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Renewed drive to fight work-related crime in the Nordics

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Theme: The green transition



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From modest environmental goals to the world's most sustainable region

23 March marked 60 years since the signing of the Helsinki Treaty in 1950. It came into force on 1 July that year and saw amongst other things the creation of the Nordic Council of Ministers – the Nordic governments' cooperation body.

EDITORIAL

25.03.2022

BY BJÖRN LINDAHL, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Ten years earlier, the Nordic Council was created, where Nordic parliamentarians cooperate. It is always interesting to read the original document, but what is *not* written down is often the most interesting. The Helsinki Treaty does not mention the climate, pandemics or gender equality at all. The environment comes up in three of the 70 articles:

- The parties shall, to the greatest extent possible, place the environmental interest of other parties on equal footing with their own.
- The parties shall seek to harmonise their standards relating to pollution, the use of toxic substances and other damaging effects on the environment.
- The parties shall seek to co-ordinate matters relating to the allocation of nature reserves and recreational areas, and to protective initiatives and other measures for the conservation of flora and fauna.

These three points appear modest compared to the Nordic Council of Ministers' strategy for making the Nordic region the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030.

New terms

Terms like “sustainability”, “carbon neutral”, “circular” and “biobased economy” did not exist in the vocabulary of those who negotiated the Helsinki Treaty, but they are all mentioned at the top of the vision for a green Nordic region, which today informs the Nordic cooperation in this area.

It also took some time before environmental issues were considered important enough to warrant a separate minister for the environment. Norway was first in 1974, followed by Sweden and Denmark in 1987 and 1988. Finland got theirs in 1991 while Iceland only got their first environment minister in 1999.

The Nordic countries are rightly proud of how far they have come in their work for the environment. Yet there are still large differences between the countries.

While electric cars made up 2% of total sales in the USA in 2020 and 10% on average in Europe, in Norway they made up 75%, Iceland 45%, Sweden 32%, Finland 18% and Denmark 16%, according to Nordregio's report State of the Nordic Region, published earlier this week.

What will happen in 60 years?

60 years is a long period of time. How will the Nordic countries look if we could see that far into the future? Did the countries really become carbon neutral in 2045 as promised? What are the watchwords in 2082?

In this edition of the Nordic Labour Journal, we take a look at the green transition. But we also write about work-related crime, platform work and the male role in Denmark and Sweden. We hope these are issues that will interest our readers, even though none of these words were mentioned in the Helsinki Treaty either.

And finally, we write about Iceland's First Lady Eliza Reid.

“It is safe to say that no First Lady in Iceland has been as active in social discussions as Reid has been,” writes our colleague in Iceland, Hallgrímur Indriðason.



Is the green transition going too fast?

All the Nordic countries agree that a green transition is needed in order to stop a climate catastrophe. But should the transition also do more than reduce CO₂ emissions?

ANALYSIS

25.03.2022

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

The political message could have been: In order to stop a climate catastrophe we must accept a lower living standard. We must accelerate the political processes to avoid various stakeholders dragging their feet over the necessary investments.

But when Nordic gender equality ministers held a hybrid meeting in New York – some online, many in person – they quickly agreed that the green transition should be more than green:

- It must also be socially fair
- New jobs must be decent
- Women, gays and other genders must be heard

- Indigenous people must also be taken into consideration

Within the EU, the first point is the top priority. Eastern European countries are particularly sceptical. Coal is still a major employer and many remember the 2008 financial crisis well when workers were left with the bill, as you can read in our report from the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Environment and gender

Linking gender equality issues to the green transition is an exercise that so far mainly has been promoted in the Nordic region. The motivation given goes like this:

Since a majority of those who have graduated in science, technology and mathematics are men, they also dominate the most important sectors in the green economy.

"This means that the new solutions, jobs and investments demanded by the transition to a low-carbon society risk favouring men, missing out on the vital perspectives and competencies of women, who have a comparatively greater interest in sustainability" is the message in *How climate policies impact gender and vice versa in the Nordic countries*.

It is easy to agree that better decisions are made if more groups of people are allowed to take part in the process. If not you might end up like Norway, where the supreme court decided that Europe's largest onshore wind power plant, on the Fosen peninsula north of Trondheim, had been constructed illegally. Indigenous Sami reindeer herders are now demanding the turbines be dismantled. We describe what has happened here.

As long as the politicians' main aim was economic growth, it was easy to motivate voters. Increased growth leads to higher living standards. When the aim is a fossil-free society, the best-case scenario is that we avoid climate change, natural catastrophes and disease spreading because of a warmer climate. But the transition does not come without cost.

Energy needed to produce energy

The energy industry sometimes tries to measure how much energy you must use in relation to how much energy you get – known as Energy Return on Energy Invested (EROEI).

The concept is controversial since it is almost impossible to include all aspects, but there is no doubt that the extraction of oil and natural gas, and especially nuclear power, produces a lot of energy in relation to what is used.

It is easy to understand that wind power is energy hungry if you know that one 1.5 MW capacity wind turbine uses a foundation made from 40 tonnes of steel and 600 tonnes of concrete. The tower needs another 150 tonnes of steel.

The generator needs nine tonnes of copper and is surrounded by 45 tonnes of steel, while the rotor blades are made from 15 tonnes of carbon fibre. All this must be transported and installed in areas that are as far away from people as possible – or out at sea.

Despite all this, the cost of wind and solar has fallen dramatically. It has fallen by 80% for solar – from 40 cents per kWh in 2010 to seven cents in 2019. The cost of wind power has fallen by 40% in the same period, from 9 cents per kWh to 5 cents.

"Most investors believe this is due to the fact that the learning curve has been so positive, which has made costs fall as the quantity of installed capacity increases and technology im-

proves," writes energy consultancy firm Goehring & Rozencwajg, from whom we also got the above calculations.

According to the consultancy firm's own analysis, there are two other important reasons behind the fall in costs – oil prices have fallen and interest rates have been at a record low.

As oil has reached more than 100 USD a barrel and natural gas is worth 300 USD in barrels of oil equivalents, the price of fossil energy will also drive up the price of wind and solar energy. At the same time, central banks have started increasing their base rates to fight inflation, which is beginning to be an acute problem.

The war's impact

One of the reasons is that Russia and Ukraine are among the world's largest wheat producers. Because of the war, the wheat price is already at an all-time high on the commodity exchanges.

In the early days of the Russian invasion, there were fears Russia would stop the flow of natural gas to Europe. Russian gas represents 35% of EU natural gas imports.

As Nato coordinates the West's reaction to the war in Ukraine and the EU coordinates politics, the International Energy Agency, IEA, coordinates the energy policy. The IEA was founded in reaction to the first oil crisis in 1973. All the 31 member states have pledged to have strategic oil reserves and refined products enough for 90 days' consumption.

The IEA already has a ten-point plan for how a sudden loss (2.7 million barrels of oil a day) should be handled. Reading this now gives you a sense of déjà vu after two years of a pandemic:

- When possible, work from home three days a week
- Avoid business travel
- Car-free Sundays in major cities
- Lower motorway speeds by 10 km/h
- Reduce the price of public transport, promote bicycle use and other micro transport

One of the main takeaways from the first oil crisis was that petrol rationing did not work well. Rather than having millions of cars driving around on half a tank, people topped up their cars which led to a big demand for petrol.

Perhaps the war in Ukraine will have as large consequences as the first oil crisis. This meant new North Sea and Alaska discoveries were developed at a breakneck speed, often at the expense of safety and the environment.

10 years on much stays the same

Before I became editor-in-chief for the Nordic Labour Journal, I covered oil and energy for many years for several

Nordic media. In 2012 I travelled to Rotterdam, and later wrote:

“After attending a conference on biofuels in Rotterdam and visiting Neste Oil’s bio-refinery outside of the city, it struck me: Nothing is going to change. The green society will look just like the one that is based on fossil energy. There will be the same large refineries and power lines, and cars will look the same even if they run on electricity.

“High above us, the planes will keep flying, only now running on aviation fuel made from algae. Many who had hoped energy issues would lead to a softer, greener and less consumer-driven society, might feel let down.”

Ten years later and a lot of this has turned out to be true. The environmental policies are based on the assumption that we will be able to continue to increase our energy consumption and that green targets can be met with technical solutions.

Instead of NExBTL, as Neste called their product when I visited Rotterdam, a new green fuel is now being launched in Denmark using so-called power-to-X-technology (you can read about it here). But the cost of the new fuels is still much higher than for fossil fuels.

If we are moving towards a time of higher inflation, like after the first oil crisis in the 70s, the enormous transformation of our energy systems from fossil to green energy risks an upwards spiralling of costs, as everyone is chasing the same solutions.

Instead of relying on building ever higher and larger wind turbines (this autumn Vesta will construct a wind turbine that is as tall as the Eiffel tower), we should pay more attention to how we can cut our consumption.

Men consume more

According to *The State of the Nordic Region 2022*, 62% of all the GHG emissions in Denmark can be attributed to household consumption. As the aforementioned study on climate policies explains:

“Sex-disaggregated data show that men generally have a larger carbon footprint than women. Male consumption in mobility and food, for example, tends toward car-based transport and a meat-based diet, while women tend toward public transport and walking, and vegetarian or low-meat diets.”

It is high time that we also focus on how we can change our societies so that they really become greener and becomes less consumer-driven. Like the Finnish city Lahti shows, it is also important to continue the work also after moving on from having the title Green Capital of Europe.



The hole that must be filled: the energy crisis and EU's green transition

There had never been so much money for the green transition in Europe as there was in February 2022. But then Russia started its war against Ukraine. Europe answered by cutting the import of gas and other fossil fuels from Russia. How will this impact on the green transition? Will it speed up or must someone pull the emergency brake? The answer might be both.

THEME

25.03.2022

TEXT: BENGT ROLFER AND GUNHILD WALLIN, PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

During the first months of 2022, the EU's plans for the green transition seemed to be mostly in place. The EU initiative The Green Deal, the new Climate Law and the post-corona pandemic recovery fund had all been agreed, all focusing on creating a more environmentally friendly society.

But then Russia invaded Ukraine, and the opportunities for the green transition suddenly changed. The need to free EU countries from their dependence on Russian gas became an urgent and important issue in all EU member states.

Important milestones for a green transition

We will return to how the Ukraine war might impact on the ambitious aim of a carbon-neutral EU by 2050, and the interim target of cutting emissions by 55% by 2030. But let us first rewind and remind ourselves about a few milestones on the road to a green transition.

In December 2019, the EU Commission presented The Green Deal – a strategy to reach ambitious climate targets and to introduce major measures for a just transition. Soon after, the pandemic broke out and more EU funds were needed for a

recovery fund which also focused on the need for a green and just transition.

A historic deal was reached in the spring of 2021, when the European Council, the EU Commission and the European Parliament agreed on the so-called Climate Law. This is the framework for creating concrete legislation in different areas. To a large degree, this is about improving and expanding the Emissions Trading System (ETS).

The labour market is the key to the green transition

The green transition will have major consequences for the European labour market. The labour market is the key to its success, according to Swedish MP Jytte Guteland, who was the parliament's main negotiator on the Climate Law.



Jytte Guteland was the EU Parliament's main negotiator on the Climate Law. Photo: Anders Löwdin.

“We must make sure we have the right training and skills in the sectors that are facing changes. We must also create good working conditions in the new jobs so that people are willing to carry out the transition.

“If we are too slow or do not set out our path clearly enough, we risk losing small and medium-sized companies in particular. The large car manufacturers, for instance, already have plans to go electric and build new models, but for subcontractors, this might become a problem,” she says.

As the green transition was presented, the Just Transition Fund was also launched. Its aim is to make the workforce more positive to make the change. Jytte Guteland says the idea behind the fund is reminiscent of how Sweden's social security system is constructed.

“The fund aims to give incentives to both companies and wage earners to make changes. They will be offered the right training for the new jobs and an opportunity to get by if their jobs disappear. A just transition is close to our heart as a group. We will now look into how to improve this fund,” says Jytte Guteland.

Leave no one behind in the climate fight

The EU Commission also considers a fair transition to be a very important issue. This was made clear by Estonian Commissioner Kadri Simson in a speech to the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow last November.

“If the only livelihood you or generations of your family have ever had is based on fossil fuels, then the transition could be a rather frightening prospect. We believe that the just transition is a key issue of the climate fight: we must leave no one behind. We will mobilise up to 75 billion euros to help regions affected by the coal exit,” said Kadri Simson.



Kadri Simons from Estonia is the EU Commissioner for Energy. Photo: EU Parliament.

At the same time, businesses in several sectors have already taken the issue into their own hands and started a transition to a fossil-free future because it is obvious to them that this is where the new business opportunities lie.

Businesses increasingly eager

This is something Nils Torvalds has taken note of. Since 2010 he has been an MEP for the Swedish People's Party, one of five government parties in Finland. He sits on the EU Parliament's Committee on the Environment and has an important role as a climate negotiator for the liberal Renew group.



Albert Hjelmborn, Director at Brussels Office of the Swedish Trade Unions.

He adds that this is in marked contrast to how EU leaders handled the 2008 financial crisis.

“Back then, the EU troika demanded savings through cuts to wages and budget deficits. The result was mass unemployment which we still see the effects from. This time we see an opposite approach, with an emphasis on keeping companies afloat because people need to keep their jobs.

“They have even been prepared to lend money for this. It is a completely different crisis management policy and something that was unimaginable in 2008,” says Hjelmborn.

Robert Renée Hansen, head of the Brussels office for the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions, notes that not everyone is as positive about the green transition as we are in the Nordics, however.

“Considering what industry lobbyists would tell me just over ten years ago, a lot has changed. They used to tell us to take it easy, but now businesses often signal for us to ‘go on, we are ready.’”

So they want more intervention?

“Yes, and that is super interesting. They see that the faster we progress, the better their chances of competing on the global market.”

Nils Torvalds therefore believes the labour market's transition will be less painful than what has been the case for the transport and construction industries. When it comes to the heating of houses, he envisages particularly difficult problems. Nevertheless, he believes the Nordic countries have a head start compared to the rest of the EU.

“Both Sweden and Finland have remote heating systems, which means it is easy to stop using fossil fuel. But visit a house in Brussels or anywhere in Central Europe and you find individual boilers in each flat. These countries face an enormous challenge phasing out coal and gas as a heating source.”

Here too a “fund solution” is being debated. The “social climate fund” is aimed at the construction and transport sectors.

Union support for EU's new attitude to transition

Trade unions have welcomed the green transition and the measures are viewed as a welcome change to the EU institutions' crisis management.

“There has never been more money in the EU coffers to support the green transition. The Just Transition Fund is a good example of how to distribute EU resources to regions that will struggle the most to manage the transition,” says Carl-



“Our colleagues especially in Central and Eastern Europe are far more sceptical to the green transition process than we are, and also have less trust in authorities. They have a different history and are more sceptical to the state – for good reasons.

“The financial crisis is fresh in their minds, for instance, when the workers were left with the bill. So there is a fear among trade unions that the same thing will happen to the cost of the green transition. The Polish trade union move-

ment lacks trust, and is against the EU's climate measures," he says.

The war means more desire for quick change

How will Russia's war in Ukraine influence the EU's work towards a green transition? The EU Commission was quick to issue a plan for reducing the import of Russian gas by two thirds as early as this year, before getting rid of the dependence on Russian fossil fuel altogether by 2030.

"We have been far too dependent on Russia, but we will now go for renewable energy that is clean, cheap and ours, and it will also create new jobs here in Europe," the EU Commission's First Vice President Frans Timmermans told a press conference at the EU Parliament in Strasbourg on 8 March this year, as the so-called Repower strategy was presented.



The EU Commission's First Vice President Frans Timmermans has also had close contact with Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg after Russia invaded Ukraine. Photo: Nato.

The strategy is partly built on increasing investments in major solar and wind power projects and partly on replacing Russian gas with gas from elsewhere during a transition period. There is talk about pausing the decommissioning of coal and nuclear power for a while. The EU Commission also encourages citizens to contribute by saving energy.

The Commissioner for Energy Kadri Simson told the same press conference that the application process for building wind power plants must be accelerated. She therefore announced a proposal for member states to speed up authorisations. Today it could take seven years just to get permission to start construction, she pointed out.

Different expectations among MEPs

So what do EU parliamentarians think about the war's impact on the green transition?

"The war forces us to act faster. But it can also mean that Polish coal mine workers can keep their jobs for a while longer," says Nils Torvalds.

"It can go both ways," says Jytte Gutenland, but adds that the war might have improved the awareness of what is needed.

"The same happened at the beginning of the pandemic when people said it will impact on our ambitious climate measures. But we managed to pass them. We underestimated how much insight people had. We might be in a similar situation now. The crisis motivation could become a drive for a climate transition. Many of those who did not listen before now see that they do not wish to contribute to Putin's war chest."

Other MEPs we speak to have different levels of expectations. Malin Björk from the Left Party in Sweden fears many countries will now finance their armies instead, and uses Germany as an example.

"Germany is pouring 100 billion euro into defence. They should go for renewables instead. That might be the best way of stopping Putin. The risk is that there is not enough focus on renewables," she says.

The Swedish Moderates want to go for nuclear power.



"What we need now is great investment in both defence and the green transition. If the EU is to become less dependent on Russian gas, we have to pay. We also need to look at the alternatives and stop the decommissioning of nuclear power," says Moderate Tomas Tobé.

Danish Social Democrat Marianne Vind disagrees and says:

"We want to be free from Russian gas and go for alternative energies like solar, wind and hydro. We can discuss the be or not to be of nuclear power as much as we like. I hope we can avoid it. It is an expensive solution."



Danish government green flights plan causes turbulence

The Danish government has promised that the first carbon neutral domestic flights will operate from 2025 and that all domestic flights will be carbon neutral from 2030. Industry giants will start large-scale production of green aviation fuel even sooner. All good but not enough, says environment think-tank.

THEME

25.03.2022

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: SAS

In just a few years, air passengers will be able to fly without “flight shame” between domestic destinations like Copenhagen and Aalborg. By then, domestic flights will use so-called e-fuel which does not impact on the environment. This is a high profile political goal for the Danish government.

“Danes will be able to make green domestic flights as early as 2025. And no later than 2030 all domestic flights should be green,” said the Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen (Social Democrats) in her latest televised New Year’s speech.

An ambitious goal

The promise to the Danish people came just weeks after the government had presented a proposal for the development of green fuel for aircraft, ships and trucks. It set aside 1.25 billion kroner (€168m) for the development of so-called power-to-X-fuel. Because a green fuel for large-scale use in aviation must first be developed and certified.

So there is not much time for the Prime Minister to make good on her New Year's promise. Still, the Dansk Luftfart trade union, Copenhagen Airports (CPH) and major Danish industries immediately backed her ambition.

CPH and Luftfartens Klimapartnerskab (the aviation industry's climate partnership) already had a plan for a green transition of the aviation industry but welcomed the government's plan for green domestic flights by 2030.

"This is a good, ambitious and realistic aim which the trade supports. But new goals also means we need new approaches and solutions for the transition of the aviation industry, and we look forward to cooperating on this," said Copenhagen Airports CEO Thomas Woldbye.



Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen meets the aviation industry and media at Kastrup. Photo: smk.dk

He had just been meeting the Prime Minister and leaders from the government's supporting parties – the Socialist People's Party and the Red-Green Alliance – to discuss how the aviation industry can turn domestic flights 100% green by 2030.

The industry leads the way

The goal might be reached even sooner. Danish industry and transport giants believe it is possible to develop and produce Danish green aviation fuel already by 2025, and that the country's total aviation fuel needs could come from green alternatives as early as 2027 – three years before the government's ambitious goal.

This is what the Green Fuels for Denmark partnership – a group of Danish companies – announced in the wake of the

Prime Minister's announcement. They already had plans for the production of green aviation fuel, and have now brought forward the startup for Danish production.

"This will be a technological challenge which we in Green Fuels Denmark are ready to take on so that we can secure Denmark's green leadership in coming decades and push for a green breakthrough for the transition of the aviation industry globally," said Mads Nipper from the energy company Ørsted.

Green Fuels for Denmark are made up of SAS, CPH, the shipping companies A.P. Møller-Mærsk and DFDS, transport giant DSV and Ørsted. The Danish state is the majority owner in Ørsted, which aims to become a world leader in offshore wind power and also among the first in the world to produce green fuel for planes and vessels based on electricity from offshore wind turbines, using power-to-X technology.

Power-to-X

Green aviation fuel is nothing new. But so far, large-scale commercial production at a competitive price using technology that makes it suitable for plane engines has not been possible, explains Marc Normann, senior market director at the consultancy firm COWI, an advisor to Green Fuels for Denmark.

"We need to find new ways of developing green aviation fuel, which is made up of hydrogen and carbon. To create green aviation fuel we must spend the coming years transforming solar and wind energy into hydrogen using electrolysis, and then add CO₂ made from biomass and use a chemical process to turn this into green aviation fuel. The method is known as power-to-X," he says.

Elsewhere, work is also being done to develop electric planes with engines run on batteries. Hydrogen planes are also being developed, eliminating the need for aviation fuel altogether.

Electric and hydrogen planes might be available for short-distance flights in the future, on domestic routes in Denmark for instance, but they will not be able to fly long-distance, believes Marc Normann.

"Electricity is preferable as an energy source and fuel in the transport sector too, because the production of green electricity has the lowest energy loss. But it will take far too long before battery technology is ready for aviation. This means we cannot have a green transport sector without also developing green fuel for planes and long-distance shipping, where electricity cannot be used."

More expensive to fly

The green think-tank Concito has called the Danish government's aim for green domestic flights "a good signal", but says more is needed to reduce aviation emissions. It is necessary to develop electric planes and prioritise the electrifica-

tion of all sectors, argues the think-tank, whose chair is the former Danish EU environment commissioner Connie Hedegaard.

Concito also recommends introducing a passenger fee that reflects the actual climate impact from flying. This would reduce the demand for flights and emissions would fall while the money raised could be used for the necessary development of green aviation fuel.

Researchers from the Technical University of Denmark DTU and representatives from Danish aviation agree that air passengers should be made to pay more and that it will be expensive to develop the technology.

They recently met to discuss how to make sure the first 100% green Danish domestic route can open no later than 2025, and concluded that massive Danish research into power-to-X technology, as well as increased solar and wind energy production, is going to be needed.



Finnish EU Green Capital kept the transition going

Many cities are fighting for the honour of becoming the European Green Capital. In Lahti, which held the title in 2021, the environmental work and green projects continue apace.

THEME

25.03.2022

TEXT: BENGT ÖSTLING, PHOTO: CATA PORTIN

A circular economy was one of the main themes, and this is still evident in many parts of the city. Procurement and events were made sustainable. The mayor switched his official car for an official bicycle.



A series of beers called “Wasted Potential” was launched – based on nature’s own waste products. Even the city’s legislature embraced ecology and sustainability in what it preached and what it did.

Environmental issues are also important for the Nordic’s largest malt producer, Viking Malt. It started the construction of a new factory in Lahti during the Green Capital year.

Lahti, in the Päijät-Häme region just over an hour’s drive north of Helsinki, is an industrial city that suffered severely from the early 1990 financial downturn. Eastward exports disappeared with the fall of the Soviet Union. What remained were environmental problems. The city’s lakes were polluted by factories and housing.

It pays to be clean

The city has been dependent on wood, furniture and metal industries. The areas surrounding Lahti are considered crucial to Finnish agriculture and grain production.

Today, cleantech is an increasingly important branch of the city’s business community. Lahti aims to be carbon neutral earlier than any other Finnish city. CNN recently named Lahti as one of the world’s most interesting tourist destinations.

Being European Green Capital comes with responsibilities. Stockholm, Oslo and Copenhagen have all held the title in the past, but Lahti was the smallest and northernmost green capital ever.

The city aimed to show other Finnish cities and the wider world how the green transition could be put into practice. It was done with cooperation from the university, companies and not least the citizens themselves.

Sustainable foodstuffs sector

Many circular economy success stories are to be found in the foodstuffs sector and the so-called grain cluster in the Lahti region.

Viking Malt is one such company. It malts grain and annually delivers some 600,000 tonnes of malt to breweries and distilleries in Northern Europe and the rest of the world.



Viking Malt produces malt in Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Poland and Lithuania. The company has an annual turnover of around €250m and employs some 240 people.

The Swedish agricultural cooperative Lantmännen owns 37.5% of the company and the rest is owned by the Finnish family business Polttimo, which started out as a distillery.

Big becomes bigger

Viking Malt is the biggest malt producer in the Baltic region. It is about to become bigger when a new malting house opens in 2023.

“Our supply is mainly based on local production,” explains sourcing manager Christian Tallskog at Viking Malt in Lahti. Most of the grain is grown locally and in Southern Finland.



The most common grains are barley, wheat and rye. Viking Malt also produces various fava bean-based food ingredients.

The new factory in Lahti is a strategic and significant investment of around €90m and is part of Viking Malt's long-term plan.

"This is big for a company of our size, but it is also one of the largest investments in the whole of Lahti in recent years," says Christian Tallskog.

The production capacity will be around 85,000 tonnes a year. The annual capacity of the current factory is 75,000 tonnes a year.

Went green, increased production

So their production will increase. Since this will be a new and innovative factory with new technology, the aim is also to increase efficiency and to become greener, points out Tallskog.

"Sustainability is important to us, it is part of our CSR agenda. We want to produce sustainably. We are a family business and our current owners are the fifth generation. We want to preserve the environment for future generations too."

Viking Malt aims to reduce the amount of energy it uses in order to cut the use of fossil fuels.

"In the longer term we also aim to reduce the amount of water we use," says Christian Tallskog. This will happen without

compromising the process, customers' demand for quality or the quality of the crop. Last year, Viking Malt also stopped using coal as an energy source.

New types of grain, lower emissions

The company's CSR reports detail how CO₂ emissions can be cut by using new types of grain.

"We are constantly working on developing new types with greater yield and better growth properties. Higher yields generally mean lower CO₂ emissions per produced tonne of grain," says Christian Tallskog.

Viking Malt is also a partner in the regenerative farming online training championed by the Baltic Sea Action Group (BSAG) and Reaktor. The company believes it can influence the Baltic Sea environment through sustainable agriculture and has seen that both suppliers and Finnish farmers are engaging.

Foodstuff crisis after the war in Ukraine?

Right now, the crisis in Ukraine also has an impact on Viking Malt's operations when it comes to procurement and sales.

"The war has been a great shock of course. Viking Malt has no employees in Russia. There are customers in both Ukraine and Russia but none are under any sanctions."

At the moment, Viking Malt does not accept any new orders from Russia but respect their legal obligations, according to Christian Tallskog.

Because of the economic situation in Russia, there is not much which can be delivered in practical terms. This can affect the company's factory in Lahti.

In terms of procurement, Viking Malt is not directly hit. But the price of grain has risen a lot in all markets since the Black Sea area is responsible for a large part of the world's grain production.

Even before the crisis in Ukraine, the global prices for grain, aluminium and energy were mounting. This is also being felt in Lahti.

Sustainability is important in turbulent times

"The price increases for grain and energy in particular has an impact on us, and we follow the market closely," says Christian Tallskog.

Market analysis has been stepped up. Risk management becomes more important in order to navigate the now very turbulent environment.

Pär-Gustav Relander, part-owner and Chairman of the Board at the Viking Malt Group, underlines the importance of sustainability in everything the company does, as the world is changing and technology develops.

When the cornerstone was laid down for the new factory, he pointed out that the company is performing its own change while also being part of creating change in the wider world.

There have been several expansions and production changes in recent years. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the company set up shop in Estonia and Lithuania. It also has a malt house in Halmstad, Sweden.



A fish beer, anyone? The Finnish brewery that went green

Beer and the environment might not be obvious bedfellows. But the little brewery Ant Brew in Lahti uses waste products that would normally have been thrown out in order to create new and exciting beers.

THEME

25.03.2022

TEXT: BENGT ÖSTLING, PHOTO: CATA PORTIN

The beer series “Wasted Potential” was created while Lahti was European Green Capital in 2021, and now includes more than ten different brews. Some of them are:

- Dumpster Diver is brewed with orange peels from a local juicer's stall.
- Wild Bunch is flavoured with various weeds.
- Herbal Hipster is spiced with local herbs.
- Boreality Check uses various lichens from the North.



Everything can be recycled. Their Goosebumps beer uses aromas from goose droppings, which is normally seen as a nuisance in Finnish fields and parks. The droppings are gathered from one of the city parks which hosts a large number of geese.

None of the alternative ingredients are put directly in the finished beer. The goose droppings are dried and hygienically boiled before being used as a raw material during the smoking of the malt. The aroma and taste are said to be deep and full.

Beer with a message

The brewery's innovation is used as an example of Lahti's open-minded green solutions, with a focus on circular economies of many hues. Making goose droppings beer does not have any considerable economic effect, but the beer carries a message, argues the brewery; everything can be used again, and old ingredients do not need to go to waste.

Today the water has been cleaned up and it is again possible to use its natural resources. While parts of the fish can be used for brewing beer, Lahti restaurants can once more serve fish based on local catches from the nearby lake. The hope is to reintroduce a variety of fish in lakes near Lahti.

The clearance of the Vesijärvi lake also became a starting shot for the drive to make Lahti the 2021 EU Green Capital. This year, Grenoble takes on the title, and in 2023 it goes to Tallinn.



Kari Puttonen balances on a ladder among Ant Brew's beer tanks.

Their newest beer will be released this spring. It will be brewed using dried swim bladders from roach, a small freshwater fish that is not normally used for food in Finland.

The fish beer carries its own message. Lahti is situated on the shores of the Vesijärvi lake, which was still heavily polluted in the 1970s. The roach used to be the only fish that survived in the dirty, algae-infected lake.





Reindeer herders want Norwegian wind farm demolished

Europe's largest onshore wind power plant, built near Trondheim in Norway by Fosen Vind, could face dismantling after a supreme court win by indigenous reindeer herders.

THEME

25.03.2022

TEXT: BJØRN LØNNUM ANDREASSEN, PHOTO: STATKRAFT

Norway's supreme court ruled that the indigenous Sámi's cultural rights were overruled when two of the three wind farms in Fosen were built. Silje Karine Muotka, President of the Sámi Parliament of Norway, wants more than an apology.

"The supreme court has concluded that the human rights of reindeer herders in Fosen have been violated. I expect the Norwegian government to apologise to reindeer herders for the injustice they have faced, and that the government will

fully follow up on this ruling. Another Fosen must never be allowed," she says.



Silje Karine Muotka, President of the Sámi Parliament of Norway, visited Fosen reindeer district and wanted to learn more about the process after the reindeer herders won their supreme court case. The then Minister of Petroleum and Energy Marte Mjøs Persen was also present. Photo: Sametinget.

Muotka has congratulated Terje Aasland (Labour) with his new role as Minister of Petroleum and Energy, while also asking for a meeting as soon as possible to revisit the Fosen case.

A breach of human rights

Eirik Larsen is a political advisor to the Sámi Executive Council – which corresponds to the Norwegian government – and he is a trained lawyer.

“Reindeer herders and the Sámi Parliament have fought the planning and construction of wind power plants in Fosen and warned that human rights were going to be breached. Fosen Vind had to expropriate the rights to these areas because reindeer herders had the right of use there. This right is just as strong as property rights,” he says.

“The Sámi Parliament has said the Norwegian state must follow up the supreme court ruling by removing operating rights for two of the three plants in Fosen. The Ministry of Petroleum and Energy has so far failed to do this. It has said the supreme court ruling does not say anything about what should happen with the wind power plant,” says Eirik Larsen.

Not forced to dismantle

Geir Fuglseth is the Communication Manager with Statkraft, owners of Fosen Vind. He confirms that the court did not take a position on what would happen to the power plant.

“The court ruled that the wind power plant, without satisfactory mitigating environmental measures, would have a considerable negative effect on the Sámi people’s cultural rights in Fosen in the longer term, which would represent a breach of international law. That is why Fosen Vind wants, in

line with the proposed process from the Ministry of Petroleum and Oil, to find sufficient mitigating measures which in the longer term will secure the economic basis for reindeer herders’ activities and their cultural rights,” says Fuglseth.

Neither he nor the ministry wants to be more concrete than that for now.

Return to nature

Many cubic metres of concrete has been used to construct the foundations for the tall turbines, and kilometres of road have been built to aid the construction of the plant in the mountains. If the operating rights are taken away, the turbines, foundations and roads must be removed so that the area can be returned to its natural state.

Yet it is equally probable that the operating rights are extended, fears Eirik Larsen at the Sámi Parliament.

Storheia wind park is the largest of the Fosen Vind parks. It was Norway’s largest when it opened in February 2020. Storheia has 80 turbines creating a total of 288 MW of power, explains Geir Fuglseth.

“The Fosen wind parks are expected to last for 25 years, which is also the duration of their operating licence,” says Fuglseth.

“The operating rights stipulate that when the plant is decommissioned, the operator must remove the plant. The area will be returned as far as possible to its natural state,” he explains.

One of the operating licence’s preconditions was that an operator must, within the end of the twelfth operating year, send the Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate NVE a concrete proposal. This must include a deposit that would cover the cost of the removal of the plant and of the return of the site to nature. In other words, this is a guarantee to cover the tidying up cost.

“Recyclable”

The global industry group Vestas delivered the wind turbines in Fosen. The group employs 29,000 people and its vision is to become a leader in sustainable energy solutions. Vestas says much of the materials used in Fosen are recyclable.

“Right now, our most common wind turbines are 85% recyclable. This means at least 85% of the turbine’s weight can be completely recycled or reused. The remaining challenge is to recycle the wind turbine blades. These are made from a composite material that mainly consists of epoxy and fibreglass.

“This material is lightweight, very strong and very durable, which makes it difficult to recycle in a cost-efficient manner. Recycling it would also mean higher CO2 emissions than what you would get from using new raw materials in a new production. We are working towards creating zero-emission wind turbines by 2040,” Vestas says in an email.



Eliza Reid – Iceland's outstanding First Lady

On March the 8th, the book *Secrets of the Sprakkar* was published in the US after having first been released in Iceland in 2020. It deals with gender equality in Iceland, considered to be among the best in the world. *Sprakkar* is an ancient Icelandic word for “outstanding women”. A few of these outstanding women are interviewed in the book.

NEWS

25.03.2022

TEXT: HALLGRÍMUR INDRÍÐASON, PHOTO: BJÖRN ÁRNARSON

Secrets of the Sprakkar examines “the deep-seated cultural sense of fairness, the influence of current and historical role models, and, crucially, the areas where Iceland still has room for improvement,” as the introduction says.

What makes this book special, apart from the subject itself, is the author Eliza Reid. Firstly, she is not a native Icelander. She was born in Canada but has lived in Iceland for almost two decades. And she has been Iceland's First Lady since her husband, Gudni Th. Johannesson was elected President in 2016.

Found love in Oxford

Before we find out where this interest in equality in Iceland comes from, let us look at her background. Reid was born in Ottawa and grew up on a farm in the Ottawa Valley. She holds a BA degree in international relations from the University of Toronto and a master's degree in modern history from Oxford University.

This is also where she met her future husband Gudni Th. Johannesson, who was a PhD history student there. They fell in love and agreed to move to Iceland in 2003. Jóhannesson al-

ready had a child and wanted to be close to her. There Eliza worked as a writer and an editor until her husband was elected President. They have four children together.



Eliza Reid accompanying her husband who is just about to be sworn in as Iceland's President after winning the 2016 election.

A First Lady's challenges

In the book, she writes that when she arrived in Iceland, she saw a nation that has what she calls a “small nation complex”, which indicates the insecurity of a small nation. But she also notes positive things, like when the chair of a board nurses a child in a conference room without anyone batting an eye, and how strollers are left on the front lawn with a child sleeping in it because it is safe and people know and trust each other.

When she took on the role of the First Lady she faced a problem. She was not sure what she was supposed or allowed to do, but on the other hand, she is the type of woman who is used to speaking up.

So she decided to use this opportunity to do some good and make a difference. And it is safe to say that no First Lady in Iceland has been as active in social discussions as Reid has been. She has sought out opportunities to give lectures, and gender equality has largely been the main issue.

“If there is anywhere from which to challenge these outdated gendered-based assumptions, Iceland is it,” she writes.



With a foreign perspective

And there are a few facts that back this up. Iceland was the first nation to elect a woman as head of state in a general election when Vigdis Finnbogadóttir was elected President in 1980. Nearly 48% of parliamentarians are women, the highest percentage in the world among countries without quotas. And Iceland is number one on the World Economic Forum's list of countries that are closest to achieving gender equality.

Reid claims that as a “guest” in this country she has a “guest's eye” which allows her sometimes to see things more clearly. In an interview with the New York Times, she says that the reasons are both historic and specific.

“There's Iceland's brutal weather, which demands an all-hands-on-deck practicality. There's its small size [...] which allows for swift adoption of new policies. And there are its popular sagas, featuring ancient sprakkar like Long-Legs Hallgerdur, who back in the 10th century took deadly revenge on her husband for slapping her.”

She also points out how both parents get 12 months of paid parental leave in total – five for the mother, five for the father and two split by choice. That creates a sense of common responsibility for children.

The small population also plays a part in gender equality. As one of the interviewees in the book says: “Most people in Iceland will meet a trans person.” Which means they will not be

unknown to anyone and are therefore more likely to be given the same rights as other genders.

Not afraid to speak up

But even though Iceland is in a good position compared to many other countries, there is still room for improvement. And Reid is not shy to point things out even though they are connected to her directly.

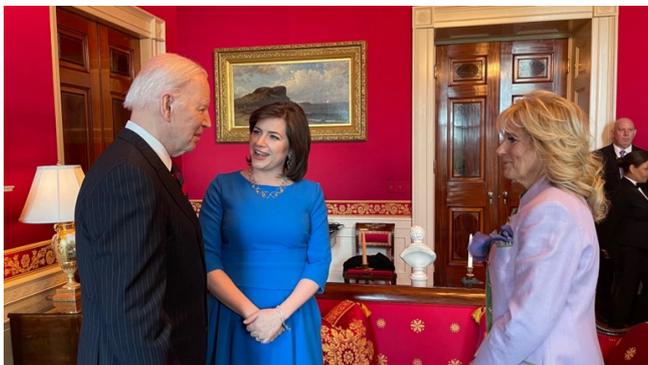
In October, the Morgunbladid newspaper published a picture of the Danish Crown Prince Frederik shaking hands with her, while President Jóhannesson watched on in the background. The caption only named the men in the picture and not Reid herself. It also named the Danish Foreign Minister who was not in the picture at all.

Reid took this up on her Facebook page (not something any other First Lady would do) and wrote:

“Summary of this photo caption on the cover of the newspaper today: One man with a name came to dinner at another man with a name's house. With the visitor was a third man with a name [not pictured]. That is all. #dowomenexist.”

Still a way to go

Her point was that there still is a tendency in the media to downgrade the role of women. And that is not all that has to improve according to Reid. Women still do more household work, they still make less money than men do for similar work (although that difference has diminished) and they hold far fewer executive roles in large Icelandic companies.



Eliza Reid meets President Biden and First Lady Jill Biden.

But in the book, she talks to a lot of women that are doing jobs that only men used to do not so many years ago – like sea captains, sheep shearers, a female rap music band (called Daughters of Reykjavik) and a professional football player.

She feels that the reception she is getting for the book says a bit about how far Iceland has come. In an interview with Grapevine.is she said:

“One of the things that I think is great about Iceland is I'm writing a book about gender equality, and it's not a super-sensitive issue here. I couldn't avoid talking to any political

people, but I tried to be diverse in terms of their backgrounds and not be specific about any parties. I don't have a grand national vision for the country. I just hope that I can do my part to make our society a better place for everyone.”

But that could easily go beyond Iceland. Earlier this month she took part in many equality gatherings in the United States and Canada. On the Equal Pay Day, March 15th, she took part in a big gathering in Washington where she met president Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden. In a reception in the meeting, President Biden called Reid up on the stage and called her “a real champion in gender equality”. Not a bad recommendation from the most powerful man in the world.



Renewed drive to fight work-related crime in the Nordics

All of the Nordics have intensified the fight against work-related crime. Norway's new government has launched what it calls a spring clean of the Nordic labour market. Sweden's deputy Minister for Employment Johan Danielsson has been tasked with coordinating the policy, and recently visited Oslo where he met his Norwegian colleague Marte Mjøs Persen.

NEWS

25.03.2022

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

All of the Nordics have intensified the fight against work-related crime. Norway's new government has launched what it calls a spring clean of the Nordic labour market. Sweden's deputy Minister for Employment Johan Danielsson has been tasked with coordinating the policy, and recently visited Oslo where he met his Norwegian colleague Marte Mjøs Persen.

Norway has had special "a-crime centres" since 2015, where the Labour Inspection Authority, Labour and Welfare Administration NAV, police and tax authorities work side by side. They also carry out joint workplace inspections. Johan

Danielsson started his Oslo visit by going to the a-crime centre in Schweigaardsgate.

"The most important thing we learn from both the a-crime centres and the Norwegian Ministry of Labour is that it works. Housing all the authorities together means more and improved inspections, while new types of crime are uncovered," Johan Danielson tells the Nordic Labour Journal, after also taking part in the annual black market conference organised by the Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees and the NTL trade union.

Sweden will open two anti work crime centres in June and another five in 2023. Nine different authorities will share physical offices.



Johan Danielsson has as Deputy Minister for Employment been responsible for coordinating the fight against work-related crime. Photo: Joakim Pohl/ Regeringskansliet.

“Since 2018, Sweden has also carried out joint inspections, 6,000 of them so far. They work well and have uncovered an enormous amount of cheating. Half of the workplaces that have been inspected have received notifications and immediate action had to be taken in one in four. In some of the workplaces, 20% of the workers did not even have the right to stay in Sweden,” says Johan Danielsson.

He offered the Oslo black market conference a succinct message for what needs to be done:

- It must become harder to cheat
- It must become easier to be caught
- Sanctions will be tougher

At the extreme end of work-related crime – when dealing with organised crime and mafia activity – the authorities can share information with each other so that data from different records can paint a more comprehensive image of the criminal activity.

“Parallel with opening up the regional centres against work-related crime, we have tasked the authorities with developing their own methods for fighting such crime. We will also introduce legislation to remove unnecessary secrecy obstacles,” says Johan Danielsson.

Society pays a lot for work-related crime

Several of the speakers at the black market conference pointed out that work-related crime costs society four to five times as much as ordinary crime. But there is a lot of uncertainty. The Norwegian government’s strategy against work-related crime refers to a 2017 analysis showing the total cost to society could be anything between 28 to 108 billion Norwegian kroner. The lowest figure represents 1.2% of Norway’s GDP.

Work-related crime is a wide-ranging term, covering everything from tax evasion to what can be described as modern-day slavery. Norwegian trade unions also want to talk about “company crime” which encompasses everything of an illegal nature that a company can do.

“We have gradually managed to include the term ‘wage theft’ into the debate, but there is still very little talk about ‘company crime’,” Mette Nord, head of the Union of Municipal and General Employees, told the conference.

To broaden the debate, the American professor, author and filmmaker Joel Bakan was also invited to the conference. One of the things he is known for is launching the term “corporations as psychopaths”.



“Visit any company website today and you would be excused for thinking you have come to a voluntary organisation. Because what is written about the company is that they will become 100% carbon-neutral and there are long deliberations about all the green and social programmes they have. Exactly like psychopaths, they have discovered that the best way of reaching their goals is to be charming,” said Joel Bakan.

He does not believe companies will ever do anything other than what their goal is: to create more value.

“Companies only do good deeds because it benefits themselves,” he said.

Crime committed by some of the largest companies centres on billions of dollars, the environment and human rights.

“This is about Volkswagen cheating on their car emissions, it is about BP and the Deepwater Horizon blowout, about how Facebook invades your private life and how Google is in breach of monopoly legislation,” said Joel Bakan

The larger, the more difficult

The larger the company, the harder it is to bring them to justice. But the problems in more day-to-day work-related crime are the same. Even smaller companies now set up complicated structures across several countries in order to cover their tracks. Tax havens are as much about becoming anonymous as it is about avoiding taxes. But according to Joel Bakan, there is also a need to change the way in which we look at companies' responsibilities.

“When authorities want to punish companies, they are told that ‘companies are not human beings’. They cannot, therefore, be punished because they have no soul or body, just like we cannot punish cars, dogs or stones. Companies have no human will or intent, both of which are important prerequisites for criminal law.

“When authorities try to punish the owners instead, it is the opposite. Then we hear that they cannot be punished because the company is responsible,” said Joel Bakan.



Pål K Lønseth is the head of Norway's economic crime authority Økokrim.

One of the largest ever court cases against a company seen in Norway was in 2004, when oil rig company Transocean was accused of withholding 11 billion kroner (€1.14bn) in tax. Ten years later the case ended with a total collapse for the financial police and the company was acquitted.

“Investigating the crimes of a benefit scrounger and a multinational company are two separate worlds,” underlined the head of economic crime authority Økokrim Pål K. Lønseth.

“After the 2001 terror attacks in the USA, the country took a quantum leap when it comes to tax havens and access to information there.”

Once more in the spotlight

The issue of how society should react against economic crime is again in the spotlight because of the sanctions against Russian oligarchs after the invasion of Ukraine.

“But finding out what Russian oligarchs own or who really owns a certain property is still not done overnight.”

He does not believe new legislation is what is needed, however.

“What we need is the capacity to investigate what is already criminal.”

And often the punishment is not proportional to the crime.

“We can, besides issuing fines, also seize part of the profit that comes from company crime. But to do this, you need big resources. In Norway we have a long tradition for investigating what crime has been committed,” says, säger Pål K Lønseth.

“However, after that, the investigators often stop because so much is needed in order to prove what the gain has been from the criminal acts.”

Another yellow card from Sweden – against platform work proposal

The European Commission has yet again presented a proposal that puts the Swedish labour market model at risk. That is the view of the Swedish parliament, which has decided to hand out a so-called yellow card against the proposed directive for better working conditions in platform work, presented in December. The strains from Denmark and Finland are more positive.

NEWS

25.03.2022

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG

A minority of centre-right parties in the Swedish parliament believe that the EU should not get involved in platform workers' conditions at all. However, a parliamentary majority argues that measures on an EU level might be needed, but that the proposal goes too far.

One of the issues that makes platform workers' situation difficult is the lack of clarity around whether they are workers, i.e. employees, or contractors, i.e. self-employed. This has a bearing on whether or not they are covered by labour law rules.

Easier to workers' status

Platform companies most certainly consider them to be contractors most of the time. Yet many work in conditions that are similar to those of employees – minus employment security, health and safety protection and predictable pay.

The Commission wants to solve this problem by making it easier for platform workers to confirm what status they are entitled to. If the platform company for instance decides the pay and issues binding rules for how the work must be carried out, the worker should, as a starting point, be considered to be an employee, protected by labour law. If the platform company disagrees, the burden of proof rests with it.

But this rule goes too far and is in breach of the so-called principle of subsidiarity, i.e. the principle that the EU should take action only if the issue cannot be solved by the member states themselves, argues the Swedish parliament. That is why it has decided to issue a so-called yellow card to EU legislators. If one-third of the national parliaments issue such reservations, the Commission is forced to review its proposal.

Sweden makes the most noise

Sweden is the only Nordic country that has made such a strong intervention, however. In Denmark, which often sides

with Sweden, the government has told the parliament's European Affairs Committee that it backs member states being "given the opportunity" to introduce regulation like the one the Swedish parliament opposes. It has also said it wants to make sure the regulation will not interfere with the Danish labour market model. The Danish government also expressively supports several other proposals in the directive.

Finland too seems to think the proposed directive is compatible with the principle of subsidiarity and the principle of proportionality, according to a communication from the cabinet minister to the Finnish parliament. When it comes to the contentious regulation, the minister treads carefully, however, and says the position on this is still under consideration.

If you read the Swedish, Danish and Finnish letters in more detail, the differences are perhaps not as big as they might seem to begin with. All three underline the importance of respecting the member states' views of who should be considered to be employees.

The Danish letter also contains repeated assurances that the government will work to secure that no regulations damage the Danish labour market model. It is possible that the three countries' different positions have more to do with which tactic they are considering for the coming negotiations on the directive. One is beating the drum; the two others remain more diplomatic.



The male role in the Nordics – in crisis or developing?

Two authors from Denmark and Sweden have written books on the male role – one concluding it is in crisis, the other believes it is evolving. Yet both underline the importance of jobs and highlight the negative consequences faced by men who cannot find one – especially among immigrants.

THEME

25.03.2022

TEXT: FAYME ALM

“Is there a male crisis at all, and if so, how does it manifest itself?” asks Swedish psychiatrist and author Stefan Krakowski in his third book, *Incel – about involuntary celibacy and a male role in crisis*.

When the Nordic Labour Journal repeats the question, he answers:

“It depends how you look at it. I believe we have a crisis in as much as men’s role in recent decades has changed in different ways in line with socio-economic conditions. This has been a rapid development. Women’s elevation to economic independence has led to a radical change to the man’s traditional role as the family provider and being the one who takes the initiative to courtship and relationships.”

The Nordic Labour Journal puts the same question to Danish sociologist and author Aydin Soei. He answers:

“If you look at the vast majority of men, there is no crisis. There is rather a change for the better as we move away from

stereotypical portrayals of men who cannot show emotions, who leave the carer role to women and who maintain the old male role as the family provider.”

As these answers demonstrate, this question is complex and depends on a range of individual and social factors. What follows is some aspects of the male role in the Nordic region of today.

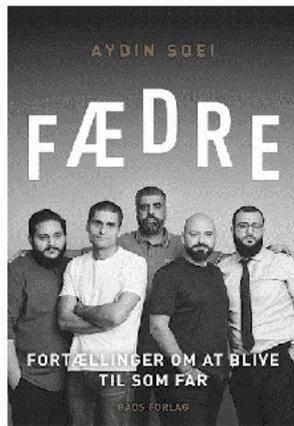
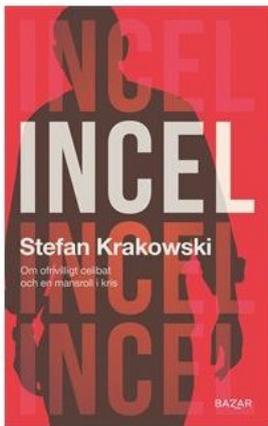
Work means status

A crucial factor here is the Nordic labour market, which has changed radically in step with increased digitalisation and automation. Repetitive manual jobs – traditionally held by men with low levels of education – hardly exist anymore.

“The need for low-education labour is very limited in Sweden – perhaps the lowest in the whole of Europe. This means many people fall outside of the labour market. A man without a job is not an attractive man,” says Stefan Krakowski.

“This is not the case only in the labour market. Someone’s employment status is important in close relationships too. Despite the fact that Sweden is one of the world’s most gender-equal countries, women chose men according to certain patterns – meaning their education level and earning potential.”

We might be witnessing a shift, says Stefan Krakowski, alluding to surveys that show younger women more often chose men with low education levels.



The two books about the male role talk about two different groups – men with no relationship to women and men who have become fathers.

Drawing conclusions from male research performed by Men’s Health Society, a network in which many Danish municipalities participate, Aydin Soei says that men tie their identity to professional accomplishments and to the fact that the man’s position in the labour market is the largest challenge when it comes to status and recognition.

“If you are male and fail to find work, you lose respect and status. When jobs do not demand an education, educated men are marginalised and might lose out also when it comes to love, sex and their relationship to the opposite sex,” he says.

And while the number of low-skilled jobs has fallen dramatically, Nordic women’s liberation and increased independence carry on, as demonstrated in the Nordic Labour Journal’s latest gender equality barometer. The division of power has never been more equal in the Nordics.

Parenthood offers something new

Parenthood can create an alternative identity that represents both a relief and a gift, believes Aydin Soei.

“Many men use parenthood as leverage in order to become more wholesome people. It allows them to be more affectionate, and to show feelings that are associated with mothers,” he says and explains that new Danish fathers spend twice

as much time with their babies today compared to ten years ago.

“The fact that more fathers want to take an active part in their children’s lives is a revolution, a success and the greatest change to norms in the welfare state,” says Aydin Soei.

This is a gift not only for the men but also for the children and women, he says. The more time spent caring for the child, the more time is freed up for the women.

“In the long run, this will narrow the gap between men and women and improve the work-life balance.”

Aydin Soei also highlights another survey which shows that the higher the education level, the more time fathers spend talking to their children and following them to football training and other activities. And vice versa. The lower the education level, the less time is spent with the children.

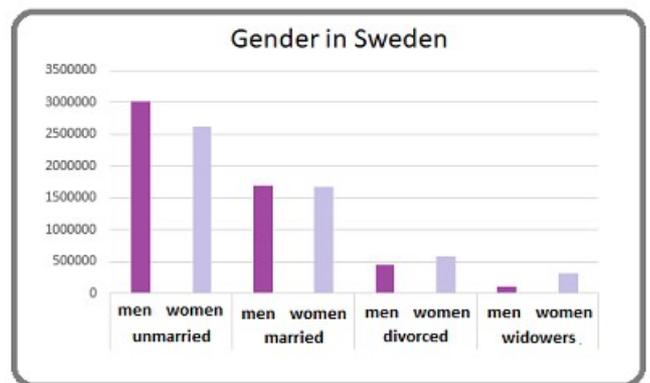
“Those who spend the most time with their children, also spend the most time with their work. So this is a question of priorities and parental culture,” says Aydin Soei.

What is more, points out Aydin Soei, parenthood cannot be taken away – unlike jobs and careers.

Childless men lose out

Men who do not become fathers are the focus of Stefan Krakowski’s book. Those who do not find a partner and therefore live in involuntary celibacy (incel = involuntary celibate).

Sweden’s male surplus and the growing group of men who neither manage to establish a family nor find a job is a ticking bomb, he argues.



Gender distributions in Sweden according to Statistics Sweden, divided into four groups. Registered partners are counted as married, and divorced if the relationship has ended. There are nearly half a million more unmarried men than women.

“This situation leads to frustration, anger, political extremism and even assaults on women. We are only seeing the tip

of the iceberg, and that is why we need to talk about this,” says Stefan Krakowski.

Ethnic differences – and the differences between generations

But let's go back to parenthood, the focus of Aydin Soei's fifth book about ethnic minorities in Denmark and the other Nordic countries. The book is called *Fædre – fortællinger om at blive til som far (Fathers – stories about becoming someone as a father)*. In it, he has interviewed five Danish men, all of them with immigrant backgrounds.

“In Denmark, men with immigrant backgrounds are the most stigmatised parent group, but immigrants do not make up a homogenous group,” says Aydin Soei.

He sees great differences between first and second-generation immigrants when it comes to how they view children and childcare.

“Some of the immigrants have fled countries with authoritarian child-raising ideas which are common in countries with poor social safety nets. They end up in the Nordic region, which has the most permissive and softest upbringing in the world, where we see children as individuals with their own rights. This is an enormous cultural chasm for the first generation of fathers from non-Western countries,” he says.

The authoritarian ideas do not trickle down to the second generation immigrants, however – those born and raised in Denmark and who also make up a group that is twice as large as that of their fathers, explains to Aydin Soei.

“They wish to care for their children, to be supportive and to be a role model. These are things they often missed from their own fathers because they were probably absent or had ended up with a considerably lower status in their new home country,” he says.

School results with consequences

Both Krakowski and Soei underline the importance of education to fight men's alienation in the labour market and in family situations.

“A young man with poor grades starts out at the bottom, and this leads to an unfortunate domino effect. Failing in school leads to failure in the rest of your life,” says Stefan Krakowski.

He puts his hope in new curricula and courses for Swedish elementary schools which are coming in this autumn. These should take into account the different starting points that girls and boys have at that age.

“Boys' brains mature slower than girls, and unfortunately there is also an anti-learning culture among boys,” says Stefan Krakowski

Aydin Soei points to the link between poor school results and opinions around gender equality. He encourages everyone to be concerned about the losers in Nordic elementary schools.

“They are prone to subscribe to old-fashioned gender roles based on the idea that a man is worth more than a woman. That is the last thing you can cling to when you have failed in your role as a family provider and has nothing else to tie your identity to. How we get them to succeed in elementary school is crucial – regardless of whether they are called Peter and Hans or Hassan and Ali,” he says.



Nordics showed resilience during the pandemic

The Nordic countries managed well economically during the pandemic in light of the massive changes that were undertaken. In four of the five countries, life expectancy rose. Denmark spent the most money while Norway did best overall while also experiencing a baby boom.

NEWS

25.03.2022

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

These are some of the conclusions from the latest State of the Nordic Region report, published annually by Nordregio.

“I have taken part in all of the reports since 1981 when I was part of the birth statistics,” joked the main author Gustaf Norlén as the report was presented at The House of Literature in Oslo.



Gustaf Norlén is the main author of the 2022 State of the Nordic Region report, the 41st.

New this year is an index detailing how much work can be performed from home in each country. For the whole of the Nordic region, the number is 36.5%, which corresponds to around 9.5 million jobs being classified as remote work.

There are large differences between different regions, however.

“In Stockholm, 56.2% of jobs are remote, while in Dalarna the figure is 27.3%,” said Gustaf Norlén.

“The pandemic also led to the lowest level of immigration to the Nordic region since 2005, while internal movements within the countries were at their highest for six decades.”

Although things went well for the Nordic countries compared to many other European countries, the pandemic hit the Nordics in different ways. While life expectancy fell by 0.8% in Sweden between 2019 and 2020, it rose slightly in the four other countries, by 0.1% to 0.3%.

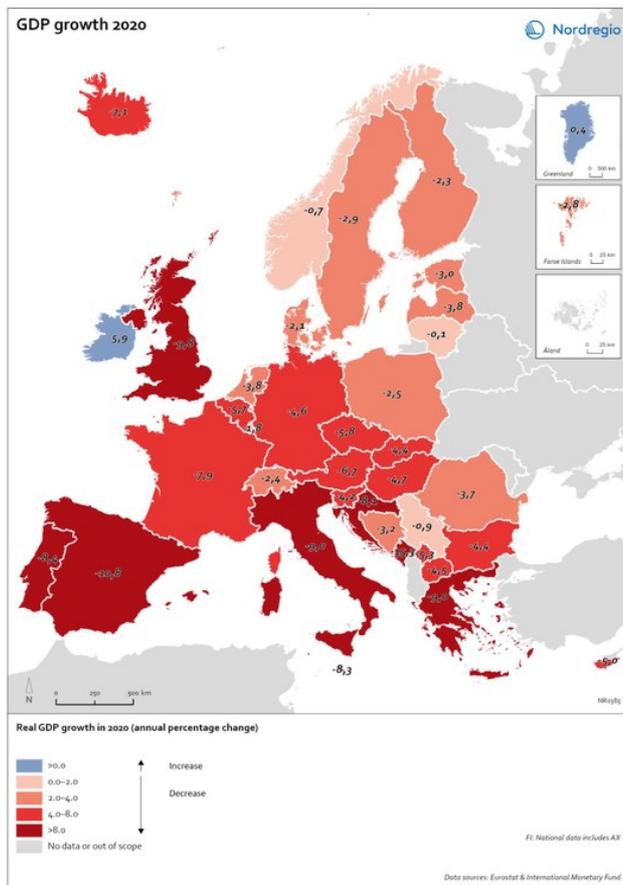
In the first year of the pandemic, GDP fell in all of the Nordic countries. Iceland saw the greatest fall of 7.1% in 2020, while Norway’s GDP only fell by 0.7% that year.

Strong economies and a high degree of digitalisation even before the pandemic allowed authorities to introduce record-large support packages. Denmark spent a full 32.7% of its GDP on economic support during the pandemic. Sweden spent 16.1%, Norway 14.5%, Finland 12.4% and Iceland 11.6% of their GDP.

“This report is presented on the same day as the 60th anniversary of the Helsinki Treaty on Nordic cooperation. The pandemic also put the Nordic cooperation under pressure and we saw clearly the different rules for border passages in Sweden and Norway,” said Anne Beathe Tvinnereim, who is the Minister for Nordic Cooperation in the Norwegian government.

“The pandemic taught us to improve how we communicate before we make decisions and that we must gather more data on the local impact of different measures. The pandemic represented a demanding test for those who live in the border regions.”

In 2020, as much as 9.3% of the Nordic labour force was on furlough. Some groups were harder hit, as were certain sectors like tourism.



The map shows how the European countries' GDP, with a few exceptions, fell during the corona year of 2020. Norway and Iceland did best out of the Nordics. Hardest hit were the Mediterranean countries and the UK. The map was made by Carlos Tapia and Johanna Jokinen at Nordregio.



Rasmus Jungersen Emborg

This has also had an impact on people’s trust in the political system, especially among young people, pointed out Rasmus Jungersen Emborg, President of the Nordic Youth Council.

“Many young people were prevented from studying in a neighbouring country as borders closed, and they could not return to their old university or college either, because of a lack of cooperation between universities,” he said.

“Young people are already in debt, have no savings and earn little. A new Danish report shows that one in two Danish women and one in five Danish men were stressed during the pandemic.”

Helge Orten, deputy leader for Norway's delegation to the Nordic Council, also pointed out that as the pandemic was coming to an end, Russia invaded Ukraine.

“This means we have to deal with a war as well, and the large number of refugees that this has led to. Meanwhile, the cooperation between EU and Nato has become stronger, and I am convinced that the Nordic cooperation will become stronger too,” said Helge Orten.



Hadia Tajik: Norway's Minister of Labour goes after tax scandal

Hadia Tajik, deputy leader of Norway's governing Labour Party, stepped down as the country's Minister of Labour on Wednesday after revelations she failed to pay tax for a commuter flat 15 years ago while working as a political advisor at the Ministry for Labour and Social Inclusion.

NEWS

25.03.2022

TEXT: LARS ÅDNE BEVANGER, PHOTO: REGJERINGEN.NO

Hadia Tajik has long been seen as one of the Labour Party's shooting stars and a possible future prime minister. At 23 she became a political advisor at the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, and two years later she became an advisor to the then Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg.

Commuter flat confusion

She has now stepped down as Minister of Labour in the Støre government as a result of errors she made during her first job for the Stoltenberg government. At that time, she was granted a parliamentary commuter flat, which is tax-free if you can prove to have housing expenses elsewhere.

At first, Tajik said she did not, but later sent in fresh information about hiring a flat in her home county of Rogaland. Earlier this year, the VG newspaper revealed that Tajik did not

have any expenses related to that flat and that she never lived there – she was living with her parents.

Tajik says she paid for accommodation at her parents' and as such had not broken any taxation rules in relation to her commuter flat.

A number of Norwegian MPs have been accused of exploiting the commuter flat system, and some – including a party leader and a parliament president (speaker) – have stepped down as a result of these accusations.

“No-one can demand trust”

Hadia Tajik has made it clear that she did not knowingly exploit the commuter flat system, but that she chose to step

down because she no longer felt she had the necessary trust required for her position.

“No-one can demand trust and anyone can make mistakes, but the top boss for labour market policies, social or welfare is dependent on trust. Many others can be minister for labour. The Labour Party's politics is the most important thing,” Tajik told a press conference, announcing her retirement from her ministerial post.

She also said she is paying tax authorities a sum equal to what she should have paid in tax for her commuter flat.

There are other reasons why Norwegian media have been so focused on Hadia Tajik's relationship with commuter flat regulations.

The same rules for all

As Minister of Labour, she has been responsible for NAV – Norway's welfare administration – which a few years ago ended up in a giant scandal that saw 80 people being incorrectly sentenced for welfare fraud.

Several thousand welfare recipients were also wrongly asked to pay back welfare payments. It was all because parliament, the courts and the civil service had misinterpreted EEA rules on where in the EEA people are allowed to stay while receiving support.

In Norway, as in other Nordic countries, there is a relatively high level of trust in politicians and equality before the law is a principle that is very well anchored in public opinion. Although Hadia Tajik has not been proven to break any laws, many felt she needed to take responsibility for her actions, especially because so many innocent “ordinary” people were wrongfully found guilty in the NAV case.

Party political tensions

Hadia Tajik was elected deputy leader of the Labour Party in 2015 together with her colleague Trond Giske. When he, two years later, was accused by a number of whistleblowers of sexual harassment of female party members, Tajik was strong in her support for the whistleblowers.

Party leader Jonas Gahr Støre considered the case closed after Giske publicly apologised for his behaviour, but Tajik chose to publicly continue her criticism of Giske. Støre chose to reopen the case and Giske stepped down as deputy leader on 1 January 2018.

This battle led to a split in the Labour Party which has partly coloured the reactions to Hadia Tajik's commuter flat problems from some within the party. A number of Trond Giske's supporters – especially from his home county of Trøndelag – have questioned whether Tajik should carry on as deputy leader now that she has stepped down as a government minister.

Retains the Prime Minister's trust

But Tajik retains the Prime Minister's trust. Jonas Gahr Støre immediately accepted her wish to step down as Minister of Labour, but has also indicated that he still wants her as deputy leader.

In maintaining that role she is still the second-most powerful person in the Labour Party. And many believe that is a more important position than being a government minister.