Nordic welfare alliances

Experiences of working together on sustainable Nordic welfare

NORDIC WELFARE ALLIANCES

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Nordic welfare

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Together for welfare

The Nordic ability of the Nordic countries to combine economic growth with the unique Nordic welfare model continues to attract attention and recognition. More and more people elsewhere in the world are deriving inspiration from the way we run our society – and we are proud of this.

Yet even a strong model must be developed and adapted in order to avoid stagnation. The financial crisis, global competition, digitalisation and demographic change are stark reminders that welfare is not something to be taken for granted.

Instead of allowing challenges like these to put a strain on the Nordic model, they must be viewed as opportunities to improve the welfare system and equip it to face the global challenges of the future.

It was in this light that the Nordic Council of Ministers launched the “Sustainable Nordic Welfare” programme in 2013. We have spent

the last three years working together to generate new knowledge and innovative solutions, and to provide inspiration for the renewal and enhancement of welfare for the 26 million people of the Region.

We have learned a great deal: how vocational education and training can reduce youth unemployment, how welfare technology can prepare the health and care sectors for the future, how we can maintain world-class medical treatment – including highly specialised care – and how sharing access to information at Nordic level can provide essential knowledge in the ongoing fight against greater inequality.

In the process, we have also learned more about the nature of Nordic co-operation, and this will help us to prepare the Nordic model for the demands of the future.

We have learned that it is sometimes better to source solutions from other Nordic countries than to start from

scratch, or to set up Nordic units – e.g. specialist medical teams. On other occasions, it will not be necessary for Norway to do things the same way as Iceland or Finland, for example, but Nordic discussions will prove valuable nevertheless. Often, our colleagues’ methods of working inspire us to reflect upon how we might improve our own.

Working together takes time. What the projects under the “Sustainable Nordic Welfare” programme have in common is that they illustrate how working together results in significantly better solutions to the challenges that we all face.

Good working relationships depend upon trust between individuals and organisations – and mutual trust is a defining characteristic of the Nordic Region. “Sustainable Nordic Welfare” reinforces my belief that by working together we will be able to safeguard the future of the Nordic welfare model.

The Finnish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers 2016 also takes work on sustainable Nordic welfare seriously. It follows up on key aspects of the programme as part of a three-year priority project for an innovative and open Nordic Region, with a thriving population and equal access to welfare, education, culture and employment.

It is my sincere hope that the experiences and results of the past three years will inspire others to initiate new Nordic projects in the field of welfare.

I hope you will find out report interesting.

Dagfinn Høybråten
*Secretary General of the
Nordic Council of Ministers*

On “Sustainable Nordic Welfare”

Joint solutions that provide better welfare for all in the Nordic Region, and a better knowledge base for welfare-policy decisions on health, education and labour market issues – these are the aims of “Sustainable Nordic Welfare”. The programme enjoys broad-based support and reflects the intention articulated by the Nordic prime ministers’ in 2012, to work more closely together at Nordic level on welfare solutions. The Council of Ministers for Education and Research and the Council of Ministers for Health and Social Affairs share responsibility for the initiative.

The focus is on working together in three areas:

Research for welfare – building a new knowledge base that will promote welfare for all.

Education and work for welfare – improving study programmes, training and the conditions on the labour markets in the Nordic Region.

Infrastructure for welfare – development and quality assurance of the Nordic health services.

“Sustainable Nordic Welfare” has provided DKK 73,210,614 in funding to 17 projects during the period 2013–2015. The projects are presented in the gallery on page 62. For more information about the programme, visit: www.norden.org/vaelfaerd

How to read this report

This publication tells a tale of Nordic co-operation. Over the last three years, the Nordic countries have been working together, under the banner of “Sustainable Nordic Welfare”, to find new paths to better welfare.

The core of the programme consists of 17 projects focusing on health, education and employment. This report is based on the work of those projects and their outcomes. Collectively and individually, the projects illustrate why it makes sense to work together across the Nordic Region, and suggest ways of doing so.

The projects are described on page 62.

Content of the report

The report provides insight into why it makes sense to work together on welfare in the Nordic Region, what this means in practice and how

we could work together even more effectively.

We start on page 12 by looking at the basis for co-operation – the Nordic model. Some of the joint challenges that we face, and which call for closer cross-border co-operation, are also outlined.

Next, you will find four real-world examples of working together on welfare.

- The article “Doctors breaking down borders” provides insight into how new Nordic partnerships in highly specialised medicine are generating knowledge, providing education and training, and paving the way for world-class academic environments in Nordic hospitals.
- “Technology to improve care” is about how a Nordic network of pioneering local authorities is working together to develop a

model for welfare technology that will benefit senior citizens and welfare professionals throughout the Region.

- “Joint approach to train more skilled workers” is about how a Nordic network of local and national stakeholders is working together to improve vocational education and training in the Region and to help more young people find their feet in the labour market.
- “Accessible data, better knowledge” is about a new partnership aimed at removing barriers to data-sharing between the Nordic countries and helping researchers generate knowledge that will benefit the Nordic welfare states in the long run.

Each article illustrates some of the benefits of working together and highlights key aspects of successful

co-operation. They also reflect the fact that working together on welfare in the Nordic Region can take many forms. Sometimes, it's a matter of talking and leveraging our differences in order to learn about ourselves and each other. At other times, it's a matter of finding common ground and developing solutions together.

Along the way, we will stop and take stock of Nordic innovation. Read what the experts have to say on page 46.

Our story ends on page 58, with a checklist for effective co-operation, drawn up by the project participants, as well as information about how the work to develop sustainable welfare will continue under the Finnish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2016.

World-class welfare – now...

The Nordic countries have something entirely unique in common. For decades, the Region has combined economic growth, welfare and social equality in the “Nordic model”, which serves as a source of inspiration for countries around the world. However, the Nordic countries, like so many others, were hit hard by the financial crisis – a stark reminder that the model

must not be taken for granted. This section outlines the characteristics of the Nordic model and some of the biggest challenges it faces.

Equality and prosperity – a Nordic discipline

A high standard of living, income equality and low levels of poverty are hallmarks of all the Nordic countries. They are also results of

the Nordic model, which is founded on universal, tax-funded welfare services, major investments in education and childcare, and a labour market that combines security with flexibility. The Nordic countries top the international rankings for combined prosperity and equality. See figure 1 and 2.

Figure 1

The Nordic countries enjoy high levels of equality.

Explanation: The Gini co-efficient is used to measure income inequality. The Gini co-efficient can take on values between zero (all households have the same income) and one (all income goes to only one household). The more equal the distribution of income, the lower the Gini co-efficient.

The Nordic Region refers to Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Central Europe refers to Austria, Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands. Southern Europe refers to Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

Source: Eurostat in *The Nordic Model – Challenged but capable of reform*, Nordic Council of Ministers, 2014.

Figure 2

The Nordic countries are wealthy.

Explanation: Average GDP per capita in USD. The Nordic Region refers to Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Central Europe refers to Austria, Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands. Southern Europe refers to Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

Source: OECD in *The Nordic Model – Challenged but capable of reform*, Nordic Council of Ministers, 2014.

Welfare that works

To paraphrase *The Economist* (2013), the popularity of the state in the Nordic countries is not due to size, but because the state works. The magazine also proclaimed the Nordic model “the next super model” from which countries around the world should learn. And it’s not just hype. Most rankings show that the Nordic public sectors are not just among the largest in the world, but also among the most efficient. See figure 3.

Figure 3

All of the Nordic countries rank highly in international comparisons on public-sector efficiency.

Explanation: The numbers are based on a wide range of surveys of companies, ordinary people and experts' views on quality in the public sector. Most effective = index 100.

Source: Government Effectiveness, Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2015, World Bank.

Top for trust

The Nordic countries top the international rankings for trust in other people, in politicians and in the legal system. This is one of the main reasons that the Nordic

countries do so well in international rankings of happiness. Simply put, we are happier because we trust each other. Economists point out that this basic level of mutual trust makes it easier to make decisions about

necessary reforms of the Nordic welfare model. Trust may therefore be our trump card when it comes to facing the challenges of the future. See figure 4.

Level of trust

Figure 4
Nordic people have great trust in the legal system, politicians and their fellow human beings.
Explanation: The figure shows the average level of trust in the legal system, in politicians and in other people (on a scale of 0–10, where 0 denotes no trust and 10 denotes complete trust).
Source: European Social Survey (2010) in The Nordic Model – Challenged but capable of reform, Nordic Council of Ministers, 2014.

... and in the future?

We face a number of challenges if the Nordic countries are to continue to be world-class welfare states. We must give careful consideration to the way in which we adapt the Nordic model. The following section provides insight into three challenges that call for particularly innovative thinking.

More older people, fewer hands

Over the next decades, the number of people aged 65+ will rise steadily and make up a larger proportion of the population in the Nordic countries. This graph

compares the proportion of the population who are 65+ with the proportion of people of working age. See figure 5.

The Nordic Region in global competition

In a globalised economy, people and companies move across borders. Many Nordic companies already have large numbers of employees outside the Region, and the competition to attract companies and skilled labour has intensified. Although the Nordic countries have invested heavily in digital technology, and have

created new jobs and opportunities in the face of global competition, things can change quickly. The Finnish company Nokia is a prime example. Until 2010, Nokia was the global market leader in the mobile phone market. However, once Apple introduced touch-screen technology and the iOS operating system, Nokia was toppled from its perch. As recently as 2011, Nokia was still the world's largest manufacturer of smartphones, but they now lag far behind Apple, Samsung and newer players such as the Chinese company Huawei. See figure 6.

Figure 5

In all of the Nordic countries, the demographic trend is toward more pensioners and fewer people of working age.

Explanation: The dependency ratio in the Nordic countries (%). The percentage is calculated by dividing the population aged 65+ by the population aged 20–64 years and multiplying the result by 100.

Source: Nordic Statistical Yearbook 2014

Figure 6

6 Nokia's fall from grace. In just two years, the Finnish electronics giant lost a significant share of the market to its competitor Apple.

Explanation: The figure shows the number of mobile phones sold in millions, Q1 2010–Q1 2012.

Source: Statista.

Fewer in work

Over the next 10–20 years, new technology is expected to replace many of the jobs we know today. According to economists, this could

lead to a new type of polarisation of the Nordic labour market and create greater inequality. Those with the least education and training will be hardest hit, which underlines the

need for continued investment in education and training in order to equip people with the skills they will need to succeed in a rapidly changing labour market. See figure 7.

Figure 7
The unemployment level for unskilled workers has been increasing steadily in all of the Nordic countries since 2005.

Explanation: Unemployment among unskilled workers as a percentage of total unskilled labour.

Source: Eurostat in *The Nordic Model – Challenged but capable of reform*, Nordic Council of Ministers, 2014.

BOX 1

Want to know more about the Nordic model?

The report *The Nordic model – challenged but capable of reform* provides more information about how the Nordic model is really faring – not least in the light of the financial crisis. The report was written by prominent economists from all over the Region and is part of the “Sustainable Nordic Welfare” programme.

Read more in the project gallery on page 62.

Video: Learn more about the Nordic model (in Danish).

Co-operation = conversation

Why launch a programme on new welfare solutions in the Nordic Region? Anders Geertsen, Head of the Nordic Council of Ministers' Knowledge and Welfare Department, reflects on three years of working together on welfare and describes the benefits.

Why work together on welfare?

The Nordic countries have a strong, long-standing foundation for co-operation – after all, the Scandinavian part of the Region has been a single country for 800 out of the last 1,000 years. We face many of the same challenges and can tackle them better by working together. Take globalisation, for example. Individually, the Nordic countries are not far off being micro-states in European and global context. In many ways, we have less muscle than the big nations – and in some cases, we have to join forces to maintain our position as a world leader, e.g. in healthcare.

What does co-operation entail?

In my view, all co-operation starts with conversation. I would rather talk about conversations between the five Nordic nations than co-operation projects. If we are to learn from each other, then the conversation is always the first step.

Facing the same challenges does not necessarily mean adopting the same solutions, but it does require dialogue that enables us to learn about ourselves and each other. Dialogue is something we are really good at in the Nordic Region, because there is such a high degree of mutual trust between the countries. This forms the foundation for sharing experiences with each other. Conversation has intrinsic value because

it creates networks – and sometimes, but not always, leads to tangible agreements or new initiatives.

What progress has been made in the last three years?

It goes without saying that we haven't found a single, chrome-plated, universal solution to the challenges facing the Nordic welfare model. In the face of challenges like globalisation, demographic change or rising inequality in the labour market, a range of different solutions is needed. Conversation allows us to discuss some of the issues we struggle with when working in isolation, and to share ideas and solutions. The eureka moments, new ideas and inspiration we achieve together represent important steps towards addressing the main challenges.

What next?

Each of the 17 projects in the “Sustainable Nordic Welfare” programme has started a conversation, and it's crucial that we continue them. We need to keep on challenging the Nordic self-image of being the best in the world. We must make use of each other and our conversations to boost our ability to innovate. We must keep asking ourselves: “How can we do things differently and better? What do we need to do differently, both tomorrow and ten years from now?”

Article 1

Doctors breaking down borders

Six patients. That's how many patients are operated on at St. Erik's Eye Hospital in Sweden every year for retinoblastoma, a rare, hereditary cancer of the eye. In Denmark, the number is five. In Norway, four. Retinoblastoma is one example of the many highly specialised treatments on which it makes particularly good sense to work together. Nordic hospitals only encounter a handful of patients with the condition every year, which makes it difficult for doctors to specialise in the treatment.

"It isn't always ideal for healthcare professionals to be trained within a purely national context, especially

when it comes to highly specialised treatments. Cross-border collaboration in this area increases the number of patients, which allows doctors to amass the requisite experience in their academic environments and ensure that study programmes are based on the latest knowledge and research," says Hans Petter Aarseth, project director at the Norwegian Directorate of Health in Oslo.

Aarseth has spent the last three years heading up a project studying options for Nordic collaboration on highly specialised forms of treatment. For more about the initiatives, see box 2.

"Partnership is crucial. We mustn't compromise on quality just because we are small countries," he emphasises.

"A world-class health system is one of the pillars of the Nordic welfare model. Adopting a Nordic perspective is at least one response to some of the limitations forced on us by the small size of the individual countries. The benefits of working together are self-evident: we get better doctors and, ultimately, higher quality treatment," Aarseth adds.

“A world-class health system is one of the pillars of the Nordic welfare model”

BOX 2

Areas in which Nordic co-operation paves the way for better treatment

Retinoblastoma (a congenital form of ocular cancer)
Nordic guidelines for the treatment of retinoblastoma have been drawn up under the auspices of St Erik's Eye Hospital, Sweden.

Spinal cord injuries
A Nordic quality register for spinal cord injuries has been drawn up under the auspices of St. Olav's Hospital, Norway.

Paediatric surgery
A Nordic network of specialists in paediatric surgery has been established under the auspices of Odense University Hospital, Denmark.

Small joint surgery
A Nordic database for prosthetic surgery of the shoulder, elbow, ankle and wrist has been developed under the auspices of Haukeland University Hospital, Norway.

Foetal medicine
A Nordic network to train specialists in foetal medicine has been established under the auspices of Copenhagen University Hospital, Denmark.

Quadriplegia (loss of function in the arms and legs)
Nordic guidelines for surgery to treat quadriplegia have been drawn up under the auspices of Haukeland University Hospital, Norway.

Treatment of transgender patients
A Nordic network for exchanging experiences on the diagnosis and treatment of transgender patients has been established under the auspices of Oslo University Hospital, Norway.

All seven initiatives emerged from the project "Nordic co-operation on highly specialised treatments" as part of "Sustainable Nordic Welfare". Find out more in the project gallery on page 62.

From zero to ten colleagues

When it comes to maintaining a world-class health service, Karin Sundberg knows all about the value of daily discussion with colleagues, and of sharing experiences, practice and the latest knowledge. A consultant physician in foetal medicine at Copenhagen University Hospital in Denmark, Sundberg established a Nordic network with her colleagues because she saw a need for the countries to do more to share knowledge and experience.

“I don’t think we’re good enough at diagnosing foetuses that need treatment. The knowledge-sharing that happens when you discuss diagnoses with specialist colleagues on a daily basis is an important tool for improving your skills,” she says. The network focuses on equipping specialists throughout the Nordic Region with the latest knowledge about foetal diagnostics.

The first network conference, in April 2015, led to the setting up of several smaller working groups that have continued to share knowledge. Simple tools such as Nordic mailing lists facilitate exchanges and informal, ongoing dialogue.

In the long term, Sundberg hopes that the expanded training programme for specialists, on how to perform surgical procedures on foetuses, will run in a few specially selected hospitals.

“There is often only a single doctor in each region who is qualified to perform complex surgical procedures like blood transfusions in foetuses. In Norway, for example, the two surgical specialists both retired a few years ago. In Iceland, there are none. The coverage just isn’t reliable enough. It’s essential that we work together on Nordic training programmes,” she explains. As part of this initiative, Sundberg recently

ran her first training session in Copenhagen, with a specialist from Trondheim in Norway travelling south to the Danish capital.

Co-operation preferable to centralisation

In the Nordic Region, generally speaking, highly specialised medical treatments are only available at centralised national units. The idea is to bring together expertise and create strong academic environments.

Over time, Hans Petter Aarseth and his colleagues at the Norwegian Directorate of Health have come to realise that centralisation is not always the way forward.

“We may well be able to save resources by centralising treatment, but we also have to acknowledge that it isn’t particularly appropriate to ask unwell patients to travel long distances, even across

BOX 3

Read more about the Nordic labour market

Mobility in the Nordic Region – Regulated professions and the welfare sector (in Danish)

borders, for treatment that could potentially last a long time. The patients are removed from their family and friends, whose support is vitally important for the treatment process.”

Aarseth suggests that Nordic co-operation could take many forms other than centralisation, e.g. joint directories and databases, treatment guidelines, skills enhancement and training.

“Nordic patients should encounter competent and highly qualified staff, no matter where they live. Shorter distances improve the quality of the patient’s encounter with the health service,” he says.

You’re welcome!

While it may not make sense to ask patients to travel across borders, in Aarseth’s experience there is much to be gained from healthcare professionals crossing borders more frequently.

“When we fly the best experts to the patient, the individual receives better treatment, and the permanent staff have a chance to learn from the visiting specialists,” he says.

Karin Sundberg concurs. She would like to see a corps of foetal medicine specialists who fly around the Nordic Region to treat patients. She’s not alone in this view.

Recruiting the best qualified staff is generally high on the wish list for the Nordic health services – both to improve co-operation in highly specialised areas and because demographic trends mean a need for more and better healthcare staff. In the future, ever-larger numbers of patients will use the Nordic health services more frequently, partly because of the ageing population. At the same time, there will be fewer people of working age to cover the costs. See figure 5 on page 15.

Fortunately, EU legislation and Nordic agreements provide excellent opportunities for welfare-sector staff to work wherever their professional interests or personal life lead them. This came to light in the report *Mobility in the Nordic Region – Regulated professions and the welfare sector* (in Danish), written by the Danish consultancy Damvad as part of the “Sustainable Nordic Welfare” programme. Find it in box 3.

The data shows that the vast majority of applicants who are trained in one Nordic country and want to work permanently in another one receive the necessary authorisation. At present, around 425,000 people – 3.3% of the total workforce – are employed in a different Nordic country than the one in which they were born.

The Damvad report concludes that this is good news in the short term. One way of guaranteeing the labour supply in the Nordic health

services in the future is to recruit from each other across national borders. However, this won't solve the long-term problem of finding enough staff. Sharing staff may even out imbalances in the short term, but the demographic prognoses identify a clear need to train more new staff. According to the Damvad report, the attractiveness of study programmes is another important priority when it comes to achieving the right staff-to-patient ratio. For more about how the Nordic countries can work together to make welfare study programmes fit for purpose, see box 4.

Slow start

Although the advantages of working together may seem obvious, busy daily schedules mean that it is not always easy. Annette Halvorsen, consultant physician in the spinal injury ward at St. Olav's Hospital in Norway, understands this all too well. In Norway, 419 new patients were registered as having spinal cord injuries in the period 2011–2014.

BOX 4

How study programmes in welfare subjects are evolving

The welfare state of the future will need more hands on deck – that is the very simple conclusion of several of the reports drawn up under the auspices of “Sustainable Nordic Welfare”. The potential solutions, however, are more complex. In the report *Recruitment and Retention of Health Care Professionals in the Nordic Countries*, Trond Nygaard, Senior Adviser at the Ministry of Health and Care Services in Norway, suggests that the Nordic countries should make study programmes more attractive so that more young people apply to study them and complete them successfully. The report is in box 7.

Another solution is to make sure that students who take welfare courses are as well-equipped as possible to meet the challenges of the future. According to Marianne Aastebøl Minge, Senior Adviser at NordForsk [a Nordic advisory and funding organisation for research, ed.], one way of doing this is to ensure that study programmes are research-based and incorporate the latest knowledge and information into their teaching.

Over the last three years, Minge and NordForsk have been working with two consultancy firms – Damvad (Denmark) and Faugert & Co. (Sweden) – on an in-depth study of the extent to which study programmes in the Nordic countries are research-based.

Their conclusion is that although differences between national systems rule out a *one-size-fits-all* model, it is still a good idea to think Nordic – not least because the countries have a range of different research priorities – and devise initiatives to ensure that study programmes are research-based, for example.

“Making study programmes more research-based is the key to developing new services, greater efficiency and quality assurance for the public in the long term,” Minge explains.

The links between research and teaching are in focus in a new Nordic masters degree starting in 2016. “Nordic Master in Social Work and Welfare” is a joint degree involving the University of Stavanger in Norway, Aalborg University in Denmark and Umeå University in Sweden. Students are required to take study modules at a minimum of two of these universities during the two-year course. The first intake of students will begin in Autumn 2017.

The projects “Recruitment and Retention of Health Care Professionals in the Nordic Countries”, “Welfare Professions in the Nordic Region” and “Nordic Master in Social Work and Welfare” are all part of “Sustainable Nordic Welfare”. Find them in the project gallery on page 62.

“My hope is that, ten years down the line, we will have made progress in establishing a culture of Nordic co-operation”

According to the Council of Ministers, the corresponding figure for whole Nordic Region was much higher – around 4,000. However, there is no pan-Nordic medical register of spinal injury patients. This represents a missed opportunity, as the higher the number of patients, the better the basis for identifying connections between spinal cord injuries and complications in later life. Since 2013, Halvorsen and her colleague Ann Louise Pettersen, a nurse at St. Olav's Hospital, have been working on setting up a Nordic register of patients with spinal cord injuries to generate knowledge – and eventually, improve treatment.

When the register comes online in 2016, healthcare professionals at nine units in Denmark, Norway, Iceland and Finland will input data into the same system.

Halvorsen knows from experience that the register will meet a pressing need among healthcare professionals throughout the Region, but she also knows that dialogue with colleagues in other countries can be a slow process.

“Our conversations with hospitals across the Region have taken a very long time. Not because of any reluctance, but because identifying shared needs requires a lot of discussion. Five minutes on the phone is rarely good enough. ‘Real’ conversations are absolutely crucial because everyone needs to understand the point of the register. Otherwise they won't use it,” she explains.

Halvorsen and Pettersen have travelled and spoken to colleagues in the other Nordic countries to make sure everyone is on board with the register. Although it is a time-consuming exercise, Pettersen knows that travelling between countries is worthwhile when there are shared issues to discuss. She has found that face-to-face meetings help to engender both trust and commitment.

“It's one thing to talk on the phone or send an e-mail, but face-to-face meetings add an extra dimension. I prioritise meeting in person because it adds to the sense of responsibility for the register when you can put a

face to each other and you've had a cup of coffee together. It fosters a sense that we are in this together,” she says.

Local support

Hans Petter Aarseth has found that co-operation in highly specialised areas is hard work. Like Annette Halvorsen and Ann Louise Pettersen, he stresses that local support is particularly important, as it provides the best foundation for lasting partnerships.

“It can be difficult to dictate from on high that collaboration should continue after the end of a project. This is partly because the management at the individual hospitals determine the amount of time staff can allocate to it. Our solution involves agreements with St. Olav's and Copenhagen University Hospital, in which they commit to prioritising these initiatives – including in the long term,” he explains.

The hospitals at which the seven projects are based were specifically chosen for this reason. In Aarseth's

experience, local support is not something that can be imposed.

“Instead of coming up with new areas in which to work together, we have tried to concentrate on areas in which the hospitals already have visions and ideas. We have based the projects in hospitals that have particular enthusiasm, expertise or experience in specific fields. For example, the register of patients with spinal cord injuries is based at

St. Olav’s Hospital, which worked on setting up the Norwegian register five years ago.”

Aarseth is under no illusions about the long-term perspectives involved in this work, and hopes that more doctors and other health professionals will participate in Nordic co-operation in the future.

“My hope is that, ten years down the line, we will have made progress

in establishing a culture of Nordic co-operation. If you are a specialist in Finland, and want to set up a some kind of network, it should be possible. This sort of bottom-up project has great potential, as long as those of us in official positions make room for them, e.g. by providing financial support or coaching on organisational aspects,” he says.

“ Making study programmes more research-based is the key to developing new services, greater efficiency and quality assurance for the public in the long term ”

Article

2

Technology to improve care

In Odense, Denmark, robot vacuum cleaners have been deployed in the city's 28 care centres, and more and more of them are being used in the homes of elderly people. The robots largely replace traditional vacuuming, which is good both for local authority finances and for the individual, according to Rikke Falgreen Mortensen, Senior Adviser at the Centre for Welfare Technology in Odense.

"The robots free up staff time for other activities and allow end users to decide for themselves when to do the vacuuming, instead of being dependent on our shifts. Having control over their own lives makes people happy," she says.

Over the past decade, greater efficiency and help for self-help have

been the driving forces behind the use of welfare technology in Odense, making the local council one of the leaders in this field in the Nordic Region. A total of 14 technologies have been deployed so far – not just robot vacuum cleaners, but everything from voice-controlled door-opening systems to mattresses that can be turned automatically – and many more are on the way.

The Odense example illustrates some of the ways in which technology can be used to improve welfare. This applies as much to the rest of the Nordic Region as it does to Denmark. In all of the countries, the health and care sectors must balance the number of older people with the number of people of working age. For more about the potential of technology, see box 5.

"Unfortunately, the reality is that, in the majority of Nordic local authorities, there is currently more talk about welfare technology than action." So says Dennis Søndergård, Senior Adviser at the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues, whose job is to promote the use of welfare technology throughout the Region.

The Centre's partners include the ten local authorities that have made the greatest strides with welfare technology. One such partner is Odense, which has teamed up with the Centre to develop a model for local councils and their work with technology. Under the name "CONNECT", this initiative seeks to inspire many more of the Nordic Region's 1,200 local councils in to turn talk into action.

“The robots free up staff time for other activities and allow end users to decide for themselves when to do the vacuuming”

BOX 5

Why welfare technology?

Financial benefits

In Denmark, DKK 233.3 million was saved during 2014–15 by introducing new technology in care and support services for elderly people and for people with disabilities. Local Government Denmark (LGDK) estimates that DKK 500 million can be freed up in this way by 2017.

Human benefits

Over half of Danish councils find that welfare technology benefits both service users and staff. The most frequent benefits for service users are greater independence, peace of mind in daily life and respite for family carers. For staff, technology improves the working environment, including in terms of ergonomics, and provides greater flexibility in day-to-day service provision.

Source: The joint local authority programme for extending the use of welfare technology, Local Government Denmark (LGDK), 2015.

Note: The study looked at assistive technology, self-cleaning toilets and mealtime assistant robots. 90 of the 98 local authorities in Denmark took part in the study.

Mutual inspiration

“We are embarrassingly bad at working together across borders when it comes to technology. We’ve been working together on other types of assistive devices for elderly people for 30 years – but for some reason, when it comes to technology, each local council seems to think that it’s unique or special. They aren’t,” says Dennis Søndergård, explaining why the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues took the initiative to set up “CONNECT”. He points out that the project’s potential is clearly illustrated by the experiences of the local authorities that are already working on it.

The councils involved in the network have also found that it makes sense to work with Nordic colleagues in this field.

For example, Halldór Guðmundsson, Care Home Director for the local council in Akureyri, Iceland, has been inspired by his Norwegian colleagues’ experience of the care of elderly people in remote areas. Large, sparsely populated areas typify the landscapes of Norway and Iceland, and the care sector must take this into account. Norwegian councils have made great progress in developing technologies that take cognisance of long distances, e.g. the use of GPS technology to alert carers or neighbours if elderly people fall or need help, making them feel safer in their own homes. Similar initiatives are now on Halldór Guðmundsson’s to-do list in Akureyri.

“We don’t want to reinvent the wheel. But we do need to copy and paste between local authorities in

the Nordic Region. That’s how we’ll kick-start implementation of these things in the long term,” he says.

A series of eureka moments

“Swapping information and discussing experiences makes sense because the different countries’ work on welfare technology has been driven by different motives,” says Dennis Søndergård. In Denmark, technology has mainly been used to cut the number of working hours care staff spend on certain tasks and to free up resources. In Sweden and Norway, the focus has been on improving the service users’ quality of life, and work on technology has taken longer to gain traction.

“In Sweden, we wouldn’t count robot vacuums as welfare technology. Where’s the dimension that makes people feel safe and secure? Robot

vacuums are tools, like Zimmer frames or wheelchairs. Personally, I associate the term ‘welfare technology’ with something that improves quality of life for the individual,” says Mats Rundkvist, strategist in welfare technology and e-health for the local council in Västerås in Sweden, and a member of “CONNECT”.

As Rundkvist points out, the Nordic countries have quite different approaches to welfare technology – which was eye-opening for the councils involved in the network, and led to a series of eureka moments.

“I was surprised, to put it mildly, by the Swedish approach to technology, which places greater emphasis on making people – the elderly for example – feel safe and secure in their own homes. That hasn’t been a driving force in Denmark to the same extent. Now I think that it’s obvious that we should also focus on how technology can do more than just make work more efficient and

help with rehabilitation,” says Rikke Falgreen Mortensen from Odense.

Mortensen describes Mats Rundkvist as a source of inspiration, while Rundkvist in turn says that Mortensen and Odense have inspired the Swedes to look at the potential financial benefits of new technology.

Søndergård believes that these different perspectives on technology are the lifeblood of cross-border co-operation.

“We need to value welfare technology for both its financial and qualitative aspects, not to mention everything in between. In my experience, Nordic conversations provide a more solid foundation on which to discuss welfare technology, because we focus more closely on the many ways in which technology can contribute to welfare.

Welfare technology should be about freeing up hands, making people feel

safe and secure, and helping people to help themselves.”

For examples of the different countries’ strengths, see box 6.

Part of a paradigm shift

Unfortunately, many people still associate technology with poorer services rather than quality. This view is expressed throughout the Nordic Region, and also by Jaana Kokko, technology specialist for the local council in Oulu in Finland and a member of “CONNECT”. Kokko thinks that there is still work to be done in terms of communicating both the financial and qualitative potential of new technology.

“People worry that human contact will be replaced by robots. Of course this isn’t the point. The idea is for technology to complement the work done by welfare professionals, to help them do it in a smarter way. It’s about freeing up staff time and providing better care,” she explains.

ICELAND
Reykjavik and
Akureyri
**Copy-paste
and scaling of
technology**

NORWAY
Lindås Council
and Lister Region
**Local authority
partnerships to
develop technology**

FINLAND
Oulu and
South Karelia
Procurement
(product development
in collaboration with
companies)

SWEDEN
Västerås and
Gothenburg
Public involvement

DENMARK
Odense and Aarhus
**Evaluation and
maximising benefits**

BOKS 6

National strengths

The ten local authorities participating in “CONNECT” have focused on different elements in their work with technology. This provides a solid foundation for a best practice model that draws on experiences from all of the Nordic countries.

For example, Denmark has made progress in evaluation, Finland is strong on “procurement” (i.e. developing products in collaboration with companies), and Sweden leads the way in involving service users in developing solutions.

The map shows the local authorities involved in the network and their various strengths.

Rather than side-tracking professionals, Kokko thinks that the work with technology supports new ways of thinking about care that have been making inroads in the Nordic countries in recent years. Help for self-help – or rehabilitation, as Nordic welfare professionals call it – is about promoting individual independence for as long as possible. The main task for professionals is to help patients do things for themselves, e.g. rehabilitation following a stroke so patients are able to do their own shopping again or pop in to visit their neighbours, or installing assistive devices in the home so patients are able to use the toilet without help.

Trond Nygaard, Senior Adviser in the Ministry of Health and Care Services in Norway, explains that the rehabilitative approach was introduced in Sweden at the turn of the century, spread to Denmark and eventually made it to the rest of the Nordic countries. In 2013, Nygaard worked with the Danish consultancy company Damvad on an analysis of the Nordic care sector, including mapping out the challenges and opportunities for staff recruitment and retention. Find the report in box 7.

“I think there has been a paradigm shift throughout the Region. Instead of thinking in terms of care and assistance, we are increasingly thinking in terms of help for self-

help. The change in approach is reflected in, among other things, initiatives to help more and more older people to live in their own homes for longer, and in thinking about coping strategies to help people do more for themselves,” he explains, emphasising that it is not a matter of doing away with services for those who need them.

Nygaard stresses that this paradigm shift has massive potential because in years to come all of the Nordic countries will have record numbers of older people and will be looking for smarter and better ways to do things. For more about demographic trends, see page 15.

BOX 7

Rehabilitation in the Nordic Region

Recruitment and Retention of Health Care Professionals in the Nordic Countries

“It’s important always to keep the goal in mind when talking about welfare technology,” says Mats Rundkvist from Västerås in Sweden.

“Technology is a means, not an end in itself. It consists of tools currently under development. In ten years’ time, I hope we will be talking less about technology and more about care. Because that’s what it’s all about – being able to provide elderly people with dignified care, no matter how many of them there are,” he says.

Best-practice model gathers momentum

Dennis Søndergård recognises that there is a long way to go before welfare technology is commonplace in every Nordic local

authority. For this reason, the “CONNECT” project aims to develop a best practice model designed to make it easier to progress from idea to implementation in the future. Experience tells him that a systematic approach will be required if local councils are to take the lead in work on welfare technology.

“Many Nordic local authorities have been hit by what you might call ‘acute projectitis’, which means that the technologies are never actually deployed. We are simply not good enough at implementing our ideas. I’m not saying that all of them are worth implementing, but we should at least evaluate them and make sure we learn from experience,” Søndergård explains.

“If more councils came on board, it would be easier to find private companies who would see the potential profit in working with local authorities to develop new solutions,” says Mats Rundkvist from Västerås. In the long term, he hopes to see a strong Nordic market in welfare technology.

“If local authorities incorporate welfare technology into their thinking, it will inevitably energise the market – the more councils are involved, the greater the potential profits. Hopefully, this will provide an incentive for companies to develop even more new solutions,” he adds.

“ Technology is a means, not an end in itself ”

Working together makes sense...

... when we don't know enough about ourselves

"We don't know enough about how major global crises affect people. Welfare Watch was launched in Iceland during the financial crisis to collate data on, for example, the number of people who lost their jobs or homes. Hopefully, we will be better placed to react when the next crisis strikes, because we will know who will be hit hardest and how. It's about all of the Nordic countries being better equipped to cope with crises – a challenge we all face. We can learn from the different ways that the crisis affected us."

Guðrún Sigurjónsdóttir, *acting deputy director, Ministry of Welfare, Iceland*

Read more about the development of Welfare Watch [here](#).

... when we need to be innovative

"Our children need to be better at thinking in new ways, seeing opportunities and turning ideas into action. These are skills they should learn in school. At the moment, we train people for the industrial society. That's no use. All we are doing is teaching kids what we already know. We need to teach them to think innovatively, so they are able to raise questions about the systems we have built up, and improve them – that is crucial for the welfare provision of the future."

Helle Munkholm Davidsen, *Head of Research, University College Lillebælt, Denmark, participant in the workshop "Entrepreneurship in Primary Schools", Copenhagen, May 2015*

Read more about the work done on entrepreneurship in Nordic schools in [When I Grow Up](#).

... when we don't succeed

"In all of the Nordic societies, too many people are excluded because they've never gained a foothold on the labour market. Social entrepreneurs can help find new solutions to this and other social problems. Stakeholders in the public, private and voluntary sectors need to improve their ability to work together to address these problems – and in particular, to ensure that the people facing the problems are involved in the work to identify solutions."

Aase Lunde, *Senior Adviser, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Norway*

For more about the Nordic countries' social entrepreneurship work, including six recommendations for improvements, see [here](#).

All three projects are part of "Sustainable Nordic Welfare". Find them in the project gallery on page 62.

A man with long, dark dreadlocks and a beard is focused on carving a piece of wood. He is wearing a dark blue zip-up hoodie. The background shows a grassy area, a building, and a cloudy sky. A semi-transparent grey triangle is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Article 3

Joint approach to training more skilled workers

How can we encourage more young people to choose vocational training?

Margaretha Allen, Director of Education at the Swedish National Agency for Education, poses this question at a time when all of the Nordic countries are facing high drop-out rates from vocational training and high levels of youth unemployment. See figures 8 and 9.

The situation is problematic – not just for individual young people who risk not being able to gain a foothold on the labour market, but also for companies in need of skilled labour, of people capable of using their heads as well as their hands. Allen came up with the idea for the Nordic network “Learning at Work” to bring together vocational schools and colleges, industry associations,

companies and national agencies in the Nordic countries. The idea is to put interaction between education and the labour market on the agenda. Allen is in no doubt that the countries have much to learn from each other in this regard.

“We share the same cultural background, and yet have developed different systems for vocational

Figure 8

Youth unemployment – a Nordic challenge

In all of the Nordic countries, youth unemployment rose in the wake of the financial crisis in 2008, and has not yet returned to pre-crisis levels. However, the level varies from country to country.

Explanation: Unemployment, under 25 (%).

Source: Eurostat.

Figure 9

Too few complete vocational training

In Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway, more young people drop out from vocational education and training than from upper-secondary education.

Explanation: The proportion of students who complete courses in the prescribed time or within two years of the end of the prescribed time (%). No data is available for Iceland.

Source: Education at a Glance, OECD, 2014.

education and training. Why do people who are so like us do things so differently? The network has given us an opportunity to consider and discuss this phenomenon. It isn't just about being inspired by each other, it's about learning about ourselves, too – it's about looking at the strengths and weaknesses of our own education systems with different eyes," she says. Since 2013, the network has held ten meetings around the Nordic Region to discuss challenges and solutions.

Inspiration not replication

Comparing Sweden with the other Nordic countries illustrates the differences between education systems and traditions.

In Sweden, the content of vocational education and training is determined at national level, while the schools have sole responsibility for their academic study programmes. The other countries have a long tradition of involving employers' organisations and trade unions in developing the content of vocational education and training, at both national and local levels. For example, responsibility

for work placements is devolved to individual schools or companies.

"We have different traditions, so it's tempting to think Finland has little to learn from Sweden. But it's not that simple. What the Swedes achieve may be different, but it may be something from which Finland can draw inspiration without necessarily copying the whole school system," says Margaretha Allen.

An example of one such initiative is "Teknikcollege" in Sweden. Teknikcollege involves local authorities, educational institutions and employers working together to match course content with employers' needs and provide local and regional employers with the qualified labour they want.

The project was launched because both the educational institutions and the companies saw a need for it. The state was not involved. Sweden does not have the same tradition of involving employers and unions as the other Nordic countries, but several examples of smaller, local, bridge-building initiatives do exist.

For Margaretha Allen, these are precisely the kinds of examples that confirm that we need to dig deeper if we really want to learn from each other.

"Our conversations in the network have never been about finding a 'one size fits all' solution for the whole of the Nordic Region. It's about identifying sources of inspiration, going home and doing things differently right away," she explains.

Teknikcollege is just one example of how the Nordic countries can learn from each other, according to Johanna Enberg of the Swedish consultancy Faugert & Co. In 2014, she mapped the Nordic countries' efforts to build bridges between education and the labour market in the report *Recruiting, throughput and relevance – study of vocational and apprenticeship training in the Nordic Region*. She draws the same conclusion as Margaretha Allen – namely, that there is plenty of inspiration to be found if we focus on thinking differently rather than on copying systems.

BOX 8

Further info about Nordic vocational education systems

Recruiting, throughput and relevance – study of vocational and apprenticeship training in the Nordic Region (in Swedish)

“You often find that smaller initiatives or minor parts of a system could easily be transferred from one country to another, despite the fact that our education systems are organised differently. Good examples of bridge-building initiatives, i.e. approaches that support the transition between education and training and the labour market, are found in all of the Nordic countries. This is where we can learn from each other, and let what works in one place inspire initiatives elsewhere,” she explains.

Find the report in box 8, and see box 9 for details of initiatives which can be seen as potential sources of inspiration for vocational schools and colleges, official agencies and employers in the Nordic Region.

Personal encounters, not dry knowledge-sharing

Her network has met ten times over the past three years, and Margaretha Allen considers it to have been

a worthwhile endeavour. In her experience, many people still think that accessibility of knowledge is the key to learning through co-operation, but the problem with long, in-depth reports is that they don’t always teach us anything. New knowledge may be important, but in Allen’s eyes it is at least as important that we spend time discussing it and putting it into perspective.

“It’s important to emphasise that a report alone does not constitute Nordic co-operation, especially when the challenges can’t be solved by a one-size-fits-all solution. Usually, what is needed is dialogue, so we can learn about ourselves and each other,” she explains.

Helen Gray, development manager at the Centre for Lifelong Learning at the IDAN Vocational Education and Training Centre in Iceland, recognises this sentiment. Seeking knowledge and inspiration, she has studied several mapping exercises

of the various systems in the Nordic countries, and over the last two years she has encountered new aspects of systems she thought she knew.

“Talking to people reveals the informal side of the systems. For example, we recently visited a school in Gothenburg, Sweden, which is working on an interesting project to integrate logbooks into the workplace. [Students on work placements using logs to reflect on their own learning, learning objectives and the link between their assignments and their syllabus, ed.] The visit only came about because I talked about it with Swedish colleagues in the ‘Learning at Work’ network. It’s often in this kind of roundabout way that we stumble across less high-profile but still important sources of inspiration,” she says.

Margaretha Allen has ensured that this remains the focus of the “Learning at Work” network.

BOX 9

Nordic vocational education and training programmes – an opportunity to learn from each other

Icelandic centres for lifelong learning – Iceland has improved completion rates for adult vocational education and training courses by establishing regional centres. The centres offer career advice, skills assessment, courses in Icelandic for foreigners and distance learning.

Quality-assurance systems in Norway – Norway has established a national quality-assurance system for vocational education. The system involves local stakeholders in discussions about quality standards, instead of them being set at national level. Employers, teachers and students participate in discussions in the local schools and colleges about how education and training should be organised.

Teknikcollege in Sweden – Sweden has had great success at matching education with business needs through the “Teknikcollege” initiative, backed by the Industrial Council. The “Teknikcollege” certification is awarded to vocational education providers that integrate ongoing dialogue and partnerships with local companies into their teaching and try to find work placements for their students.

The Quality Patrol in Denmark – As part of a three-year project from 2010–13, Danish vocational education and training providers and the Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality worked together to improve the quality of the programmes, e.g. by discussing past experiences and best practices. The Quality Patrol’s findings formed the basis for conferences and publications, and the project has improved the culture of co-operation between the providers, as well as between providers and the Ministry.

Quality Award in Finland – Since 2000, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture has awarded an annual prize to a vocational school or college that has distinguished itself by instigating new projects or achieving strong results. The prize has helped to improve the general public’s perception of vocational education and training. The winner is chosen by the Ministry, students and employers’ organisations.

Source: Recruiting, throughput and relevance – study of vocational and apprenticeship training in the Nordic Region, Faugert & Co., 2014. The report was written as part of “Sustainable Nordic Welfare”. Find it in the project gallery on page 62.

“When the project started, a lot of the participants were looking for descriptions of the various Nordic vocational education programmes. For example, they wanted to know how work placements are arranged in the various countries, so they felt prepared for conversations in the network. I actually fought against this a little bit – not because mapping how things are done doesn’t matter, but because sometimes the subtle differences are overlooked. Knowledge is an important aspect of training greater numbers of skilled workers and improving vocational education and training programmes – but it’s not enough on its own. Meeting in person obliges us to do something and to learn. That’s what the network is for,” she says.

For Gray, meeting colleagues from other organisations whose work involves making vocational education more attractive has led

to new partnerships with schools in Åland, Sweden and Denmark. They want to make it possible for students to take part of their education or training in another Nordic country, in order to make vocational education and training more attractive.

A broad-based network

Representing a variety of perspectives was an important consideration for Margaretha Allen. She wanted a broad-based network, with participants from different sectors and from local and national levels. As a result, the network includes staff from local authority schools departments, employers, school principals and civil servants from ministries.

Magnus Magnussen confirms the importance of this diversity of perspectives. He runs his own electrician’s business, chairs the Federation of Faroese Industries and has often felt excluded

from discussion of issues like unemployment, work placements and the quality of education and training. He was therefore quick to accept the invitation to join the network.

“I deal with apprentices on a day-to-day basis. It’s up to me to see to it that they get as much as possible out of work placements and time spent in the workplace. I think I speak for all employers in the Faroe Islands, when I say that we want to do our bit,” he says.

The network has, among other things, given Magnussen the opportunity to talk to some of the Danish civil servants who make the rules regarding work placements in companies like his. This led to a conversation about how the many rules and reporting requirements sometimes act as an obstacle to local initiatives. Companies are often encouraged to provide more

“All too often, Nordic co-operation takes place at the level of national agencies”

placements, but in Magnussen's experience, many of them are deterred once they realise how much paperwork is involved.

“When I mentioned this to people at the Ministry, they were genuinely taken aback. They'd never thought about it like that – they saw all the rules as a kind of helping hand,” he explains, underlining the importance of wide-ranging conversations.

For Margaretha Allen, these are exactly the sorts of subtly different perspectives that come to light in networks with a wide range of participants. It is important to know about these subtle differences when getting to grips with an issue and working out how things could be done better.

“All too often, Nordic co-operation takes place at the level of national agencies, with civil servants in ministries talking with their counterparts in the other countries.

But looking at co-operation like that is too narrow. When the topic at hand is helping more young people into work, it's a given that educational institutions and employers need to be on board. Sometimes, this is because their perspective is crucial to understanding why things are not working; other times it's because they are able to make changes and do things differently right away,” she says.

Make haste slowly

To benefit from working together in the network, the participants need to know each other well – Helen Gray, Magnus Magnussen and Margaretha Allen all emphasise this. For instance, Gray, Development Manager at the Centre for Lifelong Learning at the IDAN Vocational Education and Training Centre in Iceland, recognises that student exchanges rely on the members of the network spending time getting to know each other.

“I have to have confidence in the setup if I'm to send students to schools or colleges elsewhere in the Nordic Region. I need to be sure that they'll be in good hands and that they'll learn something. The members of the network have established that trust by meeting regularly and becoming acquainted,” she says.

“The most important prerequisite – both for exchanging information and experiences and for new forms of co-operation – is time,” says Allen. “It's not hard to be inspired by others, but it takes time to get to the point where the conversations become worthwhile and provide inspiration. I would strongly urge others who want to set up learning programmes that involve Nordic co-operation to take conversations with their partners seriously. A good conversation needs time and space to unfold – it's a matter of making haste slowly.”

Innovation, Nordic style

The “Sustainable Nordic Welfare” programme focuses on finding new welfare solutions that will benefit the people of the Nordic Region. International studies have shown that innovation is a real Nordic strength. The Global Innovation Index 2015 ranked all five Nordic nations in its top 20. But why are the Nordic countries good at innovation? And how do we make ourselves the world leaders? We asked two experts to take stock of Nordic innovation.

WHO?

Liisa Välikangas (LV)
Professor of Innovation
Management,
Aalto University &
Hanken School of
Economics, Finland

Gillian Warner-Søderholm (GWS)
Associate Professor and
Head of Department,
Department of
Communication and
Culture, BI Norwegian
Business School, Norway

What does “innovation” really mean?

LV: A lot of people think that innovation is about an end product, but we should really think of it as a messy and confusing process. I usually say that innovation is a distraction, right up until the moment that the process proves its value and something emerges from it. Seen in that way, innovation is about experimenting. The most important element is the courage to challenge ingrained habits and routines.

How well placed are the Nordic countries to do this?

GWS: Researchers have identified a special Nordic form of management in companies and organisations, whereby the manager is more of a coach than a boss. Flat structures facilitate concept development, because the staff are involved in the decision-making processes and because the boss’s office is both physically and figuratively close by whenever you have a good idea. This allows space for a different type of spontaneity in Nordic organisations, whereas in, for example, Asian ones, the focus is more on authority and establishing your place in the hierarchy. The fact that people in the Nordic Region tend to be very direct and put things bluntly is a prerequisite for innovation, and this sets us apart from the rest of the world.

LV: Another basic prerequisite for innovation in the Region is our Nordic welfare model. Widespread trust in authorities and each other, minimal corruption, free and equal access to healthcare and an all-encompassing social safety net, in the form of pensions and benefits, all help to foster a sense of security. It's easier to dare to try out new solutions with a safety net beneath you.

So is the Nordic model synonymous with innovation?

GWS: Yes and no. In general, the welfare state is really good at encouraging innovation. The safety net takes the angst out of presenting ideas and throwing yourself into new projects. Having said that, if there were such a thing as an innovation Olympics, I'd be fairly willing to bet that the Nordic team would have no chance against countries like China and India. We're just not hungry enough. Put bluntly, we are doing so well that we are at risk of becoming complacent. In other words, if we aren't careful, the Nordic welfare model could foster passivity.

I usually say that the Nordic Viking has turned soft. We've lost our killer instinct. You might even say that the price we have paid for our high standard of living is the loss of our competitive gene and belligerent spirit. If you ask children and parents in Norwegian "folk schools" whether they're happy and satisfied, the answer will be yes. But international PISA studies show that we have been overtaken by the rest of the world. You can't help but think that we are in danger of becoming satisfied with mediocrity and a little too fond of the familiar and comfortable.

LV: It's a fact that the public sector in the Nordic Region is far more conservative than the people it serves. In the last few years, there have been all sorts of situations when people have done things together in ways that challenge the way in which the welfare state is organised – e.g. engaging in a barter economy, or providing services that were previously the preserve of the state. The public sector – and the Nordic model – must adapt to these changes. In this context, one obvious question is whether welfare provision should be the exclusive preserve of local and national government, or whether we should refine the Nordic model by focusing on solutions that include and involve the public more in the equation.

Does this mean that there is a special Nordic recipe for innovation?

GWS: Yes, I think so. When it comes down to it, we are, of course, very different countries with different cultural traits – each with our own strengths. Norway's strength is its focus on gender equality. The Swedes are focused on relationships between people and allowing all voices to be heard. The Danes are good at getting things done and optimising processes and workflows. And the Finns are good at structure and embedding decision-making in hierarchies. These are, of course, sweeping generalisations, but they nonetheless suggest that Nordic co-operation – on welfare innovation, for example – will be more successful if we marshal our resources. In short, it is the co-operation itself that is the recipe.

LV: Basically, there is potential for innovation all over the Region – in all of our people and in all of

our societies. It's about the ability to imagine that things could be different than they are today. Innovation is about leaving your *comfort zone*.

How can we become (even) better at innovation?

GWS: We need to teach our children that it is okay to relax the rules a bit sometimes, and to show a bit of innovative fighting spirit. It should be considered okay to stick your neck out, and cool to stand out from the crowd, think out of the box and challenge the status quo. Consensus and political correctness are positive values, but sometimes it takes a bit of disruption and conflict to spark innovation. I think a bit more disruption would be no bad thing.

LV: At both the political and the individual level, we need to train ourselves to experiment and realise that better solutions are often possible if we try something

new. I usually say to the staff in the organisations I work with that they should ask themselves every day: "Which two unnecessary rules can I break today?" It's no use blaming your boss because you don't have time to work innovatively. Say no, take control of your own time. Innovation is in itself a pretty powerful thing.

GWS: I also think we need to innovate more together at Nordic level. All too often, we rush into national projects without considering the potential benefit of a Nordic approach. Why is it, for example, that Norway, Denmark, Greenland and Finland all claim that Santa Claus lives in their particular country? Why not just say that he belongs to the Nordic Region? We know that it works really well when we join forces and work together to identify solutions. I think we are going to see far more of that in the future.

Artikel

4

Accessible data, better knowledge

Survivors of childhood cancer are more likely to suffer from ill health in adulthood. The reason for this is that both cancer and its treatments increase the risk of long-term effects, simply because they make the body's organs more vulnerable to an array of illnesses. However, researchers know little about the other long-term effects of childhood cancer.

Jeanette Falck Winther, Consultant Physician and Senior Researcher at the Danish Cancer Society, wants to study why these children, aside from being more likely to suffer ill health, tend to fare less well in adult life than their peers.

"We don't know enough about how surviving a serious illness like cancer affects children later in life. What do they end up studying? Do they start a family? Do they gain a foothold in the job market?" she asks.

In order to get closer to answering these questions, she and a team of researchers have set out to establish a new and expanded Nordic database. It will combine existing data on child cancer patients and their health as a whole with data about their life in general, e.g. their education and whether they have families of their own.

"The database is an example of the potential benefits of sharing data across the Nordic Region, simply because the volume of data multiplies when working at Nordic rather than national level," explains Maria Nilsson. A senior adviser at NordForsk [a Nordic advisory and funding body for research, ed.], Nilsson is responsible for a three-year project, under the auspices of "Sustainable Nordic Welfare", that will make it easier for researchers like Winther to access data across the whole of the Region.

"When it comes to finding correlations between people's health and their life in general, it makes a massive difference whether you study 26 million individuals or just 5 million. It allows us to gain insights into the factors that determine the course of our lives: what we study, the illnesses we contract, how much money we earn, and so on. Ultimately, data-sharing across borders will improve people's quality of life in all of the Nordic countries," says Nilsson.

Winther agrees. She hopes that the data generated by the Nordic research project will help child cancer victims lead a better life, e.g. by providing extra support and guidance that helps give them the same life chances as other children.

For other examples of research into inequality in health and welfare using Nordic data, under the

“Ultimately, data-sharing across borders will improve people's quality of life in all of the Nordic countries”

auspices of “Sustainable Nordic Welfare”, see box 10. For more about how Nordic studies pave the way for new and better drugs, see box 13.

Solid foundation

“Fortunately, the Nordic countries are well placed to reap the benefits of sharing data, because they have extraordinarily good population databases,” says Erland Hjelmquist, Professor Emeritus at the University of Gothenburg and former Secretary General of Forte [Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare, ed.].

“The Nordic countries have been keeping records for centuries. We have records stretching all the way back to the 17th century on where people lived, who they married, and their education and training,” he says.

Originally, the national churches kept these records, but large databases and registers are now an integral

part of the Nordic welfare states. They contain health data on GP visits, use of medication and hospital admissions, as well as social data on education and employment.

“Combined with the fact that everybody in the Region has a civil registration number, this gives us unique opportunities to study all kinds of issues at Nordic level, e.g. trends in public health over time or the link between education and health,” he says.

Hjelmquist points out that collecting data of this kind has been a defining feature of the Nordic countries.

“Other European countries, e.g. Italy and Germany, don’t have the same tradition of individualised record-keeping and haven’t kept records for as long as we have in the Nordic Region,” he explains.

Stumbling blocks

Although the potential is great and the data exists, the process of

sharing data across borders is not yet a smooth one. The number of Nordic registries and databases is strictly limited.

Bo Könberg, former Swedish Minister of Health, describes some of the barriers preventing data-sharing in the report *The Future of Nordic Co-operation on Health*, which forms part of “Sustainable Nordic Welfare”. His main suggestion is that in order to achieve our aim in this area, more of the major stakeholders, e.g. national statistics agencies and health registers, need to work together and simplify the rules for sharing data between countries. Find the report in box 11.

Maria Nilsson of NordForsk also points out that one of the biggest obstacles to sharing data is a practical one – quite simply, it is very time-consuming for researchers to gain access to data in the Nordic countries.

BOX 10

Inequality in the Nordic Region – we need to know more about...

Why young refugees don't fare well in the Nordic welfare states – Socially, financially and in terms of health, young refugees do not fare as well as their fellow citizens. The project "Coming of Age in Exile", a collaboration between leading research groups in the Nordic countries, is studying the causes of inequality with the help of Nordic registers and interviews.

More people in work – Research shows that flexible working hours lead to better health and later retirement. The project "Working Hours, Health, Well-being and Participation in Working Life" studies how flexible working hours can help get more people into work, keep older people employed for longer and help more people with disabilities find work.

How air pollution affects public health – More and more deaths are related to air pollution. The research project "NordicWelfAir" will map the consequences of air pollution to identify those most affected. The project will study levels of air pollution in all of the Nordic countries in order to predict the long-term impact on public health.

Better stress prevention – The workplace is of crucial importance to physical and mental health. Unfortunately, work takes its toll on many people. The "Psychosocial Work Environment and Healthy Ageing" project is based on observational studies conducted in all of the Nordic countries. The aim is to generate knowledge about the best ways in which the working environment can support employee health and well-being.

Why some people live longer than others – Researchers still know very little about ageing in the Nordic Region and illnesses contracted in the process. The "Social Inequalities in Ageing" project looks at factors that impact on longevity and good health. It also studies how elderly care can be organised in ways that support healthy ageing.

The five research projects are co-funded by the "Research into Social Inequalities in Health and Welfare" project, which is a part of "Sustainable Nordic Welfare". Find them in the project gallery on page 62. The projects are also part of NordForsk's "Nordic Programme on Health and Welfare".

BOX 11

11 Read more about the recommendations for health co-operation

Report: The Future of Nordic Co-operation on Health

“Researchers have to apply for access to data in each of the countries, and await approval from each institution. In practice, this means that important information is lost, as it can take years to gain access to the relevant data. Research teams are often unable to wait, so they just use national data,” she says.

Speeding up the process

To make it quicker and easier for researchers to access data in the different countries, all of the national statistics agencies have entered into a new partnership. “NordForsk has encouraged them to work together and the results have been positive,” says Claus-Göran Hjelm, Head of Department at Statistics Sweden, who is in charge of the joint work.

“One of the things we are working on is thinking about our systems as one entity, in order to simplify and speed up the application process, e.g. by drawing up Nordic procedures for requesting access to data,” he says.

The long-term ambition is that researchers will only need to fill in one data-request form, rather than a separate one for each country. Jeanette Falck Winther, Consultant Physician and Senior Researcher at the Danish Cancer Society, is working with the statistics agencies to develop such a form and to simplify the application process as part of her project on cancer in childhood.

She looks forward to new system. Winther has previously been involved in collating large datasets using data from multiple Nordic countries. Like Nilsson, she found it time-consuming.

“In the long term, my hope is, of course, that researchers like me will have quicker access to data, so we can get started on the actual research at an earlier stage. Developing a Nordic application form sends the message that we are serious about this,” Winther says. For more about which institutions in

the Nordic Region have this kind of data, see box 12.

Healthy scepticism

Erland Hjelmquist, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, understands why the countries keep close tabs on their data.

“The national systems are a result of people’s confidence in their governments. They trust that the information will be treated confidentially, and each country’s national registers are considered to have great integrity. So it’s understandable that those who store the data stick closely to their procedures, e.g. by requiring ethical approval of research projects that ask to use the data. Ultimately, what is at stake is the public’s confidence in the systems,” he says.

Hjelmquist agrees with Könberg that key players, e.g. the national statistics agencies, must agree on procedures for data-sharing that

will guarantee data security and anonymity for all parties – official agencies, statistics agencies and the public.

“If we are to set up more Nordic registers, we have to be able to guarantee that they are secure, e.g. by agreeing on guidelines for how we anonymise data. Only in this way will we be able to make it easier for researchers to access data throughout the Region in the longer term.”

Nordic guidelines for the use of data are also high on Jeanette Falck Winther’s wish list. She is in complete agreement about the need for them.

“It is, of course, acceptable and appropriate for statistics agencies to be reluctant to release data to me as a researcher unless there are guarantees in place that the data to which I have access will be treated with great care and used to generate important findings,” she says.

Secure process

Claus-Göran Hjelm, who is in charge of collaboration between the statistics agencies, thinks that mutual trust is key to the process. Indeed, it is the first step toward putting in place the kind of Nordic data-processing guidelines that Erland Hjelmquist and Jeanette Falck Winther want to see.

“Meeting each other provides an opportunity to air some of the concerns that the data-owners in the various countries have about sharing data. Guaranteeing the security of the public’s data has always been the starting point for our discussions, but sitting around the same table allows us to take the next step and get closer to guidelines we can all agree to,” says Hjelm, although he stresses that the agencies are still subject to their own national legislation.

So far, the statistics agencies have been working on a Nordic security agreement on rules for the use of data that apply to the researchers to whom

BOX 12

Who has the data?

Denmark: The State Serum Institute (SSI) and Statistics Denmark

Norway: The Norwegian Institute of Public Health (NIPH) and Statistics Norway

Sweden: The National Board of Health and Welfare and Statistics Sweden

Finland: The National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) and Statistics Finland

Iceland: The Directorate of Health and Statistics Iceland

Source: Joint Nordic Registers and Biobanks – A goldmine for health and welfare research, NordForsk, 2014.

the data is supplied. An agreement of this type would mean that both researchers and statistics agencies would sign the same agreement, no matter what country the data comes from – in other words, they would not be subject to different guidelines in different countries.

Over the next few years, the statistics agencies will also establish a Nordic metadata library, which will give researchers a single point of access to all data in the Nordic countries, facilitating a rapid overview of what is available and where to find it. The library will also streamline the data to make it comparable.

“As long as security measures are in place, it makes perfect sense to make it easier for researchers to obtain an overview of the available data,” according to Erland Hjelmquist. The national statistics agencies have been collating data

for many years, but their methods of categorisation vary. “Different definitions of important variables make it difficult to compare data,” he explains. For example, the term “unemployment” is used differently in the various Nordic databases.

“Honestly, wading through huge amounts of data is a bit like hacking your way through a jungle,” he says.

Out of the starting blocks

Although there are still obstacles, Hjelmquist, Hjelm, Winther and Nilsson feel that the national statistics agencies, research institutions and national decision-makers have all shown a great degree of goodwill towards the project.

“The starting point for co-operation couldn’t be better, because all of those involved agree that there is untapped potential. We also know

that the barriers are surmountable. What is important is that we all agree on how to proceed, so we end up with procedures that everybody can accept and that will last,” says Maria Nilsson of NordForsk.

Hjelmquist is confident, but also thinks that the Nordic countries should act now if they are to retain their momentum in health and welfare research.

“We might be good, but there’s always room for improvement. If we stop striving to make progress, the rest of the world will quickly catch up and we’ll be forced to realise that we’re no longer quite as far ahead as we thought. We need to avoid this at all costs, because the key to world-class research is right in front of our noses.”

BOX 13

A population of 26 million is better than 5 million

A larger population is also a valuable asset for pharmaceutical companies developing treatments and medicines, e.g. when conducting clinical studies.

Unfortunately, the last three decades have seen a dramatic decline in the number of clinical studies conducted in the Nordic Region. According to Pierre Lafolie, Consultant Physician at Karolinska University Hospital in Sweden, one of the reasons for this decline is that, individually, the Nordic countries are not particularly attractive to researchers or pharmaceutical companies. They're just too small.

“Especially when testing treatments for rare diseases, it’s important that clinical trials are able to recruit patients from a large population base. If the population base is too small in relation to the incidence of the disease, they will move clinical trials to countries with larger populations,” he explains.

Aside from being able to offer patients the latest drugs more quickly in the long term, more Nordic studies would also eliminate the need to repeat studies in each country, as is the case today. NordForsk has therefore established the “Nordic Trial Alliance” to kick-start a range of clinical trials that cover the whole Region. Lafolie acts as an external project manager of “Nordic Trial Alliance”, which brings together researchers, hospitals, pharmaceutical companies and patients’ organisations in order to unlock the potential of Nordic trials. As well as facilitating contact between pharmaceutical companies and hospitals, the network has also launched a website where patients can find studies that are relevant to them. In 2015, the alliance launched its first Nordic clinical studies in collaboration with NordForsk.

The project “Nordic co-operation on Clinical Trials” is part of “Sustainable Nordic Welfare”. Find it in the project gallery on page 62.

The work goes on

Although the “Sustainable Nordic Welfare” programme has drawn to a close, Nordic co-operation on welfare goes on. The end of the programme is the ideal time for reflection, as well as for sharing experiences, to ensure that future partnerships will be as robust and as effective as possible.

The Nordic Council of Ministers hosted a final conference for the “Sustainable Nordic Welfare” programme on 26–27 November 2015. The conference was attended by many of the people who have been involved in the 17 projects that made up the programme over the last three years.

We asked them what they had learned about working together and the lessons they will apply in future collaborations. What went well? What should we do more of? And what should we not do in the future?

On the next page is their checklist for effective co-operation:

Checklist for effective co-operation:

Invite a lot of people

It's all about involving relevant people, i.e. the members of the public who are the target audience, or stakeholders with a different perspective on the problem, e.g. private companies, local authorities, educational institutions or NGOs.

Ask how and not just why

How does co-operation work in practice? The nuts and bolts of co-operation are important – how often to meet, how to structure meetings, and how long it takes to get to know each other. The first step toward making a difference is to focus on how to get there and the time it will take.

Focus on support

In order to be effective, co-operation must be firmly embedded into organisations. For a project to deliver real results, somebody has to feel a sense of ownership over it and keep it moving forward – even after the end of the official project period. The most effective co-operation is driven by those who have passion, commitment and enthusiasm for the project.

Communicate the benefits

Be clear about the difference the co-operation is supposed to make – and for whom. Articulate the value and prioritise external communication so that stakeholders – politicians, the general public and organisations – know about co-operation in the Nordic Region and what it has achieved.

Follow up

Think about how the results of co-operation can inspire future work in the same area, even after the end of the project. It is not just a matter of sharing the results, but also about learning from what didn't work.

Note: The checklist is based on the experiences of and advice from participants in the "Sustainable Nordic Welfare – How?" conference. Monday Morning conducted a systematic review of the participants' inputs.

The road ahead – a new programme

BOX 14

The programme for the Finnish Presidency

Water, nature and people

The work on developing Nordic welfare will continue under the auspices of the Finnish Presidency of the Council of Ministers in 2016. The title of the programme for the Presidency is “Water, nature and people”, see box 14.

The ongoing work to develop welfare in the Nordic Region is embedded in the programme *An Open and Innovative Nordic Region with Healthy People 2020 – Equal Opportunities for Welfare, Culture, Education and Work*, which will invite stakeholders from the whole of the Nordic Region to continue discussions on sustainable welfare systems for the period 2016–2018.

The three-year programme will build on the experiences and outcomes of “Sustainable Nordic Welfare” and focus on developing co-operation, specifically in the fields of education, employment, research and – as a new innovation – culture. The focus will be on cultivating interfaces that transcend sectors, which will involve

inviting a range of new stakeholders to take part in the conversations, including the people who it is all about – the public.

A new focus area will be how best to respond to the growing global interest in the Nordic model. Among other things, a “Team Nordic”, comprising experts and politicians from all of the Nordic countries, will be set up. The team’s job will be to raise the profile of the Nordic welfare model in international contexts. The ambition is that, by the end of the programme in 2018, a “Nordic Centre of Excellence” will have been set up to support national and international stakeholders involved in developing the welfare provision of the future.

Like “Sustainable Nordic Welfare”, the new programme will focus on addressing the challenges faced by the Nordic countries over the next few years. This does not mean that we think we can overcome challenges such as demographic

trends or increased global competition once and for all, rather, it means that we can – and must – learn more about the best and most effective ways of coping with and adapting to them.

The programme will also address new, more pressing challenges that call for co-operation. Like the rest of the world, the Nordic countries have been faced with record numbers of refugees in recent years, which has put pressure on our welfare systems. As a result, the Nordic work on sustainable welfare will also encompass refugees. It is not that the countries have to reach political agreement on how to handle the situation in each individual country – or because a Nordic solution necessarily has to be found – rather, it is that the conversation between the countries is key to developing effective solutions at national level. In addition, we want to ensure that Nordic welfare remains sustainable.

Project Gallery

The “Sustainable Nordic Welfare” programme included 17 projects. Here is an overview of them.

RESEARCH FOR WELFARE

Recruiting and retaining staff in the care sector

For the welfare state to continue to provide quality nursing and care services, recruitment and retention of staff in the care sector must be improved. The project concluded with a report mapping out the challenges and opportunities.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

Contact: Trond Nygaard, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Health and Care Services, trond.nygaard@hod.dep.no

Research into social inequalities in health and welfare

The Nordic countries may be among the most equal in the world, but there are still significant inequalities – and researchers still know too little about why some people fare better than others. The project is co-funding five research projects, lasting five years each, to generate knowledge about how the Nordic countries can reduce inequality in health and welfare.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

Contact: Maria Nilsson, Senior Adviser, NordForsk, maria.nilsson@nordforsk.org

Nordic Welfare Watch

The financial crisis was a challenge to the Nordic welfare model. If we are to be more resilient, we need more knowledge of how different types of crises affect our societies. One outcome of the project was the development of indicators for identifying new or

emerging welfare needs, including during crises.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

Contact: Ingi Valur Jóhannsson, Political Adviser, Ministry of Welfare, Iceland, ingi.v.johannsson@vel.is

Report on future Nordic health co-operation

How can Nordic co-operation on health be developed and enhanced in the next few years? In this report, Bo Könberg, former Swedish Minister of Health, addresses the challenges and potential benefits of closer Nordic co-operation and presents 14 recommendations for priorities.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

Contact: Astrid Utterström, Senior Adviser, Nordic Council of Ministers, asut@norden.org

EDUCATION AND WORK FOR WELFARE

Nordic knowledge base on drop-out rates from upper secondary education

In order to ensure that more young people complete their education, this project has launched a Nordic knowledge bank to bring together tools, methods and good examples of how educational institutions can help more young people remain in the education system.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

Contact: Jenny Tägström, Project Manager, NordForsk, jenny.tagstrom@nordicwelfare.org

Study of vocational and apprenticeship training in the Nordic Region

Following the financial crisis, youth unemployment in the Nordic Region rose dramatically, and many young people find it difficult to gain a foothold on the labour market when they leave education and training. This study looks at obstacles in the transition between education and the labour market, and maps the challenges, needs and visions of Nordic vocational education.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

Contact: Johanna Enberg, Consultant, Faugert & Co.,
johanna.enberg@faugert.se

Social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is about finding new solutions to social problems, e.g. how marginalised people can gain a foothold on the labour market. The project maps current social entrepreneurship initiatives in the Nordic Region and makes recommendations to promote the inclusion of marginalised groups in working life and society.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

Contact: Aase Lunde, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Norway, Aase-lunde@asd.dep.no

Learning at work

All of the Nordic countries struggle with drop-out rates from vocational education and training programmes, as well as high levels of youth unemployment. In order to address these challenges and train more skilled workers for the welfare state, the project has established a Nordic network in which both local and regional stakeholders meet to derive mutual inspiration. One of the network's

priorities is to build better bridges between education and the labour market.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

Contact: Margaretha Allen, Education Director,
Swedish National Agency for Education,
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Entrepreneurship in education

The project focuses on improving teachers' skills in promoting innovation and entrepreneurship in schools, e.g. by drawing up a Nordic competence framework for entrepreneurship in elementary schools. The project has also published a catalogue featuring positive examples of entrepreneurship in elementary schools, which will inspire more people to incorporate thinking about entrepreneurship into the school timetable in the long term.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

Contact: Morten Friis Møller, Senior Adviser, Nordic Council of Ministers, momo@norden.org

Nordic Master in Social Work and Welfare

In 2015, the Council of Ministers earmarked funds for a new degree focusing on welfare as part of the Nordic Master Programme. The University of Stavanger in Norway has received funding to work with Aalborg University in Denmark and Umeå University in Sweden to set up the Master's in Social Work and Welfare. The first student intake will be in autumn 2017.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

Contact: Kai Koivumäki, Senior Adviser, Nordic Council of Ministers, kko@norden.org

Mobility and recognition of qualifications

The health and care sectors would benefit from students and professionals being able to study and work in all of the Nordic countries. The project has mapped the countries' requirements for approving each other's professional qualifications. Based on the project's outcomes, an inter-ministerial collaboration has been set up to work on implementing the recommendations.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

Contact: Morten Friis Møller, Senior Adviser, Nordic Council of Ministers, momo@norden.org

Welfare professions in the Nordic Region

The project included a comparative study of the work done in the Nordic countries to ensure that study programmes on welfare subjects are research-based, and mapped welfare research throughout the Region in order to determine how it is embedded into study programmes.

Contact: Marianne Aastebøl Minge, Senior Adviser, NordForsk, marianne.minge@nordforsk.org

Analysis of the Nordic welfare model

A team of Nordic researchers has mapped the challenges facing the Nordic model and the opportunities to develop it in the report "The Nordic Model – Challenged but capable of reform".

[Read more about the project here.](#)

Contact: Tarmo Valkonen, Research Advisor, Research Institute of the Finnish Economy (ETLA), tarmo.valkonen@etla.fi

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR WELFARE

Nordic co-operation on clinical trials

Too few clinical trials (tests of new treatments, etc.) are conducted on patient groups in the Nordic countries. The project therefore set up the "Nordic Trial Alliance" network, which brings together representatives of research, industry and patient organisations. The idea is to promote clinical trials that involve all of the Nordic countries. In 2015, the alliance and NordForsk launched the first five Nordic pilot studies.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

Contact: Pierre Lafolie, Consultant Physician and External Project Manager, Karolinska University Hospital, Sweden, pierre.lafolie@karolinska.se; or Maria Nilsson, Senior Adviser and Internal Project Manager, NordForsk, maria.nilsson@nordforsk.org

Biobanks, health registers and social registers

The Nordic countries have a goldmine of data on their populations that could be used to generate knowledge about health and welfare. However, ethical, organisational and legal barriers still make it difficult to share data. The project has established collaboration between national statistics agencies, with the aim of making it easier for researchers in the Nordic countries to gain access to data and build up Nordic registers.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

Contact: Maria Nilsson, Senior Adviser, NordForsk, maria.nilsson@nordforsk.org

Nordic co-operation on highly specialised treatments

Run by the Norwegian Directorate of Health, the project has established seven different collaborations on highly specialised treatment in the Nordic Region, focusing on exchanges of information and experiences, establishing Nordic databases and developing Nordic procedures for treatments.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

Contact: Hans Petter Aarseth, Project Manager,
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Nordic co-operation on welfare technology

The project “Welfare Technology – CONNECT” has brought together the ten leading local authorities in welfare technology in the Nordic Region. The aims are to develop best practice in the field and inspire other local authorities. National ministries and local authority organisations have been involved.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

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