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Sexual harassment: new knowledge needed

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Greenland chooses new government in protest against controversial mining

Apr 29, 2021

Theme: The green transition



Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 4/2021



Financed by
Nordic Council of
Ministers

NORDIC LABOUR JOURNAL

Work Research Institute
OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University,
Postboks 4 St. Olavs plass, NO-0130
Oslo

PUBLISHER

Work Research Institute, OsloMet
commissioned by the Nordic Council of
Ministers.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Björn Lindahl

EMAIL

nljeditor@gmail.com

WEB

www.nordiclabourjournal.org

An email edition of the newsletter can
be ordered free of charge from
www.nordiclabourjournal.org

ISSN 1504-9019 tildelt: Nordic labour
journal (online)



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The green transition needs public support

The green transition and Greenland. Are the two linked? The election result which turned the power balance upside down on the island was influenced by a controversial mining project. It promised an abundance of rare earth materials needed for lithium batteries that are used in electric cars and wind turbines.

EDITORIAL

29.04.2021

BY BJÖRN LINDAHL, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The Narsaq mining project could provide 10% of these materials according to Greenland Mining, who had won the right to mine them.

It could have been a positive story for the green transition. But the Greenlanders did not want it. They were worried about the high levels of radioactive thorium, a byproduct which they feared could pollute the area for thousands of years.

As a result, the pro-mining Social Democrat party Siumut lost its government power for the first time since 1979, when Greenland got its autonomy. Opposition parties IA and Narsaq have now formed a coalition government.

What we can learn from this is that the green transition cannot be carried without the support of the people and workers. That was also the theme for a trade union conference organised by the Council of Nordic Trade Unions NSF and German DGB, an umbrella for eight trade unions.

Europe is facing a historic transition, pointed out Jytte Guteland, a Swedish Social Democrat MEP. What started as a coal and steel union is now to become a fossil-free union.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has also made the green transition one of its three main goals going forward towards 2030. We all depend on this transition to succeed, but there will be winners and losers. Swedish Skellefteå is among the winners. Before Northvolt has even finished building their first battery mega factory there, a German carmaker (read VW), with help from German state guarantees, has ordered batteries for 300,000 EVs.

No other country in the world has a larger proportion of EVs than Norway. 20% of all cars in that country are now fully electric. This has an effect not only on car retailers. Garages with only EVs do not have to worry about exhaust and Norway has started getting dedicated EV repair

shops where the time spent on each car is much lower, since the design is much less complicated. We have looked at what is happening to petrol stations – or could we already start calling them energy stations?

We have also dived deep into – or at least waded in the beach zone of – what researchers call the blue forest – the seaweed growing along the Nordic coasts which has turned out to play an important role both for CO₂ storage and as a raw material for food and medicines. Linnéa Sjögren is an enthusiast who wants to increase the use of seaweed, while also protecting it and spreading knowledge about it. Research with support from the Nordic Council of ministers has seen the blue forests mapped for the first time.

We also write about another kind of mapping – within the construction industry, where the Nordics want to develop methods for how to assess the climate footprint of building materials throughout their life cycle. This would cover production, installation, use and finally decommissioning.

The Nordic Council of Ministers also supports research into new technology which will give people with physical handicaps greater opportunities in the labour market, as well as research into how to reduce sexual harassment and assaults at work. This is a particular problem in the care sector since perpetrators can be colleagues, bosses, patients or even patients' family. "Tölum saman" is the rallying cry from a project run in Akureyri in Iceland.

We talk to each other in all kinds of Nordic settings, but should we use what is sometimes called "bandinavian" or should English be our common language?

"Both Finns and Icelanders can feel like outsiders in a room where you are expected to speak Scandinavian. The same goes for Greenlanders and Sami, and also many immigrants," points out Johan Strang, Associate Professor at the Centre for Nordic Studies at the University of Helsinki.



Nordic and German trade unions join forces for the green transition

Nordic trade unions should work with their colleagues in Germany to make sure the green transition happens in a just way. Together they can be strong enough to get this trade union perspective on the agenda.

THEME

29.04.2021

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

“We must look to the future and make sure it is both just and fossil-free,” said Finland’s Minister of Employment Tuula Haatinen as she opened a digital conference co-hosted by the Council of Nordic Trade Unions NSF, Friedrich-Ebert Foundation and the German Trade Union Confederation DGB.

Ahead of the conference, the three hosts had presented seven reports on the green transition – one for each Nordic country and one for Germany. There was also one overarching report which describes existing challenges and the recommenda-

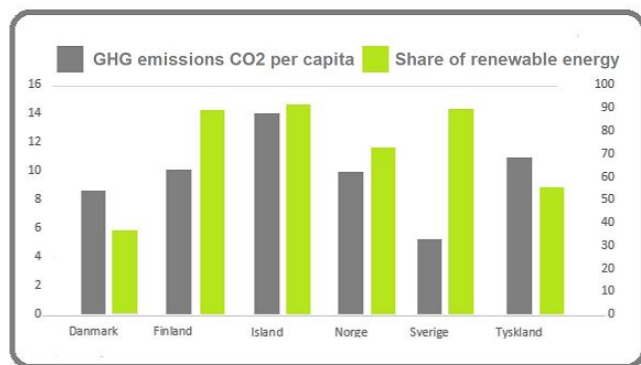
tions trade unions will present to their governments and to society as a whole.

“If the transition is not just, it will lead to increased populism. The measures must be communicated in a way that does not make workers oppose them,” warned Antti Palola, Chairman of the Finnish Confederation of Professionals STTK.

The main report concluded that both Germany and the Nordics have export-based economies which are dependent on trade. They are facing similar challenges when it comes to high emission sectors like the metal industry, construction, transport, agriculture and fossil fuel production. These are all sectors which are going to be facing major structural change.

The Nordics and Germany also share many opportunities to create strategies for zero-emission solutions and the technological development of energy sources.

If you look at the country reports, however, it is also obvious that the countries are different – for instance when it comes to CO₂ emissions per citizen and the share of renewables in their energy supplies.



The country reports contain a range of comparable statistics – here are two of them. To the left is millions of tonnes of CO₂, to the right is percentages.

The countries with a low grey column (CO₂ emissions per capita) and the tallest green column are the most environmentally friendly. But the comparison also shows that this goes beyond energy. Iceland, for instance, has the highest share of renewables yet the largest CO₂ emissions per capita.

The trade union alliance comprises countries within and outside of the EU (as well as Euro and non-Euro countries). All the reports highlight that the EU is the central arena for the climate efforts.

“We are living in a time of historical change in the EU, where we are transitioning from what was originally a coal and steel union to a climate-neutral union,” said Jytte Guteland, a Swedish Social Democrat MEP.

“The EU has earmarked 17.5 million Euro for the Just Transition Fund, which is meant to facilitate the transition, but all countries must make sure they have adequate funds,” she said.

Reiner Hoffmann from German DGB underlined that one of the most important factors for the transition to succeed is that enough is invested in keeping employment levels high.

“We need a lot of investment in digitalisation, decarbonisation and training. We also need a good economy, but we must discuss how we can modernise the monetary union criteria,” he said.

To be part of the European Monetary Union right now, a country’s public deficit cannot be more than 3% of GDP, and public debts cannot be more than 60% of GDP.

“The criteria must not be used in order to limit investments,” he argued.

In order to achieve such a change of course in Germany and elsewhere in the EU, the voices of trade unions and workers must become stronger.

Despite the major challenges, the reports also pointed out areas where the green transition can create new jobs. Emissions can be lowered both through investing in new technology which is more energy-efficient or by separating out CO₂ and storing it, so-called CCS:

- Both Iceland and Norway are working with developing CCS, an industry which can create 30-40,000 jobs in Norway alone by 2050.
- A pilot plant opened in Luleå in sparsely populated northern Sweden two years ago. This can produce steel with wheat instead of coal, which changes the emission-heavy recipe of how to create steel which has been dominating since the iron age.
- In the summer of 2020 came news that a German company, with the help of German state guarantees, had ordered batteries with a total capacity of 16 GWh (enough to charge up to 300,000 cars) from a factory under construction in Skellefteå, Sweden.
- Denmark’s green sector has grown further and has created many jobs. Energy export today makes up nearly 14% of the Danish total.
- A Finnish study shows that 20,000 jobs have been created because of the EU’s energy efficiency directive, because this increased demands for recycled wood.

Nearly all the country reports mention the potential of the bio- and circular economies for job creation for people with higher education and skills. There are also opportunities for creating jobs in rural areas, since forests and bioeconomy usually can be found there.

The German and Nordic trade unions have also been able to agree on eight recommendations for how the climate transition should progress. Beyond supporting the Paris agreement and the governments’ attempts at making good on their promises, the recommendations include:

- Involving trade unions during structural changes

- Making the transition work through increased education and improved work environments
- Reducing social insecurity during structural changes
- Invest in people and in the future
- Creating equal conditions to stop industries with large emissions from flagging out

"We believe the Nordic countries should join forces with Germany and lead the way for a just transition and help us all reach the climate and social sustainability goals at the same time. Our countries have the means to achieve this with their various welfare models. Our economies will become competitive and we will have high employment rates to boot.

"The Nordic Council of Ministers plays an important part in this perspective, not least in light of the prime ministers' vision for making the Nordics the most sustainable and integrated region in the world," says Magnus Gissler, General Secretary of the NFS.



Danish world first: a circular and sustainable building

In 2023, 60 Danish families will move into a cutting edge building made from climate-friendly materials that can be recycled or reused. This kind of sustainable and circular construction is being accelerated and the Nordics are playing an important role.

THEME

29.04.2021

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: TOM JERSØ

In early 2023, 60 new apartments in a suburb of Denmark's second city Aarhus will get their first residents. This will be different from all other housing projects in the world – a so-called circular building where it should be possible to separate and reuse 90% of all the construction materials, explains Jesper Kort Andersen.



He is the project leader at the Lejerbo social housing association, which is behind the historic building.

“As a social housing association it is part of our heritage to take social responsibility, and the climate crisis is a real threat to our society. In this context, buildings are bad for the climate. That’s why it is natural for us to contribute to the solution to the future climate challenge, and now we will be the first to construct a block of flats according to the principles of circular buildings.”

In 2021, Lejerbo chose the main entrepreneur that will construct the circular housing unit, which has been named Circle House. Lejerbo defined several circular criteria in their tender, including:

Materials with so-called material passports are preferred – i.e. all ingredients in a building material are declared, allowing for a full overview of their purity and CO₂ footprint through easily accessible data.



Finding the CO₂ footprint for the building materials should be straightforward.

The building should be constructed in accordance with “Design for separation” – which means parts can be changed without the need to change major building systems, and that they can be reused.

A need for standards

Both material passports and design for separation are crucial if architects, entrepreneurs and builders are to build and renovate buildings in ways that impact less on the climate, says Tine Lange, owner of the consultancy firm Responsible Assets, who advises the Danish construction industry on sustainable construction.

“We will only reach the climate goals if the construction industry’s large climate footprint is drastically reduced, so it is urgent that the industry starts using, recycling and reusing environmentally friendly construction materials.

“We need common standards for how to calculate and share data on the contents of various construction materials, and their “life cycle” climate impact. With this in place, the construction industry can figure out how to use environmentally friendly materials and build in an environmentally friendly way.”



Environmentally friendly buildings need standards, thinks Tine Lange, who advises the Danish construction industry on sustainable buildings.

To get to this point is no easy task, however. There are no national, Nordic nor international standards for sustainable and circular construction, but work is being done to get there. Danish Standards and its European sister organisations are among those who have begun looking at this, explains Tine Lange.

A Nordic advantage

She also sees the Nordic cooperation as an obvious forum for developing standards and sharing good experiences with environmentally friendly construction.

“Right now it is extremely important to share all good experiences with sustainable and circular construction which all countries can benefit from. Sweden, for instance, has come far when it comes to developing material passports, and that knowledge can be shared through the Nordic cooperation. The Nordics can also speak with one strong voice in international fora in order to create a global solution to the environmental impact of the construction industry.”

Nordic housing and construction ministers launched a four-year action plan in 2020 with measures aimed at making the housing and construction sector more environmentally friendly through a range of innovative and green solutions. The aim for the Nordics to become leaders in sustainable and competitive housing and construction with lower environmental impact.

Tine Lange believes that if the Nordics work quickly and wisely together, their construction industries will gain considerable global competitive advantages.

“Everyone now knows that the construction industry’s environmental impact must be reduced, and if the Nordic region creates joint solutions and ambitious competitive conditions for sustainable construction, the demand could explode – as it did for Danish wind turbine technology.”

Both recycling and reuse

Tine Lange sees the Circle House project as an important pioneer project where all the housing association's experiences with developing material passports and design for separation will be made available for the construction industry as a whole. Yet she believes other measures must be put in place in order to create volume when it comes to sustainable construction.



Finding ways to reuse and recycle building materials is becoming urgent.

She supports a CO₂ tax and hopes that in time it will be a legal requirement to document all building materials' CO₂ footprint. She also firmly believes that the *recycling* of building materials has a greater potential than direct *reuse*.

“Right now there is a lot of focus on reusing, where a building's elements are taken out and given new life somewhere else. But this process is so far quite ‘hands-on’ and time-consuming, so it won't solve the construction industry's main climate challenge on its own. To create enough volume for sustainable construction you need a commercial market for the reuse of construction materials, and to recycle parts of wasted construction materials in new construction products.”

You need material passports for both reuse and recycling – precise data for what each construction material contains and its CO₂ footprint.

Official demands

In order to create scale for sustainable construction, it will also be necessary to stimulate demand. If not, builders and entrepreneurs will go on choosing what they always do. That is why state, regional and local authorities should make sustainability a prerequisite when putting projects out to tender. This would really make the construction industry work seriously with sustainable construction, expects Trine Lange. Right now she is working with a team of lawyers and architects to prepare public construction tenders designed for reuseable or recyclable products.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretary-General Paula Lehtomäki has also said large property owners and municipalities, regions and states should be at the forefront of pro-

moting a more sustainable and climate-friendly construction industry.

She has highlighted the importance of the Nordic countries working together to develop ways of reducing the environmental impact of the construction industry throughout building materials' “lifespan” – from production through construction to the finished construction. This data should be easily accessible, and maximum permissible limits should be set for CO₂ footprint per square metre. The total climate budget for building materials should have to stick to this limit.

The Secretary-General said all this in a speech on 23 March this year as part of the EU project New European Bauhaus. The EU Commission had invited Nordic architects, engineers and builders to give advice on how to achieve sustainable construction and good design to the benefit of users.

“Establishing maximum permissible limits is no easy task. It is important to work together on how to calculate this, on data and on skills development for all of our architects and engineers,” said Paula Lehtomäki.

Sustainability benefits residents

For Lejerbo, developing Circle House has revealed new opportunities for how to improve quality for the residents. It turns out that healthy and reusable materials improve the indoor climate, and it reduces costs linked to renovation which means you can keep rents low, explains project leader Jesper Kort Andersen.



Circle House also improves the residents' quality of living.

“For us, it has been important that the construction has been both circular and that it has increased housing quality for residents. We have been positively surprised that circularity and high housing quality go hand in hand. Circular construction is not just a duty and an expense, it also brings with it many advantages.”

Lejerbo share some of their experiences on the Circle House Lab network where 70 Danish construction companies work together to find solutions. Among them is Danish Standards,

who use the companies' input to create new standards for circular construction.

Danish strategy for sustainable construction

The Danish government has been working with the Left, the Danish People's Party, the Red-Green Alliance, the Danish Social Liberal Party, the Socialist People's Party and the Alternative to reach an agreement securing the introduction of CO₂ limits for all larger construction companies from 2023. From 2025, there will be CO₂ limits for new builds in general.

"This agreement will bring the construction industry into a new, green age where environmentally friendly solutions go hand in hand with healthy, good and cheap buildings," said the Minister for Building and Housing Kaare Dybvad Bek as the agreement was announced on 5 March 2021.

Construction industry high up on Nordic climate agenda

The Nordic countries are working intensively together to reduce the climate impact from the construction industry both in the region and elsewhere in the EU.

THEME

29.04.2021

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

Making the Nordics the world's most sustainable and integrated region is the central vision for the Nordic cooperation towards 2030. This will be achieved through three strategic priorities, one of which is to promote a green transformation of Nordic societies and work towards a carbon-neutral, sustainable, circular and biobased economy.

As the construction industry is a major CO₂ emitter, a joint 2019 Nordic declaration stated that the countries would fight climate change and reduce emissions from construction. Part of this work would be to integrate the principle of circularity into the construction industry both in the Nordic region and elsewhere in the EU.

Changes to construction crucial

The Nordic ministers responsible for housing and construction agreed that it would not be possible to achieve the Nordic governments' goals of making the Nordics a global climate leader without rapid changes to how buildings are constructed and renovated.

Since 2020, a steering group under the Nordic Council of Ministers has been responsible for cooperation aimed at harmonising the Nordic construction sector and secure cuts to CO₂ emissions. The steering group meets once a year and will report to the Nordic ministers of industry and housing.

Cooperation on an EU level

The Nordic ministers cooperate on an EU level on the revision of the Construction Products Regulation, the EU's mechanism for construction companies' voluntary reduction of CO₂ emissions. They also work to get the EU to introduce rules for how to measure a building's CO₂ emissions during its life span.

The 2021 Finnish Presidency of the Council of Ministers has announced the development of a competence network for a circular economy for the construction industry. It is also promoting Nordic cooperation aimed at increasing the region's

input in international climate processes like the Paris Agreement, while working towards new goals within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity.



Passionate about seaweed: healthy, tasty and plentiful

Seaweed has been rediscovered as a resource with a range of uses point out ecopreneurs and researchers. But it is also under threat, according to a fresh report from the Nordic Council of Ministers.

THEME

29.04.2021

TEXT: FAYME ALM, PHOTO: CATXALOT

With their backs bent, snorkelling masks covering their eyes and noses they are standing knee-deep in the water. The participants at this seaweed safari have entered the wet element to study the wild, edible types of seaweed which they have learned about earlier on-shore – including their nutritional content and how to pick, clean and store them.

Culinary gold gave a flying start

Leading the seaweed safari is Linnéa Sjögren from Catxalot, a seaweed company in Grebbestad on the Swedish west coast around halfway between Gothenburg and Oslo.

“My then partner and I saw there was a gap in the market in Sweden. He is a scuba diver and I have always been interested in food and the sea. That combination was what was needed for us to start our business in 2014.”



It got off to a flying start. That year, Swedish chef Tommy Myllymäki won gold at the Bocuse d'Or Europé, considered to be the world championships of cooking. On the menu: seaweed from Catxalot.

Since then the interest in seaweed as a food has grown. It is no longer just master chefs like Myllymäki who want seaweed on their plates. Linnéa Sjögren believes the vegan trend might have helped.

“The seaweed improves both taste and nutritional content. This is now starting to spread so I am working on a new course called Make food with seaweed. The pandemic means it will have to be online,” says the Catxalot owner as she looks out over the marine fields surrounding us.

Seaweed – a paradox

The possibilities of seaweed as food have also caught the eyes of others besides ecopreneurs. The multidisciplinary research project “Marine food resources for new markets” focuses on “seaweed as a resource, possible production processes and market creation for seaweed products and consumers’ attitudes to seaweed as a food.”

Researchers and research students from Lund University’s social science, natural science and technical faculties are taking part.

A plate of sea spaghetti?

The project leader, Cecilia Fredriksson, Professor of Ethnology at the Department of Service Management and Service Studies, which is at the university’s Helsingborg campus, gave the Nordic Labour Journal some answers to what the project is about.

Why a project about this and why now?

“Because marine resources are trending and because seaweed is an old resource which has not been used for a while. In Sweden, we have been using seaweed in different ways, but we have usually not been eating it. Right now we are facing various sustainability challenges. There is limited space for food production on land, so we need foodstuffs that are lower down in the food chain.”

What are you looking at?

“How we can change our habits and what are the conditions needed for consumers and producers to do so. We will apply different perspectives to this, and that is why the project is multidisciplinary.”

What is needed for seaweed to reach a bigger market?

“We have looked at the paradoxes of seaweed. On the one hand, you have its usefulness and the fact that it can be used in different ways, not only as food. On the other hand, we know people might feel wary of having seaweed on their plates.

“It is also interesting to see how seaweed is being introduced as a foodstuff – it seems to have crossed over to be a more exclusive ingredient. It has also not been easy to find seaweed when we have been looking in shops. It comes in so many different shapes, and then there’s the issue of where you put it – among the vegetables or the seafood? Our biotechnicians are also looking at how consumers are interested in consuming seaweed.”

Any other results you can share?

“We have already been able to identify some of the obstacles to getting what we call sea spaghetti onto the kitchen table and to integrate the seaweed into traditional meals. There are challenges both with EU regulations and with the Swedish National Food Agency, but we also see resistance from shops and among consumers when new products are being introduced. The aim of this project is therefore to develop new knowledge about marine foodstuff resources that can create value for the consumer.”

At what stage is the project right now?

“We have gathered a lot of material which we are now analysing. And my colleague Filippa Säfwe and I interview entrepreneurs to find out how seaweed becomes innovation, how a resource can be rediscovered. We must also look closer at issues around seafood being perceived both as being healthy and poisonous.”

When seaweed is perceived to be dangerous

The seaweed safari participants continue to look for different types near Tjurpanna, a place in Grebbestad that has Linnéa Sjögren has chosen carefully. The water here is moving, which is a prerequisite for a good harvest. Seaweed growing in harbours or near outlets is no good for those who want to harvest it for food.



Because even though the types of seaweed that live in salt water in Sweden are neither poisonous nor dangerous, they can gather heavy metals from for instance agriculture, she explains to the safari participants and the Nordic Labour Journal.

“If we ingest heavy metals through the seaweed, our bowels will rid our bodies of them. This is different from heavy metals ingested via shellfish and oily fish species.”

Not enough people know this fact, thinks Linnéa Sjögren and sees it as a challenge for those who, like her, want our seaweed consumption to increase. The danger aspect which sometimes is linked to seaweed must go if the general public is to understand the future potential for this product as a raw material in cooking, she says.

“To achieve a change like this we need state-funded lab testing of different types of seaweed during different seasons. This is something individual businesses cannot afford. Scientific results must then be spread beyond research reports through popular science if the negative attitudes to seaweed are to be changed.”

New trade association

Like for all other business owners, profit is important for entrepreneurs like Linnéa Sjögren too. To make the company profitable, Catxalot had to stop providing seaweed to restaurants and shops since Linnéa Sjögren now runs the company on her own. You need economies of scale in order to make a business like this profitable, she says, pointing out how seaweed farms have a different capacity than seaweed companies gathering wild seaweed by hand.

“Here in Sweden, we have only three seaweed farms, while Norway has many more. This is because Swedish rules for setting up farms are complicated.”

In order to help Swedish authorities with knowledge and experience from their aquaculture business and to protect their own interests, the trade association Svensk vattenbruk och sjömat (Swedish aquaculture and seafood) was established late last year.

“We are the voice of the trade and can provide views on government reports in order to simplify the rules while also making it easier for those of us who want to operate a sus-

tainable business,” says Linnéa Sjögren, who is the association’s secretary, before pulling on her wading trousers and walking out to the group in the water.

With a gentle hand

The group in the water in Grebbestad have now brought out their scissors. Since the seaweed in Sweden is part of the public right of access, it is possible for the safari participants to harvest small quantities to take home. They have already been taught how to do it.

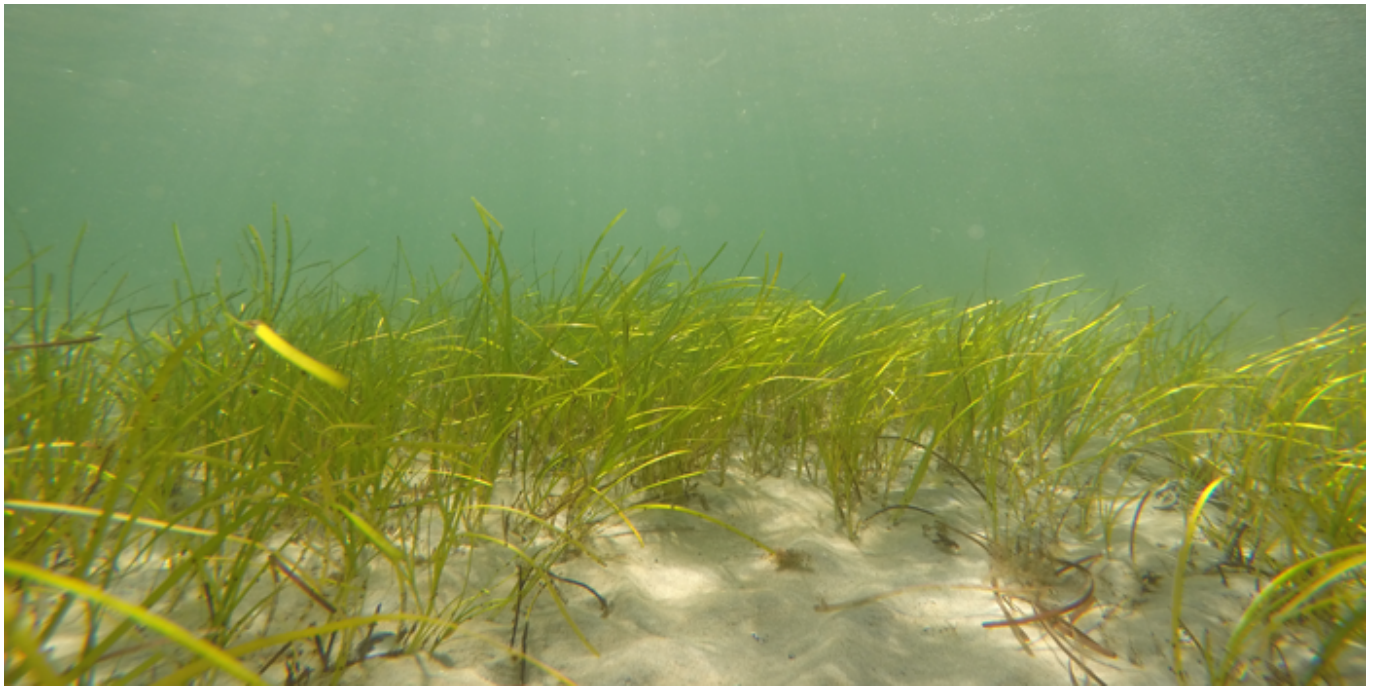
“Catxalot’s mission has from the start been to safeguard the regrowth of seaweed through showing how to pick it in a sustainable manner. How much and which part you can take and never to yank a plant off the seabed,” says Linnéa Sjögren.

A seaweed book in the making

Now she gets out of her wading trousers and heads for her desk to write the last paragraphs of her first book about seaweed. Karolina Martinson is contributing with recipes. It is due to be published this autumn by Natur & Kultur. According to the author, one chapter might be controversial since it is about nutritional content linked to results from research.

“I am prepared for a debate. The research I write about in the book might be seen to be far too good to be true,” says Linnéa Sjögren and makes her way across the cliffs.

The book can be read by those who want to learn more about seaweed and who might want to work in a professional capacity with this maritime raw material in order to create their own products or events, and thereby create more jobs.



The many ways in which seaweed can save the environment

In Denmark, researchers, companies, authorities and interest organisations have come together in Tang.nu (Danish for Seaweed Now), a project exploring how seaweed farming might help create cleaner oceans and how to use seaweed biomass as food and animal feed.

THEME

29.04.2021

TEXT: FAYME ALM, FOTO: CHRISTIAN BILLE JENDRESEN

“We like to say that seaweed is like a Kinder Surprise. It has so many possible solutions and challenges and can be used as a bioresource, food, animal feed, material and medicine. Seaweed absorbs both nutrition and CO₂ and can clearly improve the environment,” Annette Bruhn, a marine biologist and senior researcher at Aarhus University, tells the Nordic Labour Journal.



When asked how seaweed can help mitigate the climate crisis, the Danish researcher provides the following examples:

- One tonne of farmed and dried seaweed binds at least one to two tonnes of CO₂ using photosynthesis.
- If we replace imported soya with locally produced seaweed as animal feed, we cut CO₂ emissions from transport.
- More than 40% of the world's methane emissions come from cows. If we mix certain types of seaweed in their feed, the methane emissions fall by up to 98%.
- Seaweed's ability to absorb CO₂ also helps reducing local ocean acidity.
- As a foodstuff, seaweed is also a good source of carbohydrates, proteins and fat.

"Seaweed contains no more than 1 to 3% fat, but this is the good type of fat which is rich in omega-3," says Annette Bruhn.

The elements and the necessary balance

So what about elements like arsenic, iron, iodine and zinc, which are also found in seaweed? Can a seaweed eater digest too much of these elements?

"We humans need a certain amount of these elements, but we must always keep a balance and regulate the amounts that we eat in order not to get too much of any one thing. There are also variations in the amount of different elements depending on where the seaweed is being farmed, and during which time of year," says Annette Bruhn.

The many qualities of seaweed

If seaweed disappeared, what would happen?

"It would have an impact on the climate because seaweed absorbs large amounts of CO₂ from the atmosphere and turns it into marine resources in the oceans. Biodiversity would also suffer since seaweed is both food and home for small and large animals and other ocean plants.

"The food chain would be affected since the small animals eat seafood and the larger animals eat the smaller ones. Even commercially fished species like cod live in seaweed when they are small, so if it disappeared the number of cod would be hit."

How do we protect the seaweed?

"By reducing nutrient pollution which makes fast-growing species grow faster because of too many nutrients, and they wipe out species that grow slowly and contribute to more biodiversity."

The Nordic blue forests

"Blue Carbon – climate adaptation, CO₂ uptake and sequestration of carbon in Nordic blue forests" is a newly published report from the Nordic Council of Ministers. With blue carbon, they mean carbon captured by living organisms in

coastal vegetated ecosystems and stored in biomass and sediments.

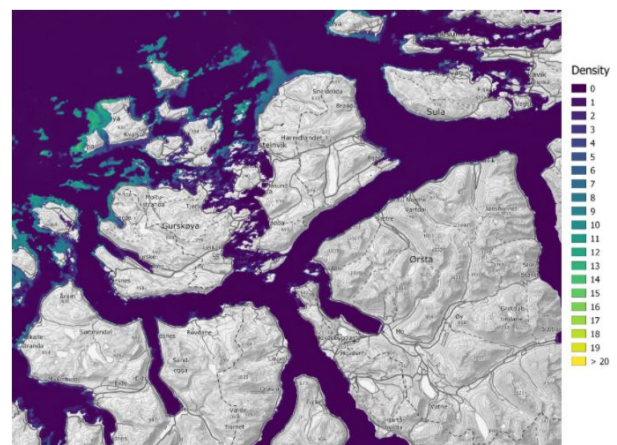
The Danish, Finnish and Norwegian researchers behind the report have studied these three types of Nordic wild blue forests:

1. Kelp forests – large brown algae growing on rocks or hard sediment in permanently water-covered areas.
2. Seaweed in tidal zones – brown algae growing on rocks that are sometimes covered in water and sometimes exposed.
3. Seagrass meadows – marine plants making up subsea meadows on soft sediment.

The project's main focus has been the blue forests' ability to help the ocean's ability to sequester carbon. While these marine forests are growing, they gather carbon and nutrients in their biomass. Parts of this biomass then end up in carbon sink deposits on the seabed and help cut carbon emissions.

The first Nordic seaweed map

The report's results include the mapping of what effect climate change and other human-caused changes have on the ecosystems of the Nordics' blue forests.



Dorte Krause-Jensen, Professor of marine biodiversity and ecology at Aarhus University, is one of the researchers behind the report. She tells the Nordic Labour Journal that the map is an important tool for monitoring the seaweed stocks.

"The blue forests are growing partly hidden under the surface. To manage them in an efficient way you need to know where to find them."

Seaweed needs resilience

The report also gives general advice for the management of the Nordics' blue forests, which is particularly important as some of them have already been lost.

"We encourage targeted measures to protect them from factors like eutrophication, overfishing and habitat fragmentation. It might also be necessary to repair and recreate lost

habitats to help speed up the re-establishment,” says Dorte Krause-Jensen.

Loss of habitat can be due to too frequent harvesting which risks ruining the seaweed.

“In some countries, large amounts of wild seaweed are being harvested. In these places, it would be good to stop the harvest or at least make it sustainable. Another alternative is to farm the seaweed you will use and protect seaweed forests that are now being harvested far too frequently,” says Annette Bruhn.



Norwegian petrol stations might fall victim to EVs

The number of petrol stations has slowly fallen for many years. Soon there will be more EV chargers than petrol stations in Norway.

THEME

29.04.2021

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJØRN LØNNUM ANDREASSEN

Electric cars have been jokingly called “chargeable torches” or “tablets”. Norway is top in Europe when it comes to the number of EVs compared to petrol and diesel cars. The number of petrol stations has fallen for many years. New cars are also more fuel-efficient and people do not need to stop as often as they used to.

Circle K operates the largest number of petrol stations in Norway. Dag Erik Juvstad is the manager at the Circle K Nidarvøll in Trondheim. He tells us that the number of EVs stopping there to charge has been increasing for a long time.

“Petrol stations must adapt because that is the only thing we can do. It will be a change, but income from fuel is not the

most important for our station. Getting more customers who spend more time with us while charging their vehicle is not a bad thing. On the contrary. That allows us to sell more food and kiosk items,” he says and shows us the station’s rich selection.



Dag Erik Juvsstad

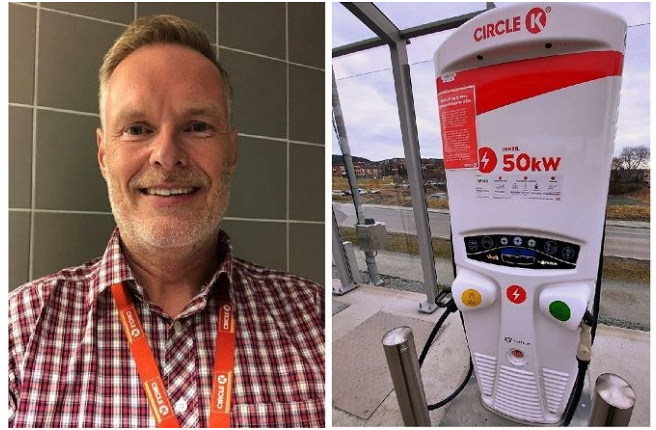
“I don’t think we will have to cut jobs. Our focus is retail and food sales, and if in future we will have more customers for longer periods of time we might have to hire more people. But we do not know this for sure, it remains to be seen,” says the experienced manager.

“Taking action now”

Lars K Bjørnå is a senior manager with Circle K Norway. He says they have around 90 EV rapid chargers across their 350 manned stations. New chargers are being installed at Circle K stations all the time, also in Sweden and Denmark.

“We believe a fall in fuel sales will have an impact on us as a company. Charging will become a more important part of our business. Financially, rapid charging cannot replace fuelling. We are dependent on selling the products and services we have today. This is what we believe in and are planning for, leaving room for hiring many people also in the future.

“We will have to wait and see how the industry will be affected by electrification. We try to take action now in order to be ahead of the curve. Time will tell whether we succeed,” says Bjørnå.



Lars K. Bjørnå is a senior manager with Circle K Norway, the country's largest petrol station chain. It is actively pursuing rapid charging for EVs. 1,200 new charging stations are needed to reach political climate goals. Photo: private

“So far, we have not seen a clear trend of fewer petrol stations as a direct result of an increase in EVs in Norway. We also do not think that more petrol stations will have to close in the coming years because of the increase in EVs,” he says.

In May, Circle K will open their first petrol station with solar panels. Together with the energy producer Glitre, they will charge a gigantic battery pack. This will be used to supplement the grid while EVs are being charged at the station.

“This pilot station will look at the effect of electricity from the solar panels, and the possibility of regulating the charging effect based on the load on the grid,” he says. Using solar power could bring EV charging prices down.

In 1969, there were 4,215 petrol stations in Norway. By 2019, 1,709 remained, according to Drivkraft Norge, the trade association representing fuel and energy companies in Norway.

New words and goals

The move from fossil fuel to electric cars is part of the green shift. The new word of the year in 2015 in Norway was “grønt skifte” or “grønn omstilling” – meaning green shift or green change. The words mean a general shift towards a more environmentally friendly future in accordance with the UN sustainability goals.

So far the term has no clear definition, but has gained traction in the Norwegian language and is often used in political rhetoric and in the media, according to the Great Norwegian Encyclopaedia.



Christina Bu speaking at an EV conference in Oslo. Greta Thunberg (on the picture behind) has criticised Norway for its oil exploration activities. Yet no other country sells so many EVs compared to fossil fuel vehicles. Photo: Björn Lindahl

Christina Bu is the Secretary-General of the Norwegian EV Association. She explains that the Norwegian parliament has decided all cars sold after 2025 must be emission-free. Which means electric cars. Today, 3,460 cars can be charged at rapid chargers simultaneously. There are three types of chargers available in public spaces – superchargers, rapid chargers and normal chargers. The time it takes to charge an EV vary from 30 minutes to a few hours. The total number of public chargers is now 15,361.

The association is lobbying for the installation of as many chargers as possible in other service areas – like petrol stations and shopping centres. That allows EV owners to do something other than just waiting for the charge to finish.

“We need to build at least 1,250 new rapid chargers a year in order to reach the goal which parliament has set for 2025. The trade responsible for installing charging stations has sped up, but things are not moving fast enough.

“The number of cars per rapid charger has fallen somewhat, but more is needed. The government must make it easier to build new charging stations. One goal is for all municipalities to have at least two rapid chargers so that EVs can be run just as easily as ordinary cars,” says Bu.

She says more charging stations were built in 2020 compared to 2019.

“Still there are long charging queues on busy days like the beginning of public holidays, Fridays and Sundays.”



Green transition brings big industry to northern Sweden

The construction of Northvolt's electric car battery factory in Skellefteå in Västerbotten County represents one of the largest industrial investments in Swedish history. Within five years, 3,000 people will be employed to produce a car battery that is environmentally friendly to produce and to use.

THEME

29.04.2021

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN, ILLUSTRATION: NORTHVOLT

Right now more than 1,500 construction workers are busy finishing the new factory in Skellefteå, including all those who are coming in to finalise electrical installations and such. The municipality is also working at full pace to face the changes which the factory and all its workers will bring.

Production will start towards the end of this year. By then, people with the right skills must be in place – a not altogether easy task since the battery sector is relatively new. Parallel with the completion of the Skellefteå factory, Northvolt is also doing research and development in Västerås.

This is where the actual production is being tested out, and it is where future workers are trained. 2,500 of the 3,000 who are needed in Skellefteå will be working on the actual production line. 500 will be in place as early as the end of this year. Research and development will remain in Västerås.

“Right now we are making sure we will be able to grow as fast as we need based on our access to staff. We need to know which skills we will need and to create the right skills. There are still no established roles in a production that is as new as ours,” says Katarina Borstedt, who is responsible for skills development and recruitment at Northvolt.

At full capacity, Northvolt Ett will produce enough lithium batteries to supply 800,000 cars a year. This makes it the largest car battery factory in Europe, and it is also the first in the world to make the actual production process sustainable. Materials, processes, waste – everything will be part of a green and sustainable vision to leave the smallest possible footprint. The factory will run 24/7 all year round and all production will be automatic.

Green approach attracts labour

The company now employs some 1,200 people from 75 countries. The battery trade is growing rapidly and there is a lot of competition to secure the relatively few skilled workers that do exist. Securing enough engineers, operators and other experts with experience in battery production is a challenge, admits Katarina Borstedt.



Katarina Borstedt is responsible for skills development and recruitment at Northvolt.

“We therefore recruit many with other backgrounds and start with their basic knowledge. The average age is relatively low, which can partly be explained by the fact that we are a young company. A young company is more associated with uncertainty compared to a more established one, and younger people can sometimes be more willing to take risks. But the further we go in our process the safer it gets.”

When Katarina Borstedt for instance seeks engineers and other special competence for the new factory, she looks globally – not least to Asia where you find the best battery production knowledge.

How do you sell the actual place, which is in a far-away country and also very far north with cold, dark winters?

“So far it has worked out. It might be less difficult to tempt workers from Asia to come than workers from Solna, Stockholm. Many think it is exotic and are tempted by fresh air and the short distances between work, social life and home,” says Katarina Borstedt.

Creative thinking around recruitment

The company applied many strategies to recruit enough people. Västerbotten has a long and proud industrial tradition and Northvolt is cooperating with the municipality and Region Västerbotten on many levels to make use of the existing labour force. Another project focuses on attracting newly arrived people with the right skills, and there is also cooperation with the Swedish job security council TRR to try to employ people who have lost their jobs – some because of the pandemic.

There is also cooperation with nearby educational institutions to create relevant training modules for the battery sector. The long-term aim is to create a skills hub in the region because the number of green jobs is growing in northern Sweden right now. Several green industry projects are in the pipeline, including Green Steel in Luleå.

Borstedt says Northvolt’s environmental approach across its operations gives them a competitive advantage.

“We are an important part of a change towards renewable energy, and we want to create the world’s greenest batteries. The fact that our production is also green makes us stand out from battery factories in Asia.

“The chance of being part of the drive towards a sustainable society makes people want to work for us, and they also want to be part of the current culture of European startups. I see that many want to do more than recycle their waste and fly less. They want to make a real change,” says Katarina Borstedt.

These are also the drivers behind her own journey. She wants to be part of the creation of a new base industry that does not limit itself to employ mainly men, but that attracts equal numbers of men and women. She also wants to shake up the old prejudice that industry is something boring and dirty, showing how it can be more lively, clean and automated.

“I want to be part of creating a company driven by a vision that I am proud of. I also want to be part of turning Skellefteå from a municipality people move away from to a place with demographic growth and exciting opportunities,” says Katarina Borstedt.

When Northvolt started looking for a place to build a factory in 2017, Skellefteå was not on their list of potential locations. But Skellefteå had done its homework well in advance and had listed the advantages prospective companies would find in their municipality.

In Skellefteå, where the urban centre has just over 36,000 people, you find municipally-owned Skellefteå energy, Sweden’s fifth largest energy company, a harbour in close proximity, a lot of land and many years of industrial tradition. One idea that had been floated was to attract the construction of a data centre, but when the municipality heard about the

ex-Tesla executive Peter Carlsson's ideas for a green battery factory, they got in touch themselves.



Anja Palm, Business Manager at Skellefteå municipality.

“We saw that we could match the demands presented in the enquiry that had been sent out to most municipalities in Sweden and Finland. Our offer was based on centrally placed industrial areas and access to ample renewable energy, a long industrial tradition with competence from process industries within the region. We demonstrated very clearly how much we really wanted Northvolt to come to Skellefteå, and we were prepared to perform the journey of growth that would be needed, together with Northvolt,” says Anja Palm, Business Manager at Skellefteå municipality.

A new hydroelectric power plant, a new culture centre, expansion of the harbour and the local housing market – these were all investments that were already part of the municipality's 2014 growth strategy. With Northvolt's arrival on the horizon, the situation changed dramatically and the investments had to be scaled up and accelerated.

On 19 October 2017 came the message. Northvolt would build their factory in Skellefteå.

“There was a party atmosphere across the entire region. Many had been following developments and were hoping for this. The feeling was that ‘we made this happen together’,” says Anja Palm.

Large and rapid growth

Two years later, the financing of the factory was secured. It became clear that 2,500 people would be employed by the time it would be in full operation in 2025. The municipality also estimated that subcontractor operations could mean another 1,000 to 1,500 jobs. On top of that, there will be jobs in new schools, nurseries, shops, restaurants and other services. In total, the labour force is set to grow by 6,000 to 10,000 by 2030. This means major upgrades of services, housing and infrastructure, explains Anja Palm.

“This is what we are in the middle of right now. We are looking at school capacity, healthcare and housing. The factory will have an impact on the whole of society and most people

in the municipality are very positive. But when the detailed plans for new housing arrive there will of course be some people who don't want any changes in their own backyard,” she says.

The Northvolt factory has also attracted increased interest from other companies who want to set up shop in Skellefteå. A Finnish company recently expressed interest, motivated by the fact that the city is growing.

“We have become a growth city,” says Anja Palm.

Being able to offer housing is an important part of the municipality's growth. People can find information on the municipality website about new housing projects due to open this year. There is also information about the new culture centre. The city also has a campus which houses two universities and research institutes. Securing the right competence is a challenge for the municipality as well as for Northvolt.

“Competence is a potential obstacle which concerns all employers, including the municipality. We do run a risk of losing workers to Northvolt and other companies. But we need people to move here, and the public and private sectors must work together on this. We are also aware that it would not be sustainable if municipalities in northern Sweden started competing over labour. That is why we need to seek competence from across the country and also internationally,” says Anja Palm.

The 15 minutes city

Anja Palm and the business office are now working to expand the various trades in the municipality.

“Skellefteå is a medium-large city where everyday life is easy to navigate. The distance between home and office, school and leisure activities is often no more than 15 minutes, and this is tempting new people to move here as well as former citizens to return.”



Will English become the new Nordic language of cooperation?

Which language should the Nordic region choose for its future cooperation? The common Scandinavian which is spoken by three-quarters of the Nordic population? Or do we take the consequences of an ever decreasing understanding of languages and turn to English? Is the Nordic identity at all built on a common language?

NEWS

29.04.2021

TEXT: BENGT ÖSTLING, PHOTO: CATA PORTIN

English is the natural choice for young Nordic citizens in a globalised world, according to a new report from the Nordic Council of Ministers – “Does the Nordic language community exist?”

In Nordic cooperation, one of the three closely related languages Swedish, Norwegian or Danish, are used both in official work and with citizens organisations.

They can also be mixed into “blandinavian” or “SASperanto”.

For 60 years, the common Scandinavian language has been seen to increase cohesion across the barely visible borders in the Nordic region. Scandinavian has also been used a lot for cultural cooperation, and people have been encouraged to understand each other's Nordic languages.

After WWII, the Nordic region became a byword for international cooperation. But the interest for contacts with the rest of the world has increased after the founding of the Nordic cooperation organisations in the early 1950s, with

NATO memberships, EU memberships and UN engagement.

Some Nordic organisations now use English as their working language, including the Nordic Investment Bank, Nordregio and organisations cooperating in innovation and energy research.

The Nordic Youth Nordic Council have aired the need of using English as a language in meetings. Many organisations complain of the high costs of simultaneous translation and time-consuming translations of documents from and to Finnish and Icelandic.

The private sector also uses English as a common language for cooperation and during mergers in the Nordic region.

Relax – English is democratic

One of the proponents of a more relaxed relationship to English in Nordic settings is Johan Stang, Associate Professor at the Centre for Nordic Studies at the University of Helsinki.



Stang recently addressed a webinar with Nordic Editors and Translators (NEaT). His role was to play devil's advocate, and he underlined that he himself chooses to speak Scandinavian in Nordic settings.

Stang does not want the official Nordic cooperation on the Nordic Council and the Council of Ministers to switch to English. It is still better to keep it Scandinavian, and this is helped by the Nordic Council's increased use of translations of Finnish and Icelandic and interpreters during committee meetings. Simultaneous translation has long been available for the two non-Scandinavian languages during meetings.

The idea of Nordic cohesion and cooperation is not only built on the common Scandinavian language, says Stang.

Speaking English in Nordic settings is often seen as more democratic and inclusive. It is a language that is nobody's mother tongue, and so it is a democratic choice. That is the usual argument.

“Among the many languages spoken in the Nordics, only Swedish, Danish and the two Norwegian languages are understandable for others – at least in theory. This means that 20% of the population is not able to participate in the cooperation on equal terms,” according to Stang.

“Both Finns and Icelanders can feel like outsiders in a room where you are expected to speak Scandinavian. The same goes for Greenlanders and Sami, and also many immigrants.”

A Nordic characteristic or not?

What makes the Nordics Nordic, what makes us stand out? That is the question Johan Stang puts to all new students at the Nordic programme's courses in Nordic politics, culture and history at the University of Helsinki.

Many mention the welfare state, the combination of individualism and the role of the state and high living costs, notes Stang.

The closeness to nature, the cold and the dark are also mentioned, along with blond citizens with Viking genes. The Students also note the Stange combination of tolerance and nationalism – and also the equally Stange combination of high levels of happiness and many suicides.

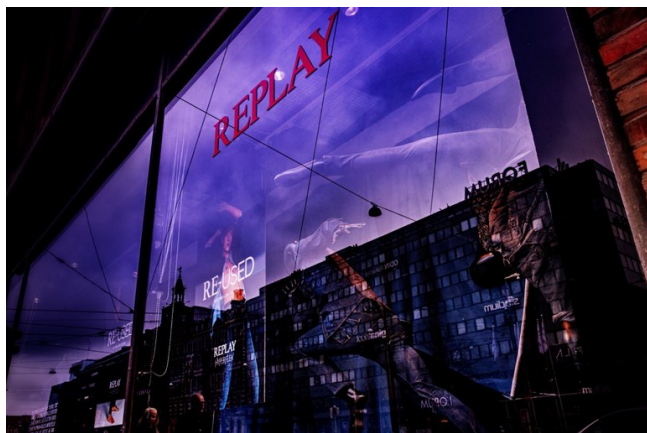
Stang has also heard students talk about the Nordic flags featuring crosses, Protestantism and Lutheranism. But there is also talk about secularisation and modernism – and functional architecture.

Stang is fascinated both by the answers and the phenomena. But equally fascinating is the fact that the language is hardly ever mentioned as a characteristic of the Nordics.

“This could be because in Finland we are a Finnish minority among Scandinavians. Or it could be that language is so obvious that nobody even mentions it. It does at least seem clear to the students that the Nordics have many things in common besides the language.

“We have already lost”

You do not need to choose either, according to Johan Stang. If we make this into a fight between Scandinavian or English, we have already lost. English is already the most important language in young people's lives and in many people's working lives, underlines Stang.



A fresh analysis from the Nordic Council of Ministers confirms that English is very popular among your people. 2,000 youths aged 16 to 25 across the Nordics answered questions about language skills and their views on language and culture.

The survey shows that young people's understanding of other Nordic languages varies. In several countries, many think it is difficult to understand one or more Scandinavian languages.

The easiest Nordic language? English

A full 95% of young people in the Nordic countries said that English is easy to understand. 62% think Swedish and Norwegian is easy to understand. Only 26% say Danish is easy to understand. These answers represent a Nordic average which hides large national differences.

The survey shows that Norwegians think it is easy to understand both Swedes and Danes in most cases.

In Finland, Greenland and Iceland many young people do not feel the Scandinavian languages are easy to understand. Their languages Finnish, Sami and Greenlandic also belong to completely different language families.

So the Nordic language debate is off again. Focusing on languages has been a priority in Nordic cooperation since the beginning. There is no expressed change of course now either.

“Not happy reading”

Is the understanding between Nordic neighbours developing in the wrong direction, wondered Gunvor Kronman recently in a letter to the two daily newspapers Hufvudstadsbladet and Svenska Dagbladet, under the headline “Don't capitulate to English dominance, promote the Nordics”.



Gunvor Kronman does not believe we in the Nordics should capitulate to English language dominance.

Kronman is the CEO of Hanaholmen, the Swedish-Finnish cultural centre just outside Helsinki. She has also worked at the Nordic Council secretariat in Copenhagen.

In the letter, she writes that the Nordic youth language survey was not happy reading for those who want to keep Scandinavian as a common language for Nordic cooperation.

Young people have a pragmatic attitude to language. Because it is important to make yourself understood, the majority of Finnish, Danish and Swedish youth would rather use English. If you want to make social contacts you can use Scandinavian, notes Kronman about the survey.

“English icebreaker”

Her experiences from Hanaholmen is that English might be needed in order to break the ice and establish contact on an equal basis in Nordic contexts.

Gunvor Kronman believes we in the Nordics should not capitulate to a dominant English language. Instead, we should promote Nordic cultural exchange, mobility and understanding of neighbouring languages.

That was also what the youth wanted. Two out of three young people said it is important for Nordic cohesion that the populations understand Swedish, Nordic or Danish.

The question is whether there is a need for some kind of equilibrium between Scandinavian and English in order for the Nordic language community to survive in the long run.

Kronman reminded people that it is our common language links that make it possible for young people to easily find work or to study in a different Nordic country. In this context, English language skills do not help all that much.

Language gaps and political indifference

Johan Stang is wondering why Denmark and Sweden are growing apart. Linguistically it could be explained by the fact that it is actually becoming increasingly difficult to under-

stand Danish because its pronunciation is changing. But this is about more than languages.

“The real reason the gap between Denmark and Sweden is widening is probably that their interest in each other is falling.”

The Nordic region is no longer a central part of the political debate, which instead focuses on the USA and Europe. This is true for politics, culture and entertainment. Scandinavia is also growing apart mentally and linguistically.

The big challenge is to get Denmark and Sweden to speak to each other again, according to Johan Stang.

Maintain Finnish interest in the Nordics – also in English

The other challenge relates to Stang’s home county of Finland, with its two languages. These are not Finnish and English, as you might think by walking down a Finnish city street. The Nordic cooperation has become a political reason to keep Swedish strong in Finland. But the corporation cannot be maintained by the Swedish-speaking Finns alone. Finns also need to learn Swedish, argues Johan Stang. Swedish is today spoken by just over 5% of the population, and the constitution recognises both Finnish and Swedish as official languages.

If we want to have compassion for Swedish in Finland we should make sure interest in the Nordics remains high in Finnish Finland – even if it has to happen in English.

It is also an open secret why so many Nordic projects start with a seminar featuring foreign guests, according to Johan Stang. It means you can speak English, and that gets the Finnish onboard. Later, during coffee breaks or evening gatherings, you can try making yourself understood in Scandinavian again.



Greenland chooses new government in protest against controversial mining

Greenland's natural resource fairytale must not come at the expense of Greenlanders' health, welfare and job opportunities. That was the clear signal from voters as they went to the polls to on 6 April 2021 and got a new coalition government.

NEWS

29.04.2021

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: EMIL HELMS/RITZAU SCANPIX

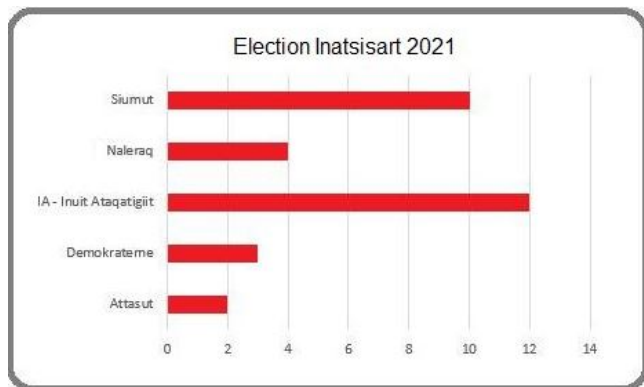
The election marks a historic political power transfer in Greenland. The Social Democratic Siumut, which has held power nearly non-stop since 1979, had to hand over the government offices to eight new ministers from the left-wing Inuit Ataatigiit (IA) and to two new ministers from the right of centre Naleraq party.

Together the two parties enjoy a slim majority of 16 out of 31 seats in parliament, and their coalition will build on a politi-

cal agreement called "Solidarity, stability, growth" which was reached between the IA leader Múte B. Egede and Naleraq's leader Hans Enoksen. The Atassut party, which wants independence for Greenland, has agreed to support the two parties in government.

IA, which has now taken over from Siumut as Greenland's largest political party, had been campaigning on improved welfare and the protection of the environment, which also

meant opposing uranium mining. These promises must now be turned into political decisions by the new government – a job for Naaaja Nathanielsen from IA who is the new Minister for Housing, Infrastructure, Minerals and Gender Equality.



IA - Inuit Ataqatigiit – got 12 mandates out of 31 in Inatsisartut. By joining Naleraq in a coalition they got the 16 mandates needed for a majority.

Mining challenges

A central theme during the campaign was how to secure income and jobs by allowing foreign companies to mine for rich rare earth metal deposits, while also protecting Greenland's unique nature. This will also be a central issue for the newly elected parliament, Inatsisartut, and Greenland's new government.

Greenland is an autonomous region that belongs to Denmark, and natural resources have traditionally been one of the policy areas run by Denmark. But Greenland's government and parliament have been taking over more and more policy areas as part of the territory's move towards greater autonomy from Denmark.



Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA) grew markedly and secured 36.6 % of the votes in Greenland. That means 34-year-old leader Múte B. Egede will try to form a government. Photo: Christian Klindt Solbeck/Scanpix

Greenland took over responsibilities for its own natural resources in 2010. The local government has since entered into a range of negotiations and agreements with foreign companies about the mining of raw materials, because establishing and running mines demand far greater investments than Greenland can afford on its own.

There is broad cross-party agreement in Greenland to support raw material extraction as an important way of securing new income for the Greenlandic society. This in turn helps secure greater autonomy from Denmark and less reliance on the annual 3,9 billion Danish kroner (€524m) grant which the Danish state still provides so that Greenlanders get the same welfare benefits as people in Denmark.

This strategy has been a difficult political tightrope to walk for the former Siumut-led government in Greenland, however. It will remain so for the new government. Because it is far from easy for Greenland to negotiate with foreign companies agreements that also secure the income from mining operations do not just end up on the bottom line of a foreign entity. These operators also bring with them their own specialists to a great degree, since there is a shortage of qualified Greenlandic labour.

Uranium mine creating unease

Big decisions must also be made about what environmental and health strains Greenland must be willing to accept as part of a natural resource fairytale. The mining takes place in vulnerable Arctic areas and could potentially be harmful to both nature, the climate and people's health. Much of the election campaign was centered on whether to give the go-ahead for the so-called Kuannersuit/Kvanefjord project – an open pit uranium mine near a city of 1,300 people in Southern Greenland.



Illustration: Greenland Mining.

Yes to mining in general but no to uranium extraction, says Greenland's now largest political party, Inuit Ataqatigiit. This is a position which has been supported by many Greenlandic voters, explains Aaja Chemnitz Larsen, an MP for IA in the Danish parliament.

“My party sees natural resources as an important part of securing broader economic development for Greenland, because today we are totally dependent on fisheries. This makes us far too vulnerable if the fish disappears. But you must take nature and human and animal health into consideration when you explore natural resources, and that is why we say no to a uranium mine which pretty much would be in people’s back garden.”

Siumut, the great election loser, has chosen not to take the same principled stand against a uranium mine, but campaigned for thorough and individual assessments of health and environment issues linked to any mining project.

A focus on education

The Kvanefjord project is owned by an Australian company that says the area contains the world’s second largest deposit of rare earth materials and uranium. The company wants to open a mine which would be the world’s second largest open pit uranium mine. It would lie just six kilometres from the city of Narsaq and promises to create local jobs.



Narsaq in summer. Photo: Visit Greenland

But the IA’s Aaja Chemnitz Larsen doubts the mining company would be able to live up to its aim of filling half of the expected jobs with Greenlandic labour, since a large part of the labour force there lacks both the language and technical skills needed to operate the mine.

An important job for the new government will be to secure qualified labour from elsewhere as well as increasing the skills levels in Greenland’s labour force. The outgoing government had prioritised to increase the import of labour to avoid bottlenecks in Greenland’s labour market and the overheating of Greenland’s economy.

In later years, the territory has experienced a deficit in skilled labour both in the construction, tourism and fisheries industries, and unemployment is low. Four out of five unemployed people only have ten years of elementary education, and many of them also face other challenges besides being unemployed. One in two jobseekers are not considered to be ready for the labour market.

Meanwhile, the fisheries industry has been experiencing a boom, so it has been easy to find unskilled jobs there. For many young people, this has been more tempting than getting an education, which for many would mean moving far away from home to Nuuk where it is difficult and expensive to find a place to live.

More than half of all Greenlanders between 25 and 64 only have elementary education, and finding a solution to this problem will sit high on the agenda of the new parliament and government, believes Aaja Chemnitz Larsen.

Better welfare for children

AI also wants to focus far more on the differences in the Greenlandic society during this new parliamentary term, she explains.

“There will be a need to focus far more on the differences in Greenland’s society. There are great gaps both in education, health and socially. We in the IA do not believe in quick fixes, so we want to secure long-term measures are in place to prevent children from having to grow up in poverty.”

Among the IA’s proposals are the introduction of a poverty line and a general strengthening of teacher training. Education measures should start in elementary school, as the quality of teaching can and should be improved. This has also been pointed out by the Danish Central Bank.

In 2019, the former Greenlandic government asked the Danish government for help to strengthen measures to help vulnerable children and young people. Around one in three children in Greenland grow up with neglect and absent parents. Nearly one in five children born after 1995 have been the victim of sexual abuse. And the number of young people who commit suicide is high.

The Danish parliament has earmarked money to secure early intervention and prevention in Greenland, including strengthened municipal case handling, more offers for vulnerable children and better safety for children and young people who have been the victims of sexual abuse.

In general, the IA wants to maintain Greenland’s position as a Nordic welfare state, says Aaja Chemnitz Larsen.

“Right now, Greenland is the most expensive Nordic country, and the most unequal Nordic country too, even though we get support from Denmark and the EU. We in the IA will be getting busy changing this. Our society is built on the Nordic welfare model, so we shall remember that we are a part of the Nordic region.”

A long way from gender equality

Women are in a minority in Greenland’s new parliament. Historically, far more women than men have run for election in both parliamentary and local elections, and the number of female candidates was lower than usual this time. Siumut

and Inuit Ataqatigiit had the the most female candidates at the recent election, but here too there is a long way to go before you get full gender equality: Both parties had 16 female candidates among 43 and 60 candidates in total respectively.

Aki-Matilda Høegh-Dam is a member of the Danish parliament for Siumut. She believes the reason is traditional Greenlandic gender roles.

According to the Danish constitution, Greenland has two representatives in the Danish parliament. Right now both of them are women. Aki-Matilda Høegh-Dam was elected in 2019 and Aaja Chemnitz Larsen has been an MP in Copenhagen since 2015.

Both feel they are “ambassadors” for Greenland in Denmark, and that there is a lack of knowledge about Greenland both among other parliamentarians and government ministers. This is a problem, as Denmark's parliament and government make decisions that have great consequences for Greenland.



Sexual harassment: new knowledge needed

Sexual harassment in the care sector has had less attention than harassment in other sectors. Patients behaving inappropriately is often seen as part of the job. “High tolerance levels represent a problem,” says Bryndis Elfa Valdemarsdottir, who has been heading the Icelandic part of a Nordic project looking at this problem.

NEWS

29.04.2021

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Sexual harassment has been a central theme since the #Metoo campaign that kicked off in 2017. A Nordic research project on sexual harassment in the care sector was carried out between 2018 and 2020 and included workers in Akureyri in Iceland, Arendal in Norway and Eskilstuna in Sweden. Nordic Information on Gender (NIKK) has also made a summary of current Nordic research in the area.

NIKK and NIVA organised a webinar on sexual harassment in March, where Bryndis Elfa Valdemarsdottir was one of the participants.

A review of accounts of sexual harassment in order to assess the extent of the problem throws up different numbers. Some recent national studies show 10 to 20% of staff have experienced sexual harassment in the past one to three years.

More assaults in physical occupations

The compilation of research that forms the basis for the report “Sexual harassment at work” also shows that young women are highly overrepresented, along with people with an immigrant background and within certain occupations:

Actors need to use their entire body in order to carry out their job. This often means work goes beyond normal limits for job relations.

In professional sport, physical contact is normalised. Lines might be overstepped. The perpetrator is most often a coach for a younger athlete.

Jobs in the police and armed forces are characterised by masculine ideals and the number of women is low.

Yet the care sector seems to hold a special position. In one survey of a random selection of just over 1,000 Swedish nurses in 2017, 40% of the female nurses answered that they had been victims of sexual harassment and assault. In 69% of the cases, the perpetrator was a patient, in 33% a colleague and in 26% a boss or superior colleague.

Female nurses had had their breast and genitals groped, were called unpleasant names by patients and were asked to help when patients were masturbating. “A consultant doctor felt my bum,” said one of the responders. “Was offered sex with

the consultant while I was a student nurse, in exchange for a good report,” said another.

The health care sector is dominated by women and characterised by intimate care work – for instance helping people wash and get dressed. While there is near parity between men and women doctors, there are far more female nurses than male.

In Iceland only 2% of nurses are men, in Denmark there are 3,5% and in Sweden 9%. The division is equally lopsided among assistant nurses. According to Statistics Sweden, 91% of assistant nurses working with home visits and in care homes are women.

Many different perpetrators

Perpetrators in the care sector might be colleagues, superiors, patients or family or patients. One of the largest obstacles to fixing the problem is how the harassment is being normalised, especially in relation to patients.

“High tolerance levels in this sector is a real problem. Sexual harassment from patients is considered to be part of the job, and explains why so few of these events are reported,” says Bryndis Elfa Valdemarsdottir, who is the gender equality advisor in the town of Akureyri and responsible for the Icelandic part of the Nordic project.



Bryndis Elfa Valdemarsdottir, Gender Equality Advisor in Akureyri municipality.

“You are expected to be professional enough to handle harassment from patients. Everyone has the right to healthcare and those who feel uncomfortable or get scared are told they must remain professional. ‘The customer is always right’,” says Silje Naustvik, Deputy President of the Norwegian Nurses Federation NSF.

On a collision course with their professional role

“If you can’t handle the harassment, you are perceived as not being professional enough. But we have to stop looking at it like this. Care staff should not have to accept coming home to

patients who are watching porn all the time, or put up with sexual comments,” she says.

At the same time, we cannot do what they do in restaurants and throw the guests out if they do not behave. We cannot just throw the patients out, she points out.



Silje Naustvik, Deputy President of the Norwegian Nurses Federation NSF. Photo: NSF

Bryndis Elfa Valdemarsdottir has worked with leaders in the public sector on work environment issues and competence raising in their work on gender equality and non-discrimination.

“We need to create a workplace culture where problems can be raised and silence prevented,” she says.

“That is why the title of our information material and our posters is ‘Let’s talk!’”

So far, 800 people have been participating in courses that have been developed in Iceland and Norway. In Akureyri, they have been focusing on explaining the consequences sexual harassment has for individuals and for society as a whole. Personnel are given practical tools to use to prevent harassment. There are six measures which workplaces can implement:

1. Identify and map the risk factors
2. Establish rules how to communicate among the employees
3. Have clear routines for how notifications are treated.
4. Make a plan for how notifications should be answered.
5. Explain the responsibilities of the boss.
6. Talk together.

At the end of the day, everyone is responsible for fighting harassment.

“The boss has a big responsibility and must safeguard a healthy work environment, address issues that arise, inform staff and create a good team spirit allowing workers to thrive

in the workplace. But all staff are also responsible for reporting any problems and to take action when situations arise,” says Bryndis Elfa Valdemarsdottir and ends with the encouragement:

“Let’s talk about sexual harassment!”



Disability in the workplace: More than new technology is needed

Can new technology, and mainly digitalisation, help people with disabilities do better in the labour market? A new report from the Nordic Welfare Centre is not optimistic.

NEWS

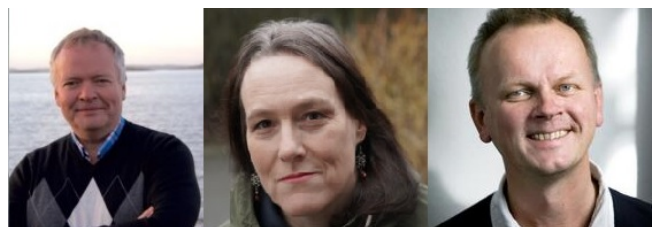
17.04.2021

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL, PHOTO: EIRÍKUR BJÖRNSSON / NORDEN.ORG

The report “New technology and other digital solutions for increased inclusion in the labour market” was written by Jan Gulliksen from the KTH Royal Institute of Technology with Stefan Johansson and Mia Larsdotter from Begripsam. They write that technical and digital skills are needed in all jobs and workplaces. The development is accelerating.

“As the development took off, the hope was that digitalisation in particular could have an equalising effect. In other words, what used to be a physical and inaccessible society should become a far more equitable society.”

But so far digitalisation does not appear to have led to any such major changes.



Stefan Johansson, Mia Larsdotter and Jan Gulliksen have written the report on new technology and disabilities.

“When it comes to labour market participation, people with disabilities were a disadvantaged group before digitalisation and there is so far nothing to indicate that digitalisation has

changed that in any meaningful way,” write the report’s authors.

New technology to help make work easier or to increase productivity in various ways is being developed all the time. Yet if people with disabilities are to be granted greater opportunities, the gap between them and people without disabilities must be narrowed.

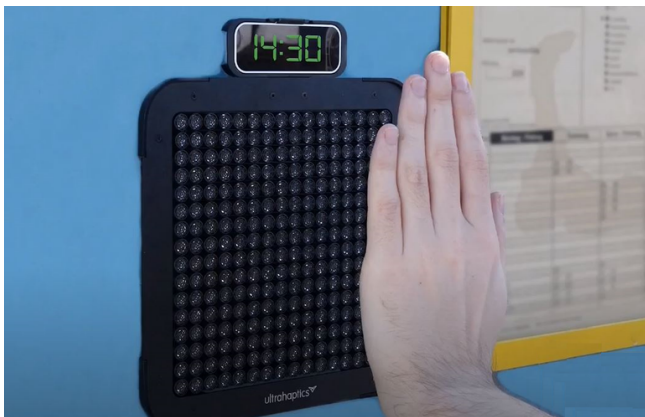
“Since all other groups have also improved their digital skills, the relative position between the groups has not changed,” the authors therefore conclude.

There are several explanations for this. Most of the technology developed for people with disabilities is targeted at a specific disability – for instant vision or hearing, navigating your surroundings, reading or writing or understanding social communication. It is rarely dealt with in a holistic manner.

Many different areas of technology

The report covers a range of different areas of technology, including:

Artificial intelligence, apps, exoskeletons and prosthetics, virtual reality, hearing technology, cloud-based technology, robots and robot technology, smartphones, language technology, smart home technology and eye control systems.



The disc emits signals that can be felt like points in the palm of the hand. A more hygienic way to read braille, argues the University of Bayreuth, which has tested the technology on blind people. Photo: YouTube/University of Bayreuth.

There is also less well-known technology, like haptic interfaces. This technology makes it possible for users to feel, touch and control virtual objects in a way that makes it feel like they are handling physical objects. A research group from the German University of Bayreuth has for instance developed this kind of technology in order to read braille without touch.

Other examples are Sensor-Tech, a smart stick using AI to recognise objects and people, which can also warn of obsta-

cles ahead, and OrCam, which represents a new generation of assistive tech where smart technology combines what used to be several different aids. This product can help the user by reading text aloud or by recognising objects and faces.



OrCam comprises an optical reader which can be attached by magnets to a pair of glasses, or it can be hand-held. It only weighs 22.5 grams. Photo: OrCam.

Limited studies of various innovations often concluded that experiments show positive results on an individual level. But most technological innovations do not make it to the labour market as assistive technology in the workplace.

The authors of the report turn the question around: Should it always be the person with a disability who adapts?

“You could also argue that new technology should be used to adapt the workplace so that employees with disabilities do not have to rely on aids,” they point out.



One example of technological development where assistive tech can be used by everyone is the self-driving wheelchairs now being tested at airports around the world. The wheelchair finds the gate by itself, before returning, sans passenger, to its docking station. Photo: Whill.

Compared with the major efforts being made to make people’s homes easier to manage, there is not all that much being done to make workplaces function well.

“Many people with disabilities are outside of the labour market. This means the need to introduce aids and assisting technology is often not very obvious. At a particular point in time,

there might not be anyone in a particular workplace who would benefit from such technology.

“People with disabilities might also choose not to come forward. It is not a given that an employee will tell about their problems or that they are motivated to solve them through the use of technology. It is striking how little input people with disabilities have in the ongoing technological development.”

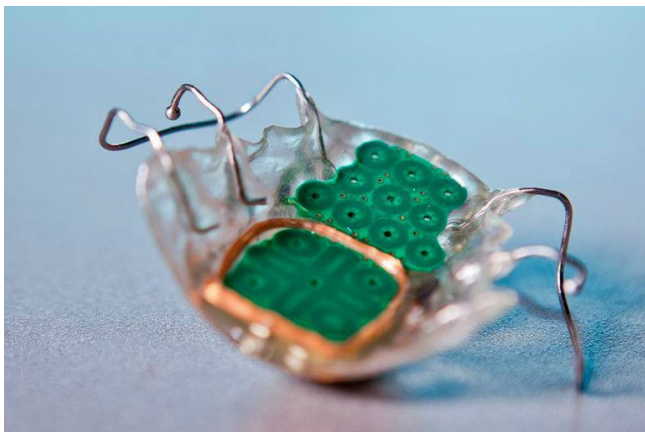
What can be done?

All the Nordic countries have now closed their assistive technology institutes. The overarching level of knowledge disappeared with them, as well as a clear division between what constitutes an aid and what is a consumer product that everyone can use.

“A large proportion of respondents to the 2019 survey Swedes with disabilities and the internet said they considered their smartphone, computer or tablet to be their most important aid. But neither of these are defined as assistive tech in any of the Nordic systems.”

The authors also point out that regulations covering what can be subsidised by the authorities are too rigid.

“It does not work when society, on the one hand, sees the potential of the technological development and want more innovation while sticking to a system which maintains the status quo, or when changes are made to who has the right to get the cost of their aid covered every time a new budget is presented. That is why we want to highlight the importance of having generous systems.”



One example of a product that is solely defined as assistive tech is Itongue. This is a contraption with 18 sensors that sits in the user's palate. One sensor is secured to the user's tongue with a piercing, and this allows the user to control the palate unit. But in many cases, the line between assistive tech and a consumer product is blurred. Photo: TKS.

“It would be very difficult to claim that a smartphone, for instance, should be available on welfare as an aid, even if a modern smartphone's software will offer loud reading of text, support for hearing aids and other functions which, if they had to be bought as separate aids, would cost more than the smartphone,” point out the report's authors.

Their advice for how new technology could be better used to improve the working lives of people with disabilities is centred on the fact that more cooperation is needed, as well as the need to revive a more coherent model for identifying the need for aids, develop these and help products get a foothold in the marketplace.

Nordic inspiration behind new EU directive

Yet another EU directive dealing with wages is in the pipeline. This time it is about pay transparency and the aim is to improve compliance with the principles of equal pay for men and women. The proposal is said to be inspired by good experiences from Denmark and Sweden, but differs quite a bit from what is common practice in those countries.

NEWS

06.04.2021

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG, EDITOR EU & ARBETSRÄTT

The provisions in the new proposed directive are aimed at making it easier to discover if employers do not provide equal pay for equal work, and for those who feel discriminated against to have their claims tried in court. Some examples:

- A job seeker should be informed about the initial pay level or its range without having to ask for this information. The employer is not allowed to ask prospective workers about their pay history.
- Workers must be told which criteria the employer uses to set pay levels and career opportunities. The employee should also have the right to access information about how her own pay compares to the average pay, and about pay levels between genders for groups of employees who do equal work or work of equal value.
- Each year employers with at least 250 employees must publish detailed statistics on the pay gap between female and male workers on their website. If the gender pay gap is five percent or more, the employer must also carry out a pay assessment in cooperation with workers' representatives (trade unions in the Nordic countries) to see whether the gap is due to breaches of the equal pay principle. If the employer cannot justify the gap on objective gender-neutral factors, the employer will be obliged to correct the problem.
- The proposed directive also contains several legal provisions which mean workers who feel discriminated against can take their case to court without risking high legal fees. It will be the employer who has to prove that there was no discrimination in relation to pay, and any doubts should benefit the employee.

Unlike the controversial directive on adequate minimum wages, this new proposal says nothing about pay levels.

Hence, it is also not quite so controversial in the Nordic region.

Nordic inspiration

The European Commission's preliminary investigations also pointed to good experiences with pay transparency rules from Denmark and Sweden. If the proposal is adopted as it stands, the provisions will in fact be considerably more detailed than what is the case in those countries.

Consequently, it is Danish and Swedish private sector employers who have voiced opposition to this being regulated at all on an EU level. They argue the Commission yet again is wading into an area that belongs to the social partners.

Reactions from trade unions have so far more non-committal. They are positive in principle to increased pay transparency but are still busy analysing the text in order to see whether it leaves the social partners' freedom of contract in peace. It is not wildly improbable that they will find some of the many detailed rules to be disproportionate.