the crew on the bridge to take it in turn to go down to eat supper. He eats last.

Night onboard

Night is descending over the Baltic Sea. Inside on the bridge, it is also very dark so that the crew can get the best possible view across the sea. It remains calm in the steady breeze and

the less than two metres tall waves are barely discernible onboard. When the ship hits open seas, the speed is set to around 18 knots. The engines can push the ship faster, but that would burn far more fuel.

The forecast is for a bit more wind in the night, but the Captain assures us that this is nothing that will disturb the passengers' sleep in their cabins or the serving of food and drink in the restaurant, café and bar.

"This ship is fantastic, and she is strong," he says.

He carries on talking about the ship, which he in proper Captain manner refers to as a "she".

"She is so long that she cuts through the waves rather than chopping at them. Even in really high seas, she remains steady on the water because we also have stabilizers which stop her from rocking."

The ship will not sail if winds of more than 25 meters a second are forecast. A few times each winter the waves grow eight metres tall, and the ship remains docked. The lovely lady can handle up to six-metre waves in style, however.



The ship's four engines are monitored from the machine control room by chief engineer Henrikas Siurblys (at the back to the left) and his colleagues.

In the machine room 10 decks below, chief ship engineer Henrikas Siurblys and his colleagues have started the night's non-stop staffing of the machine control room and are doing rounds in the machine room itself to control the operation and carry out maintenance. There is always one engineer and one engine expert on duty together.

Just like on the bridge, the machine control room is full of control equipment. An alarm sounds in the machine control room each time the equipment detects a big or small inconsistency. Henrikas Siurblys sends a man to investigate.

Cheering in the bar

While calm reigns on the bridge, on deck and in the machine control room, the bar is lively. Most of the passengers onboard are Lithuanian truck drivers and commuters on their way home. A fair few of them are sat watching the bar's TV screen which is showing the Lithuanian national basketball team, Žalgiris Kaunas, playing an important match against another European top team.



It is a tense atmosphere among passengers in the bar as Lithuania's top basketball team play an important match.

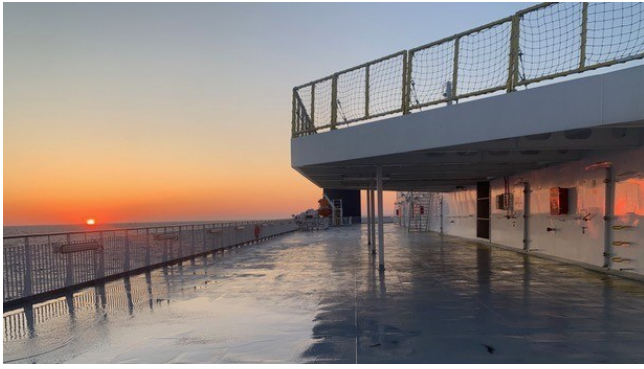
Basketball is Lithuania's national sport and the people in the bar are shouting, biting their nails and applauding as their team oscillates between being on the offensive and defensive.

Žalgiris Kaunas secure victory in the last second which is celebrated by many with another beer, poured by a visibly emotional bartender who explains that he is from Kaunas and has been following his team since he was little – for him this is really big.

When the last guests have drunk their beer, he kindly asks them to find their cabins because the bar is now closing. It is night onboard.

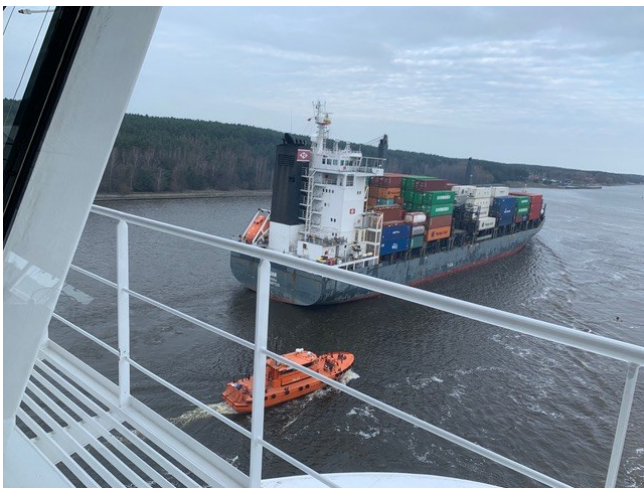
The last five centimetres

6 am the next morning, all passengers in all the cabins are woken up by a clear message over the speaker system that breakfast is now being served. The ship will soon arrive in Klaipeda. The Captain has entered the bridge after a few hours of sleep. His cabin is right next door, so he can be fetched by the mate on duty within a few minutes.



The Sun rises over the Baltic Sea as the ferry approaches its destination.

But he did not have to be woken last night. The crossing has been calm. The ship is about to dock in Klaipeda and this demands the Captain's full attention. The approach is a one-kilometre-long, narrow lane with a lot of traffic, where the Captain and his crew on the bridge must turn around the 231.5 metres long ship before docking. While they execute this manoeuvre, a container ship passes close by.



The approach to Kaipeda is narrow, where Aura Seaways meets a container ship.

The Captain and mates use binoculars and assess the situation. The passage goes well, but the distance between the two ships was not as large as the Captain had wanted, he explains.

The last meter before docking also demands the Captain's and mates' full attention. The ship must be completely still before it can be secured. Five centimetres out and the large ship cannot be tethered properly. The ship gets into position and the process of unloading starts on deck.

The engines are shut down from the machine control room. The service workers enter the abandoned cabins. Preparations for the next evening's crossing are already underway.



Electric planes herald new traffic patterns in the Nordics

Electric planes might do more than reduce CO₂ emissions. They could also open up a new category of commuting with new, shorter routes. Electric planes would also bring new jobs to manufacturing and at smaller airfields.

THEME

27.04.2023

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Nordregio recently published a report about which routes would be best suited for electric planes. There are 186 airfields in the Nordic region. The first generation of electric planes will have a reach of no more than 200 kilometres, which opens opportunities to establish 1,000 different routes between two airports.

However, when they mapped the most favourable air routes, Nordregio disregarded many of these for various reasons. They focus on routes from rural to urban areas.

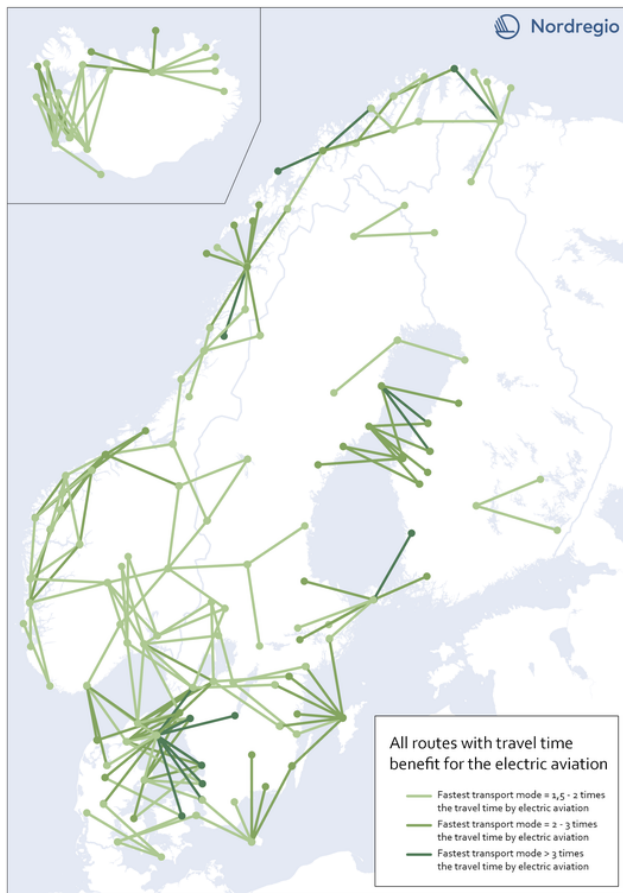
The research centre has also dropped air routes where passengers could travel by train in less than two and a half

hours. French authorities have already banned such domestic routes on environmental grounds.

Finally, Nordregio did not include air routes that are already being flown by traditional fossil fuel planes, as well as routes that are so short that hardly any time is being saved. Another factor is whether there are enough people in an area around an airport to maintain an air route.

What is left then, is 203 air routes in the Nordics where electric planes would bring big time savings – defined as being 1.5 times quicker than travelling the same route by car or public transport. Several air routes go over water, especially

in the so-called Kvarken area – the narrow area in the Baltic Sea between Umeå and Vaasa.

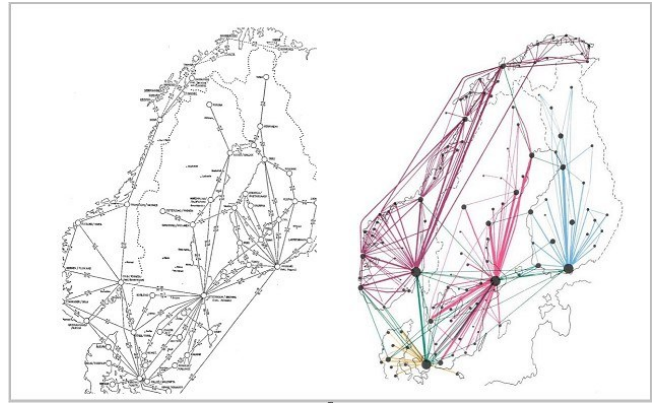


The deeper the green colour on the map, the more time is saved by flying electric. Source: Nordregio.

“There is already close cooperation between the labour markets in the Kvarken area, and the demand for labour is expected to increase. Northvolt’s battery factory in Skellefteå is one example where Finnish labour will be crucial.

“Earlier studies, like to so-called FAIR project, have concluded that electric planes represent the cheapest way of increasing accessibility to labour markets in the Kvarken area,” writes the report’s author Tove Lundberg.

The FAIR project she talks about resulted in a report written by Professor Lars Westin from Umeå University in 2021. It provides a historic overview of how the Nordic countries’ air routes are shaped like the spokes of a wheel, where the capital cities are the hub and there are nearly no cross-connections.



Air routes in the 50s compared to the 90s. Nearly all air traffic goes to and from capital city airports. Electric planes could break this pattern. Source: The Kvarken Council

“Any attempt to try to reestablish, develop and broaden a regional airline network in the Kvarken region will be met by fierce competition from the dominating hub and spoke-oriented airline networks that have been established on a national level,” points out Lars Westin.

If the different countries manage to coordinate their aviation policies and rules, it should nevertheless be possible to establish a cross-connection between Oulu in Finland, Umeå in Sweden and Bodø in Norway, he thinks. But it will not be easy.

“The well-established capital-centric air traffic connections might over time have led to business going in that direction, while the desire to establish new regional markets and inform people about these might not be big enough.

“Since air traffic according to Swedish law is not part of the official regional aviation policy, there are also no public funds available to develop regional air connections.”

In Norway, meanwhile, regional routes are part of aviation policy and the state subsidises a number of air connections with smaller aircraft. Early this year, the government presented a new national aviation strategy.

There are 37 small and medium-sized Norwegian airports. Together they serve no more than seven per cent of the total aviation volume. Although Norway, as an EEA member, must follow the same rules for aviation as the EU, these rules allow one player to have a monopoly on certain routes which can then receive state support.

This must, however, happen through an open tender process. From 1 April this year, the size of the support has been nearly 900 million Norwegian kroner (€76.7m) a year.

Thanks to the regional aviation support for around 50 connections, 90 per cent of Norwegians have access to an airport

that is no more than a 90 minutes drive from their municipal centre. This means most people in mainland Norway can make a return day trip to Oslo.

“Norway’s airport infrastructure means the country can be a good testing ground for zero and low-emission planes” the aviation strategy states.

The government’s aim is that such planes can begin operating on the subsidised routes from 2028 if technological developments allow.

It is still too early to say what kind of electric aircraft will be best suited for the job.

“The first thing that will be evident about these aircraft is that they will look dramatically different from what we know today,” write the authors of the book *Fundamentals of Electric Aircraft*.

One technology that is being used on hangar ships is so-called VTOL aircraft, short for vertical take-off and landing. The aircraft are a type of hybrid between a plane and a helicopter. According to the authors, more than 70 projects around the world are currently developing electric VTOL planes. This means airfields would not have to be much bigger than a helicopter landing pad.

A more conventionally-looking electric aircraft has been developed by the Swedish company Heart Aerospace, headquartered in Gothenburg. Their ES-30 model is set to launch in 2028. The aircraft can carry 30 passengers and needs a 1,100 metres long landing strip. It has a battery range of 200 kilometres, but a hybrid version can travel up to 800 kilometres carrying 25 passengers.

In March this year, the company signed a deal with the government of Åland to provide ES-30 aircraft as part of a plan to develop sustainable air services for the Baltic Sea group of islands.

“Åland has had a positive population trend for the past 50 years and continues to grow each year. As an island community our flight connections are vital to us, but so is our environment. That is why quiet, zero-emission electric flights are highly interesting to us,” said Fredrik Karlström, Minister for Trade and Industry in the Government of Åland.



Finland's largest industrial project finally finished

The Olkiluoto nuclear power plant has been called a forever project. The first two reactors were built in the 1970s. Now the third reactor has come online, after more than 30 years.

THEME

27.04.2023

TEXT: BENT ÖSTLING, PHOTO: TAPANI KARJANLAHTI/TVO

The Olkiluoto nuclear power plant has been called a forever project. The first two reactors were built in the 1970s. Now the third reactor has come online, after more than 30 years.

Nuclear power has become crucial to Finland's energy supply, but opponents point out another forever issue. Nuclear waste is being stored in a nearby cave and has to be kept safe for a hundred thousand years.

Europe's energy policy got a wake-up call when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. All of a sudden, national energy self-reliance became deadly important.

Huge expectations from Europe's largest nuclear power plant

Finland had great expectations for the third nuclear reactor at Olkiluoto – Europe's largest with a capacity of 1,600 megawatts. It would see Finland through the first winter without Russian energy and replace the Russian electricity import which was halted.

But it was a disappointment. The project has been dogged by delays all the way to the end. Security investigations have time and again unveiled sustainability problems both in construction, building materials and machinery.

Finland still avoided sudden electricity cut-offs or rationing. The winter of 2023 was not too cold and Finns had learned how to save energy. But the prices became considerably higher than before.

Now though, it is ready. On 16 April 2023, the final test run of the nuclear reactor was a success. One week later, the energy company Teollisuuden Voima (Industry power) took over the new power plant, constructed by Areva. Commercial energy production has begun.

The hope now is for electricity prices to return back to normal levels when Finland once again is self-reliant on electricity. In the meantime, the country needs to import electricity from Sweden and Northern Norway, which has threatened to stop its export.

The Swedish business daily *Näringslivet* envisages lower electricity prices when Finland's balance between electricity produced and consumed improves considerably thanks to Olkiluoto. When the new reactor reaches max production, it will have large consequences for Finland and the Nordic energy system, writes the newspaper.

The baguette municipality

Olkiluoto is situated in the small municipality of Eurajoki with less than 10,000 inhabitants. Nuclear power has meant an expanding population, internationalisation, tax revenues and good times for the municipality, which is said to be debt-free. Eurajoki has been jokingly called "Finland's most electric municipality".

The power plant's owners Teollisuuden Voima are owned by Finnish industry groups and energy companies which also share the energy production.

The first nuclear power units were built by Swedish Asea-Atom in the 1970s, but the third reactor was built by the French nuclear power plant developers Areva.

The company brought in hundreds of French workers. A French school was built in the municipality and baguettes popped up in the bakery section next to Finnish rye bread.

The long delay meant extended working contracts for staff. More than 4,500 people from 80 nations have been involved during the long construction period.

The nuclear power plant still employs hundreds of staff at Olkiluoto. The work with permanent storage deep in the bedrock is also continuing. Finland is solving nuclear power's great challenge, the permanent storage of spent fuel rods.

The waste will be placed in steel and copper capsules and stored in bentonite clay in underground tunnels 450 metres down in the stable Finnish bedrock. This is where all Finnish nuclear waste will be stored and the final seal will be put in place in around 100 years from now.

The state depends on Olkiluoto and Lovisa

Half of Finland's energy needs are covered by nuclear power. The three Olkiluoto reactors will produce 30 per cent of the country's energy needs.

The second Finnish nuclear power plant lies in Lovisa, on the coast east of Helsinki. It was constructed by the state but is now owned by the Fortum energy group, in which the state owns a majority share.

Last winter, the government decided to extend Fortum's operating license for the two nuclear reactors in Lovisa to 2050. The original licence would have seen them shut down between 2027 and 2030.

The government argues that the Lovisa nuclear power plant is needed to secure Finland's electricity supply. The power plant produces around 10 per cent of Finland's electricity needs.

Russian influence

The Finnish Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority says Fortum is able to carry on safely operating the reactors in Lovisa. They are a Soviet construction with many Western safety amendments. The protective shield has been made thicker using Finnish steel. Computers and various equipment have been delivered by companies like Westinghouse, Nokia and Siemens. Still, much is in its original state.

The nuclear power plant has been dependent on Russian uranium fuel, but Fortum is now looking into the possibility of transitioning to a new type of fuel from the West. The waste used to be sent back to Russia, but the final storage of low and medium-active waste is now being done in the bedrock around the power plant.

In Lovisa, like in Olkiluoto, there have been hopes and plans for a third reactor, but the project has hit costs issues and questions around the final storage of waste. The government turned down Fortum's application for a third reactor in 2010. It was said that the Fukushima accident did not improve the chances for a new application.

Kreml offered to build a third reactor in Lovisa in 2015, but the matter was not taken further.

A new project in the north stopped

Instead, a completely new nuclear power plant was to be built in Pyhäjoki in the north of Finland. The Finnish energy company Fennovoima would build a plant together with the Russian Rosatom's daughter company RAOS Projects, which

also owned one-third of the project. This was due to come on-line in 2029.

Work began, the shaft for the nuclear reactor was excavated, cables were laid and infrastructure for seawater hydraulics was prepared. But now the project has been stopped.

Fennovoima terminated its contract, citing significant delays and RAOS' inability to deliver the project Hanhikivi 1. The war in Ukraine had further exacerbated the risks of the project, according to the company.

For the Finnish owners, continued cooperation became even more difficult when Rosatom took over the Ukrainian nuclear power plant in Zaporizjzja. The Finnish Minister of Economic Affairs Mika Lintilä considered it to be impossible to carry on with the project which had still not received all its permits.

A major owner that has violated all international agreements by taking over another state's nuclear power plant cannot possibly get a permit to run a nuclear power plant in Finland, said Lintilä during a parliamentary debate.

Small-scale nuclear power next?

Finland is now looking for alternative solutions and has not ruled out finding someone else to finish construction in Pyhäjoki. But first, a range of legal challenges surrounding the abandoned Russo-Finnish cooperation must be solved.

Fortum owns the nuclear power plant in Lovisa and one-quarter of the Olkiluoto plant. It also has a considerable share in the Swedish nuclear power plants in Oskarshamn and Forsmark. Fortum is known as a leading Nordic fossil-free energy company and it is assessing the possibilities for new nuclear power in the Nordics.

Fortum and Outokumpu are cooperating on new, small-scale nuclear power projects, like SMR in Finland. The aim is to reduce CO₂ emissions from Outokumpu's stainless steel production in Northern Finland.

In addition to wind, solar and hydro, energy-intensive industries and the whole of society need stable and fossil-free electricity production, the two companies argue. Nuclear power is considered to be the only alternative.

Opposition has faded

Several political parties and civil organisations have traditionally been opposed to Finnish nuclear power. But the opposition has faded. Greenpeace has said it will no longer take action against nuclear power. The organisation has held many protests over the years, including in Olkiluoto.

Satu Hassi, Minister of Environment from the Green League in 2002, resigned in protest when the government decided to allow the construction of a third reactor in Olkiluoto. The same thing happened in 2014 when the government was due to give the go-ahead for the Pyhäjoki nuclear power plant.

Today even the Green League supports nuclear power, although the party is still concerned about costs and risks.

Many have pointed out the strange situation as Germany closes its three remaining nuclear power plants nearly the same as Finland opens its new one.

More nuclear power to save the planet?

Russia's war in Ukraine has definitely impacted Finnish energy policy. When the National Coalition Party leader Petteri Orpo started government negotiations after his party's election win in April, nuclear power was an issue. How were the parties prepared to create conditions for new investments in nuclear power and also for small-scale nuclear power?

Orpo asked the parties whether they were prepared to push Finland's climate neutrality and support an increase in Finnish companies' environmentally friendly exports. All the parties answered in the affirmative and the result can be seen in the new government programme.

Illustration of Green Mountain's data centre

Scandinavian data centres: fewer jobs and less profit than forecast

New data centres are popping up in Norway and Sweden along with a lot of hope for many new jobs and high returns.

THEME

27.04.2023

TEXT: BJØRN LØNNUM ANDREASSEN, ILLUSTRATION: GREEN MOUNTAIN

But for some, the hopes expressed at the beginning of the adventure have turned out to be more grandiose than what has followed.

Myths and optimism

A few years ago, Business Sweden published a report saying some 30,000 new jobs would be created with Facebook's new data centre in Luleå in the North of Sweden. In 2020, the Finnish broadcaster Yle found out that only 56 people were working on the server farm.



No data centre was built in Ballangen in the end. The illustration shows how the world's largest data centre might have looked. Illustration: Corgan

Today that number has risen to around 90, and a second farm is set to open. Nevertheless, Facebook's arrival has created just a tiny fraction of the jobs envisaged earlier.

Another example is the Ballangen municipality in Nordland county in Norway. According to the Norwegian state broadcaster NRK, the municipality could offer space, a cool climate and access to clean, cheap energy. So in 2017, the Norwegian

company Kolos announced plans for building the world's largest data centre which would employ up to 3,000 people.

The municipality would make available a plot measuring more than half a square kilometre. Kolos did not have to pay for the plot, and in the end, the company directors fell out over the development and sold the company for 86 million kroner (€7.37m), according to NRK. Today the plot still belongs to the municipality, but no data centre has been built.

A real development

After years of comprehensive development work, the company Green Edge Compute has created what they believe is the world's most sustainable data centre, explains Patrik J. Hagelin. He is the Chief Commercial Officer and one of the company founders.



Patrik J. Hagelin, CCO at Green Mountain.

"We build small data centres with liquid cooling, and we also build our own equipment and can hire out capacity. Our aim is to find out how to build the world's most sustainable data centre. In 2017 we started the construction of a centre in Trondheim," says Hagelin.

He adds that the company is soon starting construction of data centres in several Norwegian cities.

One central location

Hagelin and the company want to have as few employees as possible.

“Our aim is to manage with few people, perhaps 10, looking after our data centres. All operations will be run from one central location, even if the data centres are decentralised. We will have partners who work with our customers,” he explains.

Green Edge Compute’s current idea of how to run a data centre is very different from what many other operators thought a few years ago.

“Data centres themselves do not create a huge number of jobs, but you often achieve a synergy between several players,” explains Hagelin.

A lot of money

The fact that data centres can be big business, also in Norway, became clear in the summer of 2021.

According to the business daily Finansavisen, the Israeli Azrieli Group paid 7.6 billion Norwegian kroner (€652m) for 100 per cent ownership in the data centre platform Green Mountain. They run data centres in remote Norwegian municipalities like Rennesøy, Rjukan and Enebakk. The amount was ten times more than the majority owner, the Norwegian real estate group Smedvik, had originally paid for the data centres.

Last month, Green Mountain signed a deal with Chinese-owned TikTok, which will move into a new data centre that is being built near Hamar in Norway.

A security challenge

One major challenge with all this is that the technology is being developed and rolled out far quicker than Norwegian lawmakers manage to adopt legislation. This results in issues around how to regulate security and privacy.

Even before 2017, people like Norwegian lawyer Geir Lippesstad warned that legislation was lagging behind the technological development, especially when it comes to artificial intelligence.

There has been a lot of focus lately on the links between the Chinese video-sharing platform TikTok and Chinese authorities. Some fear Chinese authorities can misuse information gathered through both the TikTok and Telegram apps.

Norway’s National Security Authority says the platforms should not be installed on public employee service phones.

Legislation and security are hot topics when Green Mountain builds their data centre near Hamar. TikTok will be a

major customer. Hamar Mayor Einar Bustard told NRK that “national security is being handled by national authorities. Norwegian law applies to Hamar as well”.

Picture of Stefano Scarpetta

Scarpetta: The OECD has learned a lot from studying the Nordics

Stefano Scarpetta is excited when he goes up to the podium at the start of the OECD and Nordic Council of Ministers conference in Reykjavik. "I don't know how you did it, but thank you for the fantastic northern lights that we got to experience last night!"

PORTRAIT

27.04.2023

TEXT AND FOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

He smiles often, the man who has been responsible for work, employment, and welfare issues for the last ten years in the OECD. The conference topic is serious, however. How did the Nordic labour markets manage during the pandemic and what can the countries themselves – and the rest of the world – learn from what happened in the Nordics?

"It was like a hurricane hit us," says Unnur Sverrisdóttir, who heads the Icelandic employment agency Vinnumálastofnun (VMST) in a panel debate during the conference.

You can read more about the conference and the OECD report here. But the Nordic Labour Journal also got the opportunity to have a longer conversation with Stefano Scarpetta about the organisation's relationship with the Nordics, and about the mutual transformation that has taken place in the OECD and in the Nordic countries during the past decades.

The OECD has its roots in the US Marshall Plan, put in place after the Second World War in order to rebuild Europe and promote economic growth. The US lent Europe billions of dollars. A new organisation was started in 1948: the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), to administer the American aid.

The work done by the OEEC was so significant that the member states wanted to carry it forward in an even bigger arena. Therefore, the existing 18 member countries, together with the USA and Canada, created a new organization in 1961 which was named the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD, with headquarters in Paris.

"The goal is the same now as then: as our motto says, 'better policies for better lives', which means to help the member countries develop and implement policies and regulations that foster sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The

role of the OECD is to go behind politics and assess what actually works and what does not," says Stefano Scarpetta.

Stefano Scarpetta started working as an economist at the OECD in 1991. During his career in international organisations, he also worked at the World Bank between 2002 and 2006. He holds a PhD in Economics from the École des Hautes Études en Science Sociales in Paris, a master's degree in economics from The London School of Economics and a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of Rome.

"I encountered the Nordic countries almost as soon as I began at the OECD, because of the strong ties between the Nordic countries and my organisation. Not only are they engaged participants, they are also very open to learning from others."



Scarpetta participated and wrote several of the reports that have become a hallmark of the organisation. In the 2000s he

was also in charge of both Sweden and Denmark at the Economics Department.

“The Nordic countries are different, and they are in some ways unique in their labour and social policies. They devote significant public funding to their labour market and social policies. They also work closely with the social partners, and collective bargaining plays a key role in managing labour issues.”

But the Nordic countries also resemble each other in a way which makes them interesting to the OECD.

“The interesting thing with this report assessing the policy responses to the Covid-19 crisis was that we were able to compare the Nordic countries among themselves and vis à vis other OECD countries. This was a challenging exercise for us, since in many ways the Nordic countries are a model for other OECD countries, and it is not immediately obvious to see what could be improved. Yet, the report highlights a number of policy recommendations for all of the Nordic countries as well as for each of them.”

The relationship between the Nordic countries and the OECD was not always as rosy. The political left in particular for a long time believed they had a better social model than the other OECD countries. The perception was that the OECD had its own “cookbook” for the economy that did not take that into account.

I was unsure whether I remembered how the OECD was perceived back then, so before the interview I had a look at a Norwegian newspaper archive, just searching for OECD in a random year during the 80s. The first hit I got was a photograph in the daily *Arbeiderbladet* of a woman throwing money in the air. The headline was: “OECD report about our economy: Excessively high labour costs”, and the caption underneath the picture read:

Instead of being happy about the salary, Norwegian workers should think more about the industry's competitive difficulties, says the OECD.

When did the OECD begin to change from being fixed on balanced budgets and competition to also caring about other factors, like sustainability and inclusiveness?

“It was in the early 1990s that the OECD developed the first comprehensive strategy for the labour market, the ‘Jobs Strategy’. The strategy called for a good balance between the required flexibility of the labour market and the protection of workers.

“It actually praised the flexicurity model of Denmark. But it is true that our own policy narrative has evolved since then. In the mid-2000s, we launched a major comparative report on inequalities and adopted the concept of inclusive growth.

“In 2008, we published the first comprehensive report showing income equality was rising in most member states, including in countries where inequality was lowest,” says Stefano Scarpetta.

“Sweden is a good example. It used to be one of the most egalitarian countries in the OECD, but it is the country where inequality has risen the most in the past decades. Of course, they are still way below many countries, but they have been following a general tendency to widen the income disparities, because of skills-biased technological progress.

“Following these findings, our narrative on growth has evolved, and we showed that high levels of inequality could be detrimental not only to social cohesion but also to economic growth. We presented a report on the drivers of inequalities in 2015.

“We also presented this report to the finance ministers, as well as the ministers of labour and social affairs. And then suddenly the narrative changed. Because inequality is not only detrimental to social cohesion. It might also undermine economic growth, which has always been the OECD's main objective.

“We showed that in countries with high levels of inequalities, those at the bottom of the income distribution cannot invest enough in their and their children's human capital. This has a negative aggregate effect on economic growth”, he says.

His view is shared by historians like Peter Carroll and Aynsley Kellow, whose book *The OECD: A Decade of Transformation*, focuses on the period 2011-2021:

“The OECD has leapt boldly to reinterpret its constitutional requirement, embedded in its Convention, of maximising sustainable economic growth. For most of its history, that has meant a focus on increasing GDP, but this measure has long been questioned as the sole basis for assessing human welfare. The reason for this focus was well enough known: other aspects of welfare were notoriously difficult to measure.”

Central in the transformation was the 2006 election of the former Mexican finance minister Angel Gurría as Secretary-General, a position he kept until 2021.

“The OECD has not only led the world in attempting to overcome this difficulty by focusing on well-being and inclusion and developing statistical techniques to measure them, it has also sought to develop policies in education and skills development that will improve well-being and reduce inequality in future,” write the two historians.

Stefano Scarpetta became the Director of the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (ELS) Directorate of the OECD in 2013. He heads the organisation's work on employment, labour, migration, health, skills, gender and tackling unequal-

ities. He also contributes to the implementation of the Secretary-General's strategic orientations in these areas.

As Stefano Scarpetta puts it:

"Then we went further and looked at social mobility in a report in 2008 – how inequality was inherited between generations and how this impacted growth.

"We found that when inequality is high, many people and their siblings get stuck in a low-income loop. Many disadvantages are transferred from 'father to son' as we say. This is even the case in France and Germany. They do not have particularly high levels of inequality, yet mobility is low.

"Then we investigated what prevents people from moving up the ladder. There are different policies that prevent or facilitate that. And it's not just an issue for the poor. The middle class is eroded and affected by rising inequality, too. All of this led to us looking at disadvantaged groups, women, people with disabilities, young people, migrants and so on.

"To some extent, this has been an intellectual process, but we always present proof. We are not ideological; we are saying this because that is the evidence," Stefano Scarpetta underlines.

"Of course, the countries have different preferences and priorities, and they listen to us more or less. But this was 2015 when the G20 declaration for the first time in the opening paragraph stressed the need to promote inclusive growth."

He says that the change in some ways came naturally:

"The OECD is not the secretariat, it's not me and my colleagues. The OECD is the member countries. Of course, we do the analysis, and we closely interact with them, so the change and evolution of the narrative is also to some extent an evolution of the joint perspective of the secretariat and member countries. We have probably contributed to this evolution of thinking, I hope."

But will this continue? What will happen when emerging economies like China and India represent an increasingly large share of global economic activity and trade across the Pacific becomes more important than trade across the Atlantic? Will these countries agree with your definition of inclusive growth?

"The answer to your two questions is yes and yes. China, India and to a certain extent, Indonesia as well as Brazil – these are big economic players. Of course, we are working with them already to an extent, in some cases very closely.

"We define all non-OECD G20 countries as partner countries, which means they are not members of the OECD but they are always invited to our meetings and they do participate. We run economic surveys in all of them.

"The OECD is founded on the basis of democratic values, human and labour rights, a set of legal instruments, transparency and multilateralism. Some of these principles are being challenged in the current geopolitical situation.

"We stand by our basic values in all our engagements with member countries and non-member countries. But we can't ignore some of the big players in the global economy – otherwise, our assessments and our support to our members can suffer and not be as useful."

"On the other hand, I think emerging economies increasingly appreciate what the OECD can do. Because we basically produce evidence of how policies and outcomes vary across countries. For example, China is one of the most eager consumers of our reports.

"Whenever I go to China and highlight findings from a report, I am often told that they have already studied our findings very carefully. Taking another next step and producing equally comprehensive reports on China as we do on our member countries – now, that's a different story. They are a bit more resistant of course, but we do produce economic surveys for emerging countries.

Now I will ask you a final question I know you can't answer. If you had to move to a Nordic country, which would you choose?

"After the Northern lights last night, I must say I was impressed by Iceland, but I have to say that I think I would move from one to another and spend a couple of months here and there," Stefano Scarpetta answers with a smile.



Norwegian security guards dread work among violence and threats

Norwegian security guards are ill-prepared to face a tough work environment, according to a new report from the Work Research Institute at OsloMet. One in four dreads going to work.

NEWS

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TEXT: LINE SCHEISTRØEN, PHOTO LISE ÅSERUD/NTB

In recent years, security guards have taken over many tasks traditionally handled by police.

“It is a challenging job,” one security guard tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

Together with chief health, safety and security representative Simon Dragland Knutzen at Securitas, the security guard has agreed to talk about their work and comment on the findings in the new report from the Work Research Institute (AFI). The guard wishes to remain anonymous.

On top of their job?

AFI was asked in 2022 by the Norwegian Union of General Workers to carry out a survey of how security guards experience their work situation, with a particular focus on safety and security. The research project was carried out by Christin Thea Wathne, Inger Marie Hagen and Ingrid Haugland, together with Helene I.O. Gundhus at the University of Oslo and the Norwegian Police University College.

One of the questions in the survey was: To what extent do security guards feel they are on top of their professional tasks

and how do they rank safety and security in their work? What are their experiences of harassment, threats and violence at work and how are they being looked after by employers?

The answers were not particularly inspiring for the sector. Results show things are not especially good.



“The report paints a somewhat depressing image of security guards’ working life. It is surprisingly bad in certain areas. These results must be taken seriously,” AFI researcher and project leader Christin Thea Wathne tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

In their conclusion, the researchers say:

“Solo work, lack of support, too little/inadequate training and lack of equipment are among the reasons security guards feel they are not on top of their job. There is also an imbalance in the security guards’ mandate and the situations they might have to deal with.”

New roles, important tasks

Security guards have taken on many of the less serious public order and control tasks traditionally handled by police. The National Police Directorate and the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise NHO also entered into an agreement in 2018 that says the police and the security sector should work closer together to prevent crime and maintain order.

In the survey, security guards say they feel they play a central role in this work. One of them put it like this:

“The feeling that you are doing something good for society is quite high on the list. Feeling that you make the world a little bit safer for others (...) Helping someone is a fantastic feeling in itself, being able to return home and knowing that you have helped a person. This can be service-related or security-related.”

“Being on the frontline meeting a varied public can make security guards’ work meaningful, but this position can also represent a risk for the guards themselves,” the report says.

“We are everywhere all the time and meet people who are sick or people who are about to do something stupid,” one of the security guards is quoted in the report.

Calling for more correct training

In order to prepare for this kind of job reality, security guard training is more comprehensive today than it was some years back. Still, many of the security guards say the training is not good enough.

4 in 10 security guards say they are dissatisfied with their training in relevant legislation and regulations. They are also dissatisfied with the training in communication and conflict resolution, first aid and fire safety.

Nearly half say the lack of training has an impact on their sense of achievement and their ability to perform the job properly.

“We do things we are not properly trained to do and which we have not rehearsed. It is like putting someone into any type of work without the proper training. It is unsurprising if some feel insecure at work,” says the security guard who has agreed to talk to the Nordic Labour Journal.

National Secretary at the Norwegian Union of General Workers Terje Mikkelsen is surprised that so many feel they have not been given the necessary training to master their job.



“In recent years we have done a lot to strengthen our training. But we have clearly a way to go here, and I think much of this must be done in the individual companies through cooperation between workers’ representatives, safety representatives and leadership,” says Mikkelsen.

Stomach ache

The researchers say security guards pay for the lack of a sense of achievement by worrying about going to work, experiencing stomach aches when they return home and dreading going back to work.

- Nearly 1 in 4 has dreaded going to work once or more times over the past month.
- Nearly 1 in 5 security guards say they have been scared at work in the past three months.
- 3 in 10 have a bad gut feeling when they return from work because they did not have time or the right resources to do the job as well as they had wanted.

“I worry about the psychological strain security guards like us expose ourselves to over time. We see and experience things that make a lasting impression. It can be exhausting. For some, it might take away the joy of being a security guard after a while,” thinks security representative Simon Dragland Knutzen at Securitas.

“We talk to colleagues, leaders and our closest family members, but mostly about more serious issues. We are good at writing reports about serious incidents, but there is little in these reports that say anything about how we feel as human

beings. We have to do something about this,” says Dragland Knutzen.

Threats and violence

Security guards are among the occupational groups that face the most violence, threats and harassment at work, along with health and social workers, police and military personnel.

“The report confirms what we already knew: There is a frighteningly high number of security guards, especially those on the front line, who have experienced everything from being shouted at to being physically attacked,” says the National Secretary at the Norwegian Union of General Workers Terje Mikkelsen.

- 3 in 4 security guards have experienced being called bad things.
- 4 in 10 security guards have experienced being spat at.
- 1 in 4 security guards has experienced being hit (with no physical injuries).
- 1 in 4 security guards has experienced being physically injured.

The security guards say what they can tolerate best is to be called bad things – nearly half of them say they do not take action when this happens.

“We are hated. Nothing of what we do is good enough. Because we are in a service job, we try to please everybody. But this is not always possible,” the anonymous security guard tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

“Of course, I don’t want a job where people tell me they want to kill me, shoot me or knock me down. I guess nobody wants a working environment like that. But that is sadly the reality for us right now,” the security guard says.

Hidden numbers

The report shows that not all undesirable events are reported to HR. The most worrying results are:

- 1 in 3 security guards says they do not feel sure their employer will look after them if they are the victims of an undesirable event.
- 3 in 10 security guards say they to a small degree or not at all feel they can report mistakes or mishaps without fear of negative consequences for themselves.

“When around 3 in 10 security guards feel it is not safe to report mistakes or mishaps to their employer, and generally say they have little individual agency when it comes to their own work situation, we need to really look at how this sector of our frontline services actually work in practice,” the researchers underline in the report.

Wants statutory protection

Simon Dragland Knutzen argues Securitas has good tools and systems for addressing serious events.

“The police say we must report violence and threats. So we report violence and threats. With us, it is the employer and not the individual security guard who does the reporting. Yet it is still the security guard who has to face this. Many sadly experience that a few weeks later a letter comes, informing them the case has been dismissed. When you have experienced this a few too many times you lose faith in the system. So the next time you are hit, you don't bother to report it,” says Dragland Knutzen.

Security guards argue for improved statutory protection on the same level as healthcare personnel, teachers and police officers. According to Norwegian law, violence against people in particularly vulnerable occupations will result in a fine or prison for up to three years.

“As long as hitting or threatening a security guard has no consequence, there will always be people who do it,” the anonymous security guard tells the Nordic Labour Journal.