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Oct 16, 2012

Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 7/2012

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Theme: Can culture turn the downturn around?



Financed by
Nordic Council of
Ministers

NORDIC LABOUR JOURNAL

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

PUBLISHER

Work Research Institute, OsloMet
commissioned by the Nordic Council of
Ministers.
The Nordic Council of Ministers is not
responsible for the content

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Björn Lindahl

EMAIL

nljeditor@gmail.com

WEB

www.nordiclabourjournal.org

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

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



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Editorial: Art and culture shapes the future working life

Working life is changing and improving constantly. The essence of art is to go beyond what is already there and point to something new. Can art and culture help innovation processes and the development of new jobs?

COMMENTS

14.10.2012

BERIT KVAM

The EU Commission recently launched a strategy to speed up growth in the cultural and creative sectors and to maximise their employment potential. Where art, business and technology meet, the cultural and creative sectors can make waves which create a spill-over into other sectors, the Commission says. Many signs point to this being an area of growth. Things are afoot on a Nordic level too: the cultural and creative sectors can show the way out of the crisis, says the Nordic Council of Ministers' General Secretary Halldór Ásgrímsson.

People have been flocking to the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Contemporary Art which has just opened in Oslo. But art and culture showing the way in a new kind of working life has further implications than this. This month's theme for Nordic Labour Journal shows that businesses looking for creativity make use of the inherent possibilities of art and culture in completely new ways: "When culture was presented as a strategic tool people laughed at me. Today no one is laughing," says Piritta Kantojärvi at the Finnish culture company Grape People.

The example from Sweden shows that designers' products and processes can help make businesses more innovative and create more jobs. A quarter of working Icelanders already work in creative occupations. Culture is so important to the Icelandic national identity that the Icelanders themselves aren't aware of culture's strong position in society, says Professor Einarsson.

What makes art art is that it creates something new, and the artist is always ahead of the pack, says Director Gunnar B. Kvaran at the Astrup Fearnley Museum in Oslo, and we need help to get to where the artist is. Perhaps this is the key to how to create waves by pushing art and culture forward. But is this the kind of push which is taking place? Can culture turn the downturn around?

Culture increasingly important for employment

Culture plays an increasingly important role in employment. Cultural and creative trades employ five million people in Europe and represent 3.3 percent of the total EU economy. Employment in cultural occupations also grows three times faster than the rest of the economy. Both in the EU and in the Nordic region culture is being highlighted as a creative catalyst which can help create competitiveness and employment within the wider economy.

THEME

14.10.2012

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

“Cultural and creative trades could be the way out of the crisis for the Nordic region,” writes the Nordic Council of Ministers’ Secretary General Halldór Ásgrímsson in his introduction to the report ‘The Creative Nordic Region 2012’.

The report is written by KreaNord, which was founded in the wake of a prime ministerial meeting in Punkaharju in 2007. KreaNord is a Nordic initiative which aims to improve the growth potential for the region’s cultural and creative trades. The initiative came partly in response to a 2010 EU Commission green paper ‘Unlocking the Potential of the Cultural and Creative Industries’. The green paper says the cultural sector represents a large untapped potential. KreaNord has organised a string of conferences between 2008 and 2012 which resulted in four political recommendations for the ministers of culture and trade:

- Cooperation between the Nordic cultural and creative trades and with other businesses should be strengthened.
- New funding models should be developed to make it easier for the cultural sector to take part in the global marketplace - and to attract foreign investors to the Nordic region.
- Culture and creativity should be promoted at all educational levels.
- A common Nordic market for creative industries and cultural products should be established.

So far so good. Not many in the EU or in the Nordic region argue against the fact that we should become more creative and that culture plays an important role in order for a country and regions to be as vital as possible.

The challenges arise when European or Nordic initiatives need funding. Culture is something individual countries prefer to control themselves.

The EU Commission’s 2014-2020 budget includes a new programme called Creative Europe, where culture has been allocated €1.8bn (out of which €900m is earmarked the film industry). This represent a 40 percent increase on the previous budget period, but at that time culture represented a minuscule part of the budget. Direct support for cultural projects represented only 0.05 percent of the total EU budget for 2007-2013, or 13 Eurocent per capita. In comparison 42 percent of the EU budget still goes to agriculture and rural development.

In the Nordic region the Nordic Council of Ministers has given culture a higher priority. The 2013 budget proposes to grant culture 169m Danish kroner (€22.6m). That is 17.7 percent of the total Nordic cooperation budget, but exactly the same figure as for 2012. This represents nearly one whole Euro per person.

At the same time some countries’ cultural budgets are growing rapidly. Next year’s Norwegian national budget allocates nearly the aimed for 1 percent of total spending to culture. An increase of 889 million Norwegian kroner (€120m) represents a doubling of the cultural budget since the centre-left government came to power in 2005.

Yet an increase in state funding for culture is not going to be the main driver for getting Europeans out of the economic crisis.

Equally important is exploring the creative potential present in the cultural sector so it can benefit the rest of the economy. The Swedish Agency for Growth Policy Analysis has tried to describe the importance of the cultural sector on a regional and national level.

To put it simply, there are three dimensions to the impact culture can have.

- The first dimension relates to the importance culture has when it comes to relationships, networks and trust which bind people in one region together.
- The second dimension is culture as a means to tying external visitors to the area. This could be in the form of a new centre of experience or a new area of the city.
- The third dimension is culture's influence on products and possible services which can be exported from the region and contribute to export revenues.

“All these concepts and definitions do have one thing in common - they all try to capture the social phenomenon which is the seemingly increasing importance to the economy of expressive values like aesthetics and experiences. It is increasingly attractive to strive for uniqueness and things that cannot be copied, and here culture and cultural heritage plays an important role,” writes the project's leader Anna Kolmodin.



Kjartan Ragnarsson and Sigríður Guðmundsdóttir outside the privately run museum Landnámssetur in Borgarnes (see box on the right). The museum also hosts various shows in the evenings and at weekends

One in four Icelanders in creative jobs

The culture, entertainment and experience industry is increasingly important in Iceland. The country's single most important cultural industry is music. Many jobs are also created when US producers come to Iceland to shoot their films. Icelandic computer games do well abroad and the country has renewed its export of literature after an 800 year long break. Culture is so deeply rooted in Icelandic identity that Icelanders themselves fail to realise how important it is.

THEME

14.10.2012

TEXT: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR, PHOTO: SVAVAR KNÚTUR, NIC LEHOUX (BOTTOM PHOTO)

No other Nordic nation consumes as much culture as Iceland. Icelanders attend theatres, cinemas and museum and they read more books than people in other Nordic countries. These are figures from the report *The Extraordinary Extent of Cultural Consumption in Iceland* by Ágúst Einarsson.

Cultural life is blooming. Iceland's cultural offerings can be compared with what can be found in a major city abroad, says Professor Gunnar Kvaran at the Iceland Academy of the Arts, Listaháskóli Íslands.

“The offer has been enormous over the past few years and it is steadily growing. At the same time more people are attending various cultural events than ever before,” says Professor Kvaran.

“It isn’t just professional artists who contribute to cultural life. The general public has a need to create and contribute to cultural life in different ways,” he says.

The sagas are important

Professor of Economy Ágúst Einarsson at Bifröst University has specialised in the importance of culture for the economy and in working life. Professor Einarsson thinks culture is a prerequisite for the very existence of the Icelandic people. Sagas and traditional poetry built the nation’s identity and led to the emergence of a people called Icelanders.

“Culture’s role is visible in the large consumption of culture,” he says.

The Icelandic state uses an unusually large part of its GDP to fund cultural activities. The culture sector represents four percent of Iceland’s GDP while fisheries represent 12 percent and agriculture one percent. Culture is, in other words, incredibly important to the Icelandic economy.

A quarter of the labour market

Iceland comes out top when it comes to the number of jobs in culture, creative businesses and entertainment, according to the report The Extraordinary Extent of Cultural Consumption in Iceland. Only Holland has as many jobs in the creative sector as Iceland, but Sweden and Finland are not far behind.

“Many people are working in culture. A quarter of the labour force works in the creative sector,” says Professor Einarsson.

Major changes

Right now some major structural changes are taking place in the economy. New technology is increasingly important. There are also some dangerous changes and terrorism is a new threat. All of society is being shook up,” according to Einarsson, and other great changes are coming.

Professor Einarsson thinks Iceland has huge opportunities when it comes to culture, nature and creative work, if only the inherent possibilities of nature and technology can be harnessed as efficiently as they are within the film industry. Several American film studios come to Iceland every year to film Icelandic nature. The government has made this attractive by offering special tax rebates.

But Iceland’s cultural economy is also growing stronger elsewhere. It is not only Björk who has found global fame, but also bands like Sigurrós and Of Monsters and Men. Iceland has also begun exporting literature. Icelandic fiction has got a reputation and crime writers have been well received, not least in Germany.

“Book exports are growing again. Iceland has not exported literature since the middle ages when Icelandic bards traveled around selling their poetry and sagas,” says Professor Einarsson.

“Culture is so important to the Icelandic national identity that Icelanders themselves are not aware of the enormous cultural consumption and culture’s strong social position,” he says.



The Harpa concert hall

Despite the fact that Icelanders are keen consumers of culture, the Icelandic state has cut culture budgets by around one fifth in recent years, according to the Ministry of Culture.

At the same time Iceland has built the largest concert hall in the Nordic region, Harpa. The construction of Harpa had just begun when the financial crisis hit home in Iceland. Yet despite the crisis a decision was taken to finish the project.

It cost just over 1.2bn Swedish kronor (€145m) to build Harpa, and it opened last year. Professor Einarsson reckons Harpa will strengthen Iceland’s cultural activity in the future.

“There was no concert hall in Iceland. I used to teach in the morning in the same hall which the Iceland Symphony Orchestra used for their concerts in the evening,” says Einarsson.

Both Gunnar Kvaran and Ágúst Einarsson believe the Harpa concert hall will be very important to the development of Iceland’s cultural life for many decades to come.



The old Cable Factory in Helsinki's Gräsviken has become an oasis for culture companies like the ones run by Outi Raatikainen (above) and Piritta Kantojärvi

Culture helps handle the darker sides of working life

There are great hopes that creativity will give businesses the competitive edge, but amateurish attempts at introducing culture into working life do not help, say Finnish pioneers on culture in businesses.

THEME

14.10.2012

TEXT: CARL-GUSTAV LINDÉN, PHOTO: MIKAEL NYBACKA

Culture can help create an understanding of working life's complex structures, says Piritta Kantojärvi, an art pedagogue specialising in leadership and organisational development. She and her company Grape People use picture art, theatre

and dance to educate workers in how to deal with difficult situations and processes of change.

"I was the first one to stage company art workshops where the point is to do something other than providing a bit of fun and relaxation," she says.

"But when I first introduced culture as a strategic tool, people laughed at me."

Today no one's laughing anymore. Her customers include several major listed companies.

"I have for instance got the leader group of a large industrial company to get involved with modern dance. That is possibly the best way to stimulate your own comfort zone. We prepare them in how to change their work culture so that they are no longer afraid of failure."

Personnel issues

So this is about more than aesthetic wellbeing and striving to get away from the visual chaos which dominates in so many workplaces. Using culture can actually help simulate problems and lead to open discussions on how to solve them, without involving people's concrete challenges. People can simulate situations without having to disclose what it is they are afraid of at work. But this goes further than helping people relax by painting pictures – it is about developing company processes which in turn demands a deep knowledge of pedagogical and business logics.

"There's a great risk that people who don't understand this can ruin the entire market," says Piritta's working partner Outi Raatikainen at Pink Eminence, a company helping cultural businesses create business-like relations to the companies, for instance in relation to product development and pricing.

"Our customers are involved in different kinds of cultural activities, from theatre groups to circus and art museums, and all want to offer their services to companies," says Raatikainen.

Culture can get the creativity flowing, but at the same time it can work as therapy. A particularly vulnerable group of people are those working with personnel issues. In times like these, with redundancies and cuts, they are exposed to pressure both from their bosses and from employees. It can be liberating for them to be able to express their exhaustion.

Nokia's heritage

We meet over a morning coffee at Helsinki's Cable Factory, an oasis for producers of culture in Finland since 1987 when the manufacturing of cables ended. The 1930s industrial building was long home to Nokia. Many culture workers have their workshops here and as public funding shrinks they are forced to look for market-friendly solutions to secure their incomes.

"They are forced to deal with various hybrid models because cultural projects cannot be financed by public money alone; they have to create new models and find new target groups," says Outi Raatikainen.

She and Piritta Kantojärvi often come across fuzzy cultural project whose only aim seems to be to spend project money, either from various domestic sources or from the EU.

"They exist as long as there is EU funding," says Raatikainen.

Behind this lies a misunderstanding that cultural services are easy to produce and that companies have a lot of money to spend on this.

My prejudices

One of my questions is deliberately prejudiced and is about men: how can they become interested in culture-based development work? Piritta Kantojärvi claims the challenge is actually not particularly large and the key word is 3D.

"We have made sculptures out of scrap metal which has made engineers become interested in recycling copper. We have also built cities out of cardboard," she says.

Grape People and Pink Eminence must do pioneering work, but the number of cultural based services is growing fast. The health and therapeutic benefits of culture have long been known, the theme celebrated 20 years in Finland in 2012. The comprehensive level of research in Finland into culture and working life is another proof of the increased interest in the issue. Yet it is only in recent years that the strategic importance of culture has emerged, not least as part of creative thinking and innovation theories.

Many more jobs

Finland's Ministry of Employment and the Economy launched a development project with a cultural focus as early as in 2008 called 'Strategic project for a creative economy'.

The end report was published one year ago, but work continues to increase the growth of creative sector companies. The creative economy is part of the government's programme until 2015. At the same time it is clear that this part of the Finnish economy is quite small. The end report estimates some 108,000 people work in the creative economy – covering the professional range from scriptwriters to computer game developers.

Yet the trade's future is bright. New figures from Statistics Finland show employment figures for cultural occupations has risen much faster than the average employment figures during the 2000s – with a full 22 percent between 2004 and 2011 compared to 5 percent for all occupations. The increase is mainly found in graphics and advertising jobs, but it nevertheless illustrates the importance of culture in working life.



Picture of Josefin Ambring, who with her fellow students Kajsa Davidsson and Andrew Wilson who constructed the game to fit the company's own needs.

Board game injects creativity into medical technicians

There is growing interest in the way industrial designers work, and design ideas are entering into more and more areas. The ability to create processes, focus on customers and to think outside the box fuels the interest among big and small companies.

THEME

14.10.2012

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

At their autumn get-together this year the medical technology company SHL-Group tried something entirely new. They played a board game where each throw and move was fol-

lowed by conversations about the company, using different angles and scenarios. The game was thought up by three master degree students who attended the course 'Design In-

sight', part of the industrial design programme at Stockholm's University College of Arts, Crafts and Design (Konstfack). They had spent ten weeks mapping the company's Swedish operations, and tailor-made a game based on that.



"We wanted to do something playful and to get the participants to think and talk outside the box. We also wanted to show them the problem areas identified through our research and to get the employees to reflect on them," says Josefin Ambring, who with her fellow students Kajsa Davidsson and Andrew Wilson constructed the game to fit the company's own needs.

A process giving several answers

As part of the master course, Konstfack organises ten weeks of company or occupational based work. The ambition is to allow design and entrepreneurship to meet in order to give students training in understanding the companies they will be working with and to communicate in a 'business-like manner'. But the ambition is also to allow the companies to take part in the creative processes which form part of the design students' skills. Unlike many other methods, the designers' way of working is an open process where many different aspects of a company are being looked at – for instance objectives, networks, power issues and more. The company or business is put into a context which also includes the surrounding world and customers. As a result it is not always easy to know where you'll end up.

"The design process often results in identifying several problems or arriving at several explanations. You map the business in order to find those factors which best can explain its reality and highlight the possibilities," says Magnus Eneberg, the students' Konstfack lecturer who is also doing a PhD in design processes in small and medium-sized businesses.

The participants are important

Josefin Ambring and Kajsa Davidsson explain how their image of SHL-Group grew out of a thorough analysis of the company through interviews with employees and customers. As this task centred on a medical technology company, they also contacted pharmacies and Sweden's Medical Products Agency. They also analysed the company's homepage and compared it to those of the competition.

"We try to understand how things are connected and who is affected by what the company does. During our presentation they were surprised how well we identified things they already knew about but perhaps had not yet talked about," says Kajsa Davidsson.

The students' skills give them the advantage of being able to work with complex problems while focusing on possibilities. Another advantage is that they are not particularly bound by costs, which means they can go in with an open mind. They realised one challenge would be the fact that companies are often used to positive thinking and to sell themselves, which can be an obstacle when you want to see the company for what it really is.

"To get through 'the slick stuff', i.e. getting the company to present itself, that's a tough obstacle to get around," says Josefin Ambring.

Different scenarios

This was one of the reasons why the three design students wanted to find a way to get the company employees to talk about the problems the students had identified during their research, rather than point out what was right and wrong themselves.



Being used to express themselves through other mediums than words, they created the game where the squares on the board represent different issues within the company. Using

three dice, each player move to an issue to be discussed, focusing on needs, obstacles or desired results etc.

“Our tools include visualising things, creating images and visions, which is a more efficient way of communicating than presenting a report,” says Kajsa Davidsson.

Jochen Ratjen, head of design with SHL-Group, has been the main contact point for the students. SHL-Group is an international medical technology company with branches in many countries and headquarters in Taiwan. One of its products is syringes used by many diabetics to administer insulin. The company has seen a rapid growth and today employs 2,000 people - 50 of them in Sweden.

He admits the expectations were not massively high in the beginning.

“We hadn’t worked with Konstfack before, but they were rumoured to be more artistic than what we are used to. At the same time it was exciting to get an outsider’s perspective,” he says.

Increasingly free reins

As time went by, his interest in the students’ work grew. This resulted in the company giving the students increasingly free reins, which included allowing them to meet the company’s Vice President and a Swiss customer. Looking back he is surprised they agreed to so many of the students’ requests and puts that down to a professional attitude and good personal chemistry.

“The game demanded that we, the players, constructed different scenarios related to our company. That was a very good idea and there were many good points for discussion. Indeed, it was so good that we felt it would be a good thing to do at annual autumn get-together and we had good discussions there too,” says Jochen Ratjen.

He feels the design students have provided the company with valuable input which is worth taking forward. It has also been good to have the students present a vision for how things might look in five to ten years from now - a perspective which is easily lost in a company’s daily work. With the students’ help more space has been given to reflect on the company’s future and strategy. The students will also do another project on the company.

“They came up with two proposals themselves and pitched their ideas in a very clever way. Although they haven’t completely turned the company’s thinking upside down, they have provided input which is worth taking further,” says Jochen Ratjen.

See your company in a new light

Design is more than beautiful and functional products - this is an insight which is growing stronger every day. Not long ago design was to many synonymous with craftsmanship.

Later people began realising the importance of product design and now there is increasing focus on the design process itself. There is talk of design in service development and design as a service where the work of designers can help in organisational development and innovation. The health sector is also a growth area for designers.

Research shows the earlier designers get involved in a process the better, says researcher Magnus Eneberg. Designers’ creative working methods allow companies to see themselves in new and innovative ways, which often leads to shared learning and new, innovative solution for business, product and service development.

“If the design process comes on board in time, it contributes to strategic thinking. We also know that it leads to good results which often go beyond the customer company’s expectations,” he says.

And several surveys show that it pays to involve designers in companies, public bodies and service-providing businesses. With the help of designers’ products and processes, companies are becoming more innovative, they hire more people and share value rises for listed companies. Democracy is another important aspect here, according to Magnus Eneberg.

“The design process’ method means involving both end users and employees on different levels, which makes people talk to each other about the products and services they are helping create or are going to use,” he says.

A growing jobs market

Kajsa Davidsson and Josefin Ambring radiate a faith in the future. They will soon graduate and consider the future of industrial designers to be very bright, not least within the public sector.

“Design is penetrating further and further into areas where it has not featured before, and in a few years it will be an obvious perspective in most areas,” says Josefin Ambring.



Italian architect Renzo Piano and Icelandic Director Gunnar B Kvaran (left) has worked together on a Norwegian art museum showcasing American art. "Contemporary art lacks a geographical centre. It is global," says Kvaran

Art is always ahead but lacks a centre

All architects who are drawing culture houses share a secret dream of creating a new Sydney Opera House, a landmark which can draw people from around the world. Renzo Piano is one of the few who have actually done it.

THEME

14.10.2012

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL AND BERIT KVAM. PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL AND NIC LEHOUX (EXTERIORS)

He belonged to a group which in 1969 was commissioned to draw the new Centre Pompidou in Paris, an all-in-one library, culture house and exhibition hall for art. He had set up an architect's office in London with his British colleague Richard Rogers. They entered the competition which drew 688 entries. Piano and Rogers' entry turned most things in-

side out - the pipes for ventilation and water were put on the outside of the house and escalators in glass tubes went diagonally across the facade. But it took the jury by storm.

“At that time it was a revolution. This is something completely different,” said Renzo Piano at the opening of the new Astrup Fearnley Museum in Oslo.

He is sitting alongside the museum Director Gunnar B Kvaran under a large painting by Dan Colen made from different coloured chewing gum which has been smeared across the canvas.

Art and nature

While the Pompidou Centre looked like an oil platform had just been dumped in the middle of Paris, the inspiration for Piano's latest building is the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark.

“Not architectonically, but in the way art and nature mixes there. I want to create a space where you can experience the sea and art at the same time, he says.



The Astrup Fearnley Museum has even got its own little beach.

He is also a passionate sailor and designs his own sail boats. That's why the large sail-shaped roof was part of the design from the beginning.

“Building an art museum is both about creating something very poetic and something very technical. In the south of Europe the light is so strong that a lot of the architecture is about how to protect against that. But here in the north of Europe it is more about how to capture light.

“The worst thing you can do to art is to build a white cube with no windows and turn on the artificial light. That is to kill the art.”

Quickly agreed

The fact that the Astrup Fearnley Museum is privately owned explains why there was little noise around the building process, compared to the never-ending debate around how a new Munch museum should look and where in Oslo it should be situated.

“But this is also about the fact that we agreed very quickly on what we wanted to achieve.

“It has been a privilege to work with Renzo Piano and to be part of the process from the first drafts to the finished building,” says Gunnar B. Kvaran.



The museum seen from the air, the small beach is also visible.

The new museum sits at the end of Tjuvholmen, a completely new part of Oslo which has been built on a disused container harbour. It is Oslo's most exclusive quarter where flats cost double the Oslo average. The museum employs 12 people and some 50 part time workers, but it has already led to the opening of six galleries in this new part of the city plus an art hotel.

The museum is situated in an elitist quarter. How does that fit in with the social institution you want to create?

“There are two sides to this. Behind us there is quite a bit of architecture which reminds you of other cities' financial districts, but on the other side we have nature and the fjord which is part of our soul and our personality. I believe this meeting between the fjord and art is what will be interesting.

Offensive art

As you enter the museum there is a small sign:

‘Some of the exhibits can appear offensive’ it says.



Gunnar B Kvaran with some of the museum's Damien Hirst artwork.

What people react to depends, of course, on their culture. The museum does not aim to represent an entire school of art or a country. The collection is particularly strong on American art from the 1980s, with Jeff Koons' porcelain sculpture of Michael Jackson and his chimpanzee Bubbles plus Damien Hirst's animal corpses in formaldehyde among the most famous artworks. But there is also space for Odd Nerdrum's gigantic painting *The Murder of Andreas Baader* which he painted in 1977-78.

Few Norwegian paintings have provoked so many reactions as this one. But it was not mainly because Nerdrum depicts the German terrorist as a victim of an execution, when according to German authorities he committed suicide. Art critics and other art lovers were agitated by the fact that Nerdrum painted the scene the way a Caravaggio or Rembrandt would have done it - a total break with modernism and the spirit of the time.



The guard has positioned himself instinctively next to the painting.

Art is always ahead

"What is interesting with art and what makes art art is that it creates something new, so art is always slightly ahead. We need some 'education' to help us reach the place which the artist has reached. That's why we put a lot of resources into communication, so that we have the necessary tools and staff who can both write and talk about the artworks," says Gunnar B Kvaran.

"What's interesting is that there is no geographical centre to contemporary art. We have quite a unique situation. Contemporary art has developed a kind of universal language," says Gunnar B Kvaran.

Artists from China, India and the USA work with the same kind of artistic language. New York is a kind of a melting pot, for sure. But so is Berlin and Beijing, Delhi and many oth-

er cities in Europe and on other continents. What we used to talk about as centres of art, first Paris and then New York, is gone, says Gunnar B Kvaran.

Nordic seniors want longer working lives

Nordic women and men work for longer than their European colleagues, and the retirement age is increasing. But there are also differences between the Nordic countries. In later years Denmark has considered Sweden and Norway to be good examples when it comes to employment among the older generation. So why the differences, and why do more people want to work for longer?

INSIGHT

13.10.2012

TEXT: BERIT KVAM

Seniors in working life was the theme when Norway, which holds the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers, organised a Nordic conference under the auspices of the Centre for Senior Policy (CSP) on 26 September. Since 2001 the Norwegian government has worked with the social partners on the Agreement on a More Inclusive Working Life (the IA agreement/2001). One of three main goals of this tri-partite agreement is to increase the retirement age. The Centre for Senior Policy (CSP) which organised the conference has been established to gather and spread knowledge about seniors in working life.

Jan-Erik Støstad, State Secretary at Norway's Ministry of Labour, posed one main question in his opening address at the conference: How do we get more seniors to work for longer?

He pointed out that the Nordic welfare model with equal distribution of goods is a major success, yet the welfare model is under pressure. Demographic changes represent a challenge when the number of older people increases and the older live for even longer.

"This could undermine the Nordic welfare model unless we tackle this challenge in time," he said, and asked the conference:

"What influences the way seniors act? The first thing that springs to my mind is economic incentives, but we also know many other things mean something. Norms and attitudes are also important," said Jan-Erik Støstad.

Norway's age limits up for debate

As a politician he was keen to fight the stereotyping of seniors and to make sure they have a choice; a worn out cleaner might not have the same desire to keep working for as long as an active academic. Norway's pension reform which came into force in 2011 opens up for a more flexible retirement from

working life after the age of 62. The general retirement age is 67, but workers can agree with employers to stay on and work until they are 70. The government has announced it will look at the age limit in the wake of the pension reform.

While the law allows individuals to earn retirement points until they are 75, the final age limit for employing someone in a private or public company is 70. The general age limit and specially agreed limits within for instance the police force and defence is currently being assessed and debated.

"If our average life expectancy continues to increase and our working health improves, it is natural to change the 70 year age limit, but our focus now should remain on the 67 year age limit: to secure the right for all to work until they are 67," said State Secretary Jan-Erik Støstad.

Why do Swedes work longer than Danes?

On an international scale, there are many older people who are in work in Denmark, said Per H. Jensen, Professor at Aalborg University. He delivered a lecture on retirement patterns in Denmark: in 2011 59.9 percent of people between 55 and 64 were working, compared to the EU average of 47.8 percent, while the numbers for Norway and Sweden were 69.6 and 72.3 percent.

"Reaching Swedish and Norwegian employment rates is Denmark's desired goal," said Per Jensen, and added:

The last Danish government (2011) thought Denmark's lower employment rate for people between 60 and 64 had to be seen in the light of the country's favourable early retirement scheme.

But the picture is more complicated than the economists claim, he said:

“The Retirement and pension system is only one out of several factors which influence employment, but because economists have been allowed to lead the debate this idea of the importance of incentives has been allowed to dominate.”

When Professor Per H. Jensen uses the comparison between Sweden and Denmark as the starting point for his analysis, it turns out the differences go beyond retirement systems:

- People in Sweden live longer and are healthier
- Working environment regulations are more comprehensive in Sweden than in Denmark.
- The level of education among 55 to 64 year olds is higher in Sweden than in Denmark.
- There is more flexibility in Sweden when it comes to accommodating vulnerable groups of people into the labour market
- Dismissal protection is far weaker in Denmark than in Sweden, where the principle of last in, first out is largely the rule. This protects older workers and people with seniority. A survey asking whether they find it hard or easy to fire people showed 59 percent of Swedish employers find it hard or very hard, while in Denmark 26.5 percent of employers feel it is hard or very hard to fire people.
- Structural economic issues play a part too. While Danish businesses are on average small, in Sweden they are mainly large.

Which factors drive development?

Beyond the factors mentioned above, Professor Per H. Jensen also thinks employers' attitudes are enormously important, along with the general public debate:

“If employers say ‘we cannot do this without you, we need your experience and your social skills,’ and if they can also adapt people's working conditions, I believe more people will stay on,” said Per H. Jensen. Using the introduction of the early retirement scheme as an example, he illustrated the importance of social debate:

“When the early retirement scheme was introduced in Denmark in 1979 older people were considered to be altruistic if they retired. At that time youth unemployment was high. When the older workers retired they were doing society a favour, people said, because it would leave jobs open for younger people. Today the public debate has changed: early retirement is damaging to society. It is hard to prove but I am sure these kinds of debates do have an impact on whether people retire early or late,” said Professor Jensen.

He also underlined that these processes will take time:

The way people act does not suddenly change as a result of some adjustments being done here and there.

Perhaps it is also not necessary to put so much effort into keeping people in work, he suggested, because when people's health improves and the level of education increases, then people do stay in work for longer.

So there is no simple answer to the question of what influences the way seniors act. What we need is a many-faceted effort, Professor Per H. Jensen concluded.

High road or low road ?

There are others who paint a similarly many-faceted picture. In conclusion to her talk, Ingrid Esser, researcher at the Swedish Institute for Social Research at Stockholm University, said that economic incentives tend to influence the timing of people's retirement much more in countries with less generous welfare states. In the Nordic countries the picture is far more complex.

Non-economic issues play a very important role, especially people's health. But at which stage people choose to retire will depend on their entire working life, said Ingrid Esser. Gender, education and social class all play a crucial part, and not least our investments in human capital and the organisation of the workplace. A high working life quality creates a high life quality.

“The Nordic countries are at a crossroads. Do we take the low road or the high road to higher employment; do you only create more low-salaried jobs with less control over working conditions and lower working life qualities, or do you go for the high road with demands for skills and good working conditions. This has a major effect on job motivation and retirement,” said Ingrid Esser from Stockholm University.



Applause as Norwegian Government's gender equality action plan is presented in Norway. To the left: Hege Skjeie, to the right Minister of Equality Inge Marta Thorkildsen

How to increase equality in Norway

From next year Norway increases parental leave to 49 weeks. Yet months of daddy leave and nursery places for all children do not automatically make for a less gender segregated labour market nor does it make the male dominance in top jobs disappear, warns Professor Hege Skjeie, who has been heading the largest report on equality in Norway so far.

NEWS

11.10.2012

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

When Norway debates gender equality people in other countries often listen keenly. Several Norwegian equality measures have spread across the borders. But the situation is not so rosy as it might appear in the celebratory speeches:

"We often hear we're living in the country of gender equality. And the history of equality has many examples of Norwegian

innovation. The world's first equality ombud, the world's first gender equal government, the partnership law, daddy leave and female quotas in boardrooms," said Hege Skjeie when she presented the report 'Policy for Gender Equality'.

“Yet in important social institutions the distance between gender equality as a value to be highlighted and gender equality in practice is still large.”

Gender segregated labour marked

Norway still has a gender segregated labour market with more than 80 percent female representation in many occupations like pre-school teacher, nurse and secretary, while other jobs like builder, mechanic and chauffeur are held nearly exclusively by men.

Three in four bosses are still men. Out of ten sectors, from defence and the economic sector to culture and education, only two fall marginally within the aim of having at least 40 percent of each gender as leaders.

The imbalance between the sexes manifests itself in two ways - partly in the development of female and male jobs, partly in the fact that women are paid less than men for doing the same job.

But today's equality politics must address more than gender issues. People are discriminated against for other reasons, like ethnicity, sexual preference, age and disabilities. The report refers to studies from the USA which show black women's life situations can be more marginalised than what could be expected if you only looked at gender and ethnicity.

The man is not always more powerful

Yet the report also shows that men are not always more powerful than women: a white, Norwegian middle class woman is more powerful in most situations than a male asylum seeker who has no access to the labour market.

So which are the measures the report recommends in order to increase equality?

- The report recommends the establishment of a new directorate for equality. Today there are no checks to see whether the equality targets are actually being met.
- The report also recommends a tri-partite equality agreement between the government and the social partners. The parties would negotiate equality goals and businesses willing to sign the deal would get access to funding, similar to what is being done through the agreement on an including working life.

One of the report's most innovative statements is that in order to reduce gender segregation in the labour market, there must be measures in place to target people already at the stage when they are choosing their education. That is why the report recommends the introduction of a special equality grant. Those who choose to study for non-traditional occupations should have one third of their student loan subsidised. This would apply for boys and girls.

In Norway 85,000 out of 228,000 students in upper secondary education attend courses where one gender makes up 80 percent of all students. 17,000 students would have to change courses for that representation to climb above 20 percent across all courses. This also gives an indication of how many equality grants would be needed. The cost is estimated at 100 million kroner (€13.5m) and represents no more than a small percentage of what the report recommends should be set aside to promote equality.

“We haven't looked into whether subsidising student loans with 30 percent is enough to make students switch studies,” says Hege Skjeie. Subsidising one single student would cost 8,000 kroner (€1,080) a year for upper secondary education and nearly 17,000 kroner (€2,290) a year for higher education.

Unemployment benefit cuts undermine the Danish model

Danish trade unions warn cuts to unemployment benefits are undermining the Danish labour market model.

NEWS

08.10.2012

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

The Danish word "torsk" (cod) can mean both a fish and a particularly stupid person. So it was no coincidence that cod was on the menu when Danish trade unions set a table for Denmark's 179 members of parliament in front of the Danish Folketing [parliament] as it opened after the summer recess as tradition has it on the first Tuesday of October.

The trade unions are angry with the government. Unusually angry. The cod stunt, newspaper opinion pieces and newspaper adverts have all been part of a major media offensive from the trade union representing public sector employees with some 500.000 members, protesting against the fact that from January 2013 unemployed people will only be allowed to collect unemployment benefits for two years, compared to four years today. With that reduction, the Social Democrat-led government undermines the entire Danish labour market model, warned trade union leaders in a joint opinion piece ahead of the opening of parliament.

Safety on thin ice

The Danish model leaves a relatively large part of labour market policies to the social partners, and the model rests on the fact that the partners' agree workers can be dismissed relatively easily as long as they can emerge economically safe when they lose their job. The unions argue a shorter unemployment benefit period means that safety is on thin ice, and they threaten they will demand an introduction of longer warning periods for redundancies.

The unions are not swayed by the fact that the government has pledged 330m Danish kroner (€44.2m) for an emergency package which aims to find jobs for those who are about to lose their right to unemployment benefits. They don't believe it will be possible to find jobs to everyone who is affected. Unions have set as a minimum demand that government must reduce from one year to six months the period people must work before again having earned the right to receive unemployment benefits.

This demand is echoed by the Red-Green Alliance (Enhedslisten), which traditionally supports the government in parliament, and by the government coalition partner the Socialist People's Party (SF), while coalition partner the Danish Social-Liberal Party is completely opposed to the reduction in unemployment benefits. This means Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt faces a difficult task when she must negotiate the 2013 budget. She did not mention unemployment benefits at all during her opening speech in parliament and chose to focus on outlining a school reform which aims to secure a better education for Danish children and youth.

Nordic worry over EU internal market package

The European Commission's proposal for how to apply the EU directive on the posting of workers must not limit our powers to control foreign companies! That was the unified message from government officials, authority representatives, the social partners and researchers from all Nordic countries when they met in Oslo to discuss how to deal with what remains of the so-called internal market package.

NEWS

08.10.2012

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG, EDITOR EU & ARBETSRÄTT

'The internal market package' which was introduced in March consisted of two parts:

- partly a proposed directive on how the existing directive on the posting of workers should be implemented ("the Enforcement Directive")
- partly the so-called Monti II regulation, on the right to take industrial action in the context of the freedom of establishment and the free movement of services. The week before the Oslo seminar only the first part remained. The Commission had decided to withdraw the Monti II regulation.

And it really was an impossible regulation, neither appropriate nor politically realistic, professor Niklas Bruun told the seminar. But there is still a problem which remains to be solved.

EU already limits the right to strike

With its judgments in the Laval and Viking Line cases, the Court of Justice of the European Union has already begun to regulate the right to strike. The question is not, therefore, whether this should be regulated on an EU level but whether only the Court of Justice should be responsible for setting out the norms for this, Bruun pointed out. He launched the idea that perhaps the Nordic countries could approach the Commission with a better proposal which could rectify the current imbalance where the right to strike in reality has become secondary to the EU's economic freedoms.

But what will then happen to the Enforcement Directive - will it be implemented at all or will it too end up in the paper bin? The two proposals were after all presented as one packet where both were considered necessary.

"Yes, there will be a directive, but it will probably be less comprehensive than what the Commission initially proposed," said Stig Hansen Nørgaard from Denmark's Ministry of Employment, who spoke about possible scenarios for the contin-

ued political process. There is support in the EU Council for the idea that some rules are needed, but many parts of the proposal remain contentious.

Genuine and non-genuine postings

One issue being debated in the EU Council is rules to help member states differentiate between 'genuine' and 'non-genuine' postings - an issue also discussed at the Oslo seminar. What will the legal consequences be for workers and their employers if the host country discovers that the employer is nothing but a mailbox company with no substantial activity in the country where it is established, and that the rules for the posting of workers as a result don't apply at all? In these cases workers might not be covered by the host country's labour law rules, but it is not possible to get a clear answer to what rules would apply instead, the seminar concluded.

The proposed directive is very clear, however, when it comes to its power to limit the demands a host country can put on foreign employers in order to control that they fulfil their obligations in that country. The proposal contains a list of control measures which member states may "only" use. The list is based on cases where the EU Court of Justice has decided whether different demands put forward by some member states are compatible with the free movement of services.

Can countries have their own control measures?

In the EU Council there is a split between governments which want the rules to be predictable for companies and therefore think the list is a good idea, and governments which argue that member states must be allowed, just as they are today, to design their own control measures. The Court of Justice will then decide in each individual case whether these measures are compatible with EU law. Finland is one of those countries.

"We don't believe the EU Court of Justice has scrutinised all possible control situations and measures. EU countries

should not limit their chance to control the posting of workers because we do not know what the future world will look like, and our Riksdag [parliament] does not accept a weakening of the control mandate,” said Anne Vänskä from Finland’s Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

If you want to prevent this, it is not enough to simply erase the word ‘only’, said Professor Jonas Malmberg.

“I fear the EU Court of Justice would still interpret the directive to allow only the control measures which are mentioned in it, in the same way as it interpreted the existing directive on the posting of workers as a maximum directive.”

If you want to make sure this is not going to be the case, you have to write it into the directive, argued Malmberg.

It was clear that all participants at the seminar shared the fear that the directive would limit rather than strengthen the control mechanisms which the Nordic countries already have. As expected there was more contention surrounding the proposal that construction firms using foreign subcontractors in certain cases should be made to pay the wages of the subcontractors’ workers.

Unhealthy competition in the construction trade

Tapio Kari from the Confederation of Finnish Construction Industries described the comprehensive control system which Finland has developed to stop unhealthy competition in the construction trade.

“We have developed a system which gives the authorities the opportunity to catch those who break the law. If they don’t do it, one lone company can’t do it. We don’t want to take responsibility for companies which break the law,” he said. In other words, employers in the construction industry do not want the directive’s rule on joint and several liability.

Yet for the Norwegians, who already have considerably stricter rules on joint and several liability, the proposal is too weak, said Professor Stein Evju.

Swedish trade unions are positive to the proposal, explained Lena Maier Söderberg from Saco - the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations.

“We don’t have a similar system, so for us this would be a step forward. You could wish the proposal was even more far-reaching, for sure, but we are worried the rules on joint and several liability will disappear altogether from the directive if you complain too much about them. So we try to put forward constructive criticism.”

It will be some time before we see how much of the original proposal is left after it has been through the EU law-making machinery. The European Parliament does not plan to look at it until May next year, after which the EU Council will consider the Parliament’s proposed amendments. Yet judging from the Parliament’s earlier position on questions relat-

ing to the posting of workers, one could expect tough negotiations on the Enforcement Directive.

The Oslo seminar was jointly organised by the newsletter EU & arbetsrätt and the Nordic Council of Ministers’ Industrial Relations Committee.