

Conference summary

The Nordic Region as a frontrunner in Research and Innovation

Reykjavik, Iceland, Thursday 10 June, 2004



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"The Nordic region as a frontrunner in research and innovation" was the theme of the conference hosted by the Nordic Council of Ministers, Iceland (its chair) and the Nordic Innovation Centre on 10 June 2004. Delegates included decision- and policymakers in the Nordic innovation system. An important aim of the conference was to discuss and generate feedback to the newly presented policy document, "Proposals for a collaborative Nordic programme on innovation policy 2005-2010" ("The Book of Innovation": see box).

The conference participants showed great enthusiasm and commitment to the process of Nordic collaboration in research and innovation. The challenge in the months to come will be to follow-up with concrete measures and collaboration structures.

The conference showed that the following issues and proposals for action are of particular importance:

The need for strong political commitment and involvement in developing the innovation and research policies of tomorrow.

- As a region, the Nordic countries must hasten to board the innovation bandwagon. Other regions, and in particular the great knowledge economies (USA, Japan, countries in Southeast Asia), are storming ahead. In the Nordic decision-making process speed is of the essence.
- A crucial precondition for realizing the ideals of the Book of Innovation is the political will and leadership to act at the Nordic level – to take a "top-down" approach. Political engagement is required to tackle the issues associated with the development of a collaborative Nordic innovation policy; and decision-makers elsewhere in the innovation system must also be involved, particular with regard to more practical issues.

- Members of the high-level groups which have been proposed must be selected meticulously. The proposals in the Book of Innovation must also be fleshed out in order to establish appropriate and effective structures.

- We must not create new and complex Nordic organizations, but work with existing structures. On the operational side, priority should be given to integrating the newly established Nordic institution; the Nordic Innovation Centre, in these processes.

- The Nordic countries are a part of the global economy, with well-established and effective collaborative constellations at various international levels. The Nordic region should exploit these connections in the areas of commerce, innovation and research.

The need for a horizontal innovation and research policy – nationally and at Nordic level

- It was broadly agreed that innovation policy and collaboration at the Nordic level must be developed and strengthened. The proposals in the Book of Innovation point in the right direction.
- The proposal collectively to open up the respective national innovation systems – and not least the mechanisms for doing so – is visionary. However, a number of specific practical issues must be addressed if we are to realize this vision. A working group will be established to work out a truly common Nordic innovation and research apparatus. It will be most interesting to see the result of this work and to move forward with the implementation of appropriate measures.
- The proposals in NORIA (see box) and the Book of Innovation must be treated as interdependent in or

der to avoid establishing non-holistic structures. The proposals should be developed bearing this in mind.

- One basic question involves the kind of results we need in order to declare the Nordic region a “front-runner” in research and innovation. In this regard attention should be given to the use of indicators and measurements.

Priority for targeted interventions in areas where the Nordic countries have achieved global excellence

- It was stated that Nordic collaboration in the field of innovation is not a goal in itself. The important thing is to work together in exploiting the strengths of the individual countries in order to position the Nordic countries globally.
- In declaring Nordic collaboration in the field of innovation a priority, we must focus on a smaller number of collaborative projects than previously. Joint Nordic innovation initiatives have often tended to be numerous and diffuse, and their efficacy and visibility limited accordingly. Our choice of priorities must follow from our joint Nordic strengths. One good example of such joint effort is the ScanBalt BioRegion collaboration, which was co-funded by the Nordic Innovation Centre (then The Nordic Indus-

trial Fund) in 2002. By uniting the complementary strengths of a large number of actors in biotechnology and life sciences, this project has demonstrated that the Nordic region, acting together, can achieve global excellence. Such spearhead projects should also be given priority in the future.

- Nordic collaboration has also shown a tendency to ape national and European visions in the short and medium term. The focus should now be more on generating common Nordic visions and strategies for future growth and well-being – through foresight studies, for example.
- This will not necessarily mean spending more money through the common Nordic system. The challenge is to use national funding to the best advantage in a Nordic perspective. Thus funding for networking activities is of particular importance. One way to achieve higher returns from public funding might be to earmark national funding for Nordic collaboration - thereby increasing the competition and consequently programme/project quality. This will require a radically new approach, as collaboration has been virtually fossilized for many years.

The Book of Innovation

A decision in principle to draw up a programme for future collaboration on innovation policy was taken by the Nordic trade and industry ministers during the autumn of 2003. One of the aims of their initiative was to expand and make more specific central areas of the current programme for Nordic collaboration in the commercial sector; another was to clarify the potential contribution of the sector over the longer term to the Nordic region as an internationally prominent innovation and knowledge environment. The Book of Innovation will be discussed by the Nordic trade and industry ministers at their yearly meeting at the beginning of September 2004.

NORIA

- White Paper on Nordic research and innovation

In June 2002, the Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research (MR-U) presented a White Paper proposing measures for promoting development of the Nordic region as a world-class research and innovation player at global level. The proposals cover organization, funding, incentives and other aspects of Nordic cooperation on research. The White Paper also identifies ways of encouraging closer collaboration between universities, research institutions, businesses, national ministries and other official bodies.





The organisers

Nordic Innovation Centre

The Nordic Innovation Centre is the Nordic Council of Ministers' single most important instrument for promoting an innovative and knowledge-intensive Nordic business sector. The Centre initiates and finances activities that will enhance innovation collaboration and develop and maintain a smoothly functioning market in the Nordic region. The Nordic Innovation Centre is located in Oslo.

www.nordicinnovation.net

The Nordic Council of Ministers

Since the early 1970s The Nordic Council of Ministers for Industrial Development Policy has been responsible for the integration of the Nordic market. Presently, the main focus is on an increased exploitation of the key elements of the infrastructure. This includes activities aimed at increasing the mobility of manpower, competence, research resources, innovation, qualified business resources and strategic networks. The objective is that the Nordic region will be an effective borderless inner-market and a common resource foundation for vital business efforts for the benefit of the competitiveness of the Nordic economies.

www.norden.org

The 2004 Icelandic Presidency of the Nordic Council

In 2004 Iceland leads the Nordic collaboration with the theme Nordic resources. The theme is broad in scope and includes measures such as the structure of society, cultural heritage and natural- and human resources. The Ministry of Industry in Iceland focuses on improving the environment for business development within a borderless Nordic region. For this purpose it has stressed the importance of harmonising Nordic policy emphases within the fields of science and innovation. The objective being to obtain a greater synergy between these two main contributors to the competitiveness of the region and the social well being of the Nordic citizens.

www.ivr.is

www.nordicinnovation.net

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