Theme issue
THE NORDIC REGION IN THE WORLD

The Folkbildning Tradition
ADDING VALUE TO EDUCATION

GLOBALISATION OPPORTUNITIES

NORDIC PORTRAITS
Dear reader

This is a special thematic Dialog issue for the World Assembly of the global adult education organisation, International Council of Adult Education (ICAE), entitled "A World Worth Living In", held in Malmö, Sweden on 14-17 June 2011.

The world of adult education is coming to Malmö to meet colleagues from other parts of the world but also to take a closer look at the democratic tradition and philosophy of learning that has existed in the Nordic countries for more than a hundred years. We are happy to have the forms of learning that foster personal development, that are open and inclusive, that are available to a broad range of population due to public funding and at the same time free from the state control. And we are, certainly, proud to share the experience but also would like to have a critical look at the Nordic practice and have a constructive discussion with colleagues from the whole world about the mission and effects of liberal adult education.

Adult learning organisations have made an attempt to explain what folkbildning / liberal adult education is about in a clear and concise way through formulating 25 statements. Each article in this Dialog is linked to one of these statements. Furthermore, Chapter 2 presents a number of stories, portraits and cases that should exemplify and clarify what Nordic folkbildning / liberal adult education tradition implies. I do hope the articles would facilitate the discussion during the Malmö conference and afterwards.

Articles in Chapter 1 look at the role of folkbildning / liberal adult education for retaining the Nordic welfare model and also look at the place and role this learning tradition has in Europe and globally. Possibilities and challenges that globalisation brings to the Nordic region are discussed in Chapter 3 of this Dialog.

I would like to thank the contributors to this issue of Dialog.

Enjoy the reading!

ANTRA CARLSEN,
NVL Head-coordinator
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In the Nordic countries the forms of folkbildning vary from country to country. Folkbildning is based on different national traditions and different kinds of influences from other countries, deriving in the first place mainly from German culture. Grundtvig’s foremost inspirer was Gottfried Herder, one of the leading figures of Romanticism. In his work, the nation, through its common language and culture, is the central unit in the creation of folkbildning; the people are seen collectively as the bearer of what is truly national.

On the whole, Swedish folkbildning has a different prime source, i.e. the philosophy of Kant, represented mainly by Grundtvig’s Swedish counterpart, Hans Larsson. Larsson’s thinking is closer to the Enlightenment, with its stronger reliance on reason, science and utility. The idea that man should depart from his self-inflicted state of incompetence is strongly present. Grundtvig’s influence extends mostly to Norway and only partially to Sweden and Finland. Today this national tradition and understanding of folkbildning faces great difficulties in identifying itself, both in relation to what is termed multicultural society, and to globalization.

**Changes in Bildning**

By tracing the common concept of bildning and its transformations we can try to determine what popular or democratic bildning might be in a multicultural and global context. Within the concept of bildning we can incorporate what Grundtvig meant by enlightenment in the romantic sense, i.e. in the term that he used as an alternative to the German word "Bildung". The classical concept of bildning, which comes from Wilhelm von Humboldt, has undergone great changes, both in relation to infor-
mation technology and to globalization. Lars Lövlie has shown what a technocultural bildning could be, comprising an interface between man and technology, between the web and man as a cyborg. Taking Goethe’s concept of world literature as a starting point, a globalized or postcolonial understanding of bildning can be interpreted, in such a way that it is no longer identical with the area in which Western literature is prevalent. Instead, it will denote literatures which reflect each other and are translated into each other, thus encompassing the whole world.

**BILDNING AS A JOURNEY**

Taking the above idea of bildning as a starting point, and seeing bildning as a journey with a departure and a return, we can proceed to form a global concept of bildning. Here, the hermeneutical idea of interpretation and understanding is seen as a relationship between the known and the unknown, as a relationship with a “home”, where we start from and to which we will return. But we will come back to something new. This means that we start from ourselves and go out into the world in order to look for new experiences and perspectives and to widen our horizons. It means also that we alternately switch on and off the things that are familiar to us, in order to arrive at something new, a new understanding of the world. This idea can be applied to everything that we find unfamiliar, ranging from things which are our own to things which can be very distant from us. To disconnect from what is our own and to see only the unfamiliar may lead to exotism. However, in order to truly perceive the unfamiliar, one must open oneself to a sensitive listening to what the other is. Starting from this idea, Peter Kemp has tried to formulate a notion of the bildning of a citizen of the world.

**CITIZENS OF THE WORLD**

Citizens of the world have a clear national identity of their own but realize that their nation is only part of the world and that the nation is increasingly dependent on the world at large. Citizens of the world wish to know about traditions other than their own, and they study “the others” using their own traditions as a starting point, realizing that, ultimately, this is the only way one can learn anything about oneself. Citizens of the world are critical of their own traditions and open themselves to the stories of others in order to be able to enter into the situation of these others. One need not go very far from the northern to the southern hemisphere to encounter poverty and great social difficulties, which for the most part result from Western colonialism. Decolonization gave rise to postcolonial thought, which for the most part was produced by philosophers and authors from the southern hemisphere who had migrated to the north. Here, the concept of “the other” plays a central role.

The idea of “the other” was created by Hegel in his great bildning epic The Phenomenology of the Spirit. To his mind, self-consciousness arises in one’s relationship to others. This relationship is always based on a hierarchical and subordinated relationship, a master/slave relationship, which must be recognized by both parties. This notion was used by modern feminism in the formula of man/woman, and by the postcolonial in the formula of colonizer/colonized.

**GLOBAL BILDNING**

In global bildning it is essential to see one’s own situation and dependencies – today within a global context.

Here one must understand that the world is built by Western oppression, and that the nation is only part of the whole. Nor does it consist of the national units on which Nordic folkbildning is based. It is made up of diversity, and it is part of multicultural bildning to understand oneself within this diversity. It is no longer a matter of multiculturalism in the sense that we should think that people’s status is entirely defined by their social and cultural background. To see cultures as fixed categories can lead to the stereotyping and categorization of people. Diversity can change into difference, and difference opens up a space between fixed categories, a third space. In this third space there is room for new interpretations, for creating something new and unpredictable, room for creativity and fantasy, and a space will also grow for a new understanding of bildning – global bildning. The main problem arising here is how we should see the relationship between the human – the universal – and all existing differences and disparities – the particular. Human rights are formulated in universal terms, but they are always applied and expressed in a particular context. The future belongs to those researchers and thinkers who attempt to find the right balance between the universal and the particular. This is the main problem of global bildning.

Translator’s note regarding terminology: The Scandinavian terms folkbildning (Swedish) and folkeopplysning/folkeopplysning (Norwegian/Danish) refer to the Nordic adult education philosophy pioneered by N.F.S. Grundtvig in the 1800s. The terms are difficult to translate into English because no corresponding concept exists in English-speaking countries. The most frequently used translations are ‘liberal adult education’ or ‘popular adult education’. However, as noted on the website of the the Swedish National Council of Adult Education,’specific conceptual foundation of folkbildning extends beyond the term ‘adult education’. Hence, some authors and organisations increasingly prefer to retain the original term folkbildning/folkeopplysning in texts and translations published in non-Scandinavian languages. This approach has been favoured by the translators and editors of this magazine where practical. Some contributors writing in English have chosen to use the English terms in their articles.
Participation in adult education have many so called wider benefits (Desjardins & Schuller 2007), which are not usually recognized by policy makers. According to Finnish study (Manninen & Luukannel 2008; Manninen 2010a and 2010b), these benefits are extensive for individuals, as well as for society in general.

The study was based on the experiences of adult learners who participated in studies offered by liberal adult education organisations (adult education centres, folk high schools, summer universities, study centres and physical education centres) in Finland in 2007. The data was collected using theme interviews (n = 19 adult learners), focus group interviews (12 study groups, 77 adult learners) and a survey (n = 1744 adult learners). The data is therefore both qualitative and quantitative.

The qualitative analysis was based on the responses of 1744 adult learners to three questions (what direct benefits has learning provided, what wider benefits have there been, and what other outcomes have there been in your life). A total of 2521 individual statements (such as “new language skills have made it possible to travel and communicate with local people”) were identified from the data. These were placed under 35 main themes (such as “internationalisation skills”). The main themes were subsequently positioned in five categories (such as “Skills & competences”).

The following model summarises the qualitative results.

**MODEL: WIDER BENEFITS OF LEARNING**

The following example from data shows how participation generates wider benefits:

“*When I started in the poem circle, I had just moved into the village as a new resident. The group welcomed me very cordially, which made it easier to create other social contacts in the village. Learning new presentation skills and gaining new contacts have helped and motivated me to join other local societies as well*.”

(woman born in 1967, culture producer, adult education centre)
Quantitative analysis show that participation in liberal adult education has at least some influence on learning motivation (mentioned by 93 % of participants), development of skills and competencies (84 %), well-being (88 %), and skills needed in active citizenship (81 %).

**SOME OBSERVATIONS**

The results of this study are similar to those of earlier ones (for example Schuller et al. 2002), and it is fair to assume that liberal adult education has many positive outcomes and benefits in peoples’ lives. There are also outcomes which benefit – at least in a long run – communities and society in general.

Assuming that the results are transferable to whole population, it is possible to estimate that nearly one million Finns (93 % of liberal adult education participants) have higher learning motivation as a result of participating in liberal adult education. Therefore liberal adult education system plays an important role in the learning society. Liberal adult education seems to support many EU policy objectives and provide tools for facing other challenges, such as globalisation and aging workforce, by promoting Lifelong learning, Active citizenship, and Social capital.

**REFERENCES**


35 YEARS OF SERVICE

63 year old Sturla Bjerkaker is the Secretary General of the Norwegian Association for Adult Learning (NAAL), a post that he has held for 14 years. But he has been involved with folkeopplysning i.e. liberal adult education for the greater part of his life.

"I have worked in liberal, adult education for a long time, if time is conceived linearly. But if time goes around in circles it is a totally different concept – at least for me it is. Then things happen over and over again but in a different way and you sometimes feel you have tried something before, and sometimes that something is a totally new experience", says Bjerkaker. 35 years ago he participated in a course on information policy at the Nordic Folk academy in Gothenburg, together with adult educators from all the Nordic countries. It was a new and inspirational experience.

"This meeting between an experienced Danish folk high school teacher and Swedish study circle leaders was critical for my later career and my attitude towards the importance of lifelong learning", states Bjerkaker.

NEITHER A JUDGE NOR A MISSIONARY

He has never regarded himself as a missionary. "A missionary has to convince others that she is right and represents the correct belief. Is it possible that liberal adult educators are perceived in the same way? "Even if you don’t want to, you have to learn, because we think it is important for you." says Bjerkaker, and asks further: "Who are we to ‘sentence’ people to lifelong learning?" He prefers to describe his role as that of someone who continually reminds people. He uses every opportunity to remind a person of that which has become his mantra.

"I believe that knowledge is important, learning is important, and that learning can, should and has to happen throughout life because it keeps us and our surroundings alive. Intelligence and knowledge are valuable indicators in a changing society. Knowledge is a durable asset in time of change and democracy has to be learned all over again by every generation" says Bjerkaker with enthusiasm.

OLD-FASHIONED OR MODERN EXPORT?

But is this not old fashioned? "Why on earth is folkeopplysning a theme for ICAEs general assembly in 2011?" we ask. – It is one of four important themes, the other three being sustainable developments, adult education as a right and learning for work.

When ICEA chose to have its world conference in the Nordic area, it was partly due to the fact that people admire and become inspired by the Nordic tradition for liberal adult education. We therefore have to offer this when people gather here from around the world. "I believe that the Nordic emphasis on democratic and equal learning has always been and will always be topical and relevant", he says emphatically. But he does not agree that the study circle is old-fashioned by definition.

"It is old fashioned in the way it came about as a ‘cheap’ form...
One day in the spring of 2006 we were bumping along in an old car far into the pampas in Uruguay. We passed enormous prairies and dry rivers. Finally we arrived at a small scattered town and the house that served as a church, congregation house, school and workshop. There the Catholic congregation provided liberal adult education across generations. I greeted knitting mothers and children who were being read to. Unfortunately I did not know the dialect of these poor farmers, but they asked me to say something in my own language. On the worn concrete floor I discovered something that resembled a map of Norway. I took a stick from the stove and started to sketch on the floor, point and explain as they listened and watched. ‘Fantastico Sturla’, said Celita afterwards. I still envisage her bright, attentive eyes.

2011 AND ONWARD

The most important challenge for liberal adult education in Norway, Tanzania or Nepal is to maintain democracy, equality, tolerance and understanding between people.

“Knowledge, particularly knowledge created in a social community, is an important contribution to that”, says Sturla Bjerkaker. But what is needed in order to further the development of liberal adult education? Liberal adult education certainly has to keep pace with change. The Internet and the social media can represent the future study circle, says Bjerkaker. But he is also keen on preserving liberal adult education, in particular the study circle contributing as it does to motivating people to learn; it can represent learning which is slow of necessity. Even if technology is accelerating, most brains still function in the same way as before, he says smiling.

. . AND ONWARD

Replying as to what drives him on and on in the field of continuing education, Sturla Bjerkaker tells us that it is little things like the following:

“...
Sirelius is the Secretary-General of VSY (The Finnish Adult Education Association), Vice President of EAEA, the European umbrella organisation for adult education, as well as a Board member of Unesco’s Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). She will be leaving VSY and EAEA when she retires in June this year, but will continue on in her elected position within Unesco.

“The Nordic model, based on every adult being offered the opportunity to take part in free education supported by public funding, is so good that it ought to be held up as a good example for the benefit other countries, says Eeva-Inkeri Sirelius.

Via her international commitments, she has observed a great deal of interest in the Nordic adult education model throughout the world. She was just recently in contact with Serbia, a country which lacks both public funding and any legislation encouraging adult education of the folkbildning type. The Nordic countries can be especially happy and proud of the long tradition of cooperation they have for exchanging know-how among themselves, both in terms of administration and political support.

“This still doesn’t mean that those from the Nordic countries ought to become travelling representatives for folkbildning in an attempt to get everyone to do exactly as we do, but it is important that we tell about our shared values in this area. We should actively participate in discussions about this and carry on a dialogue.”

NOT A BUSINESS

It is with an increasing sense of unrest that Eeva-Inkeri Sirelius has been observing how education is being continuously whittled down in Europe, and how many attempt to control it from the top to an ever increasing degree.

“I have seen indications that certain governments only are willing to fund certain types of education, leaving the rest to private funding. For example, the German Volkshochschule has focused only on certain sectors such as immigrant education and vocational training.”

In Finland, the institutions’ autonomy is respected in a different manner.

“In the Nordic countries, we should not approve an education that is completely business-based, when one of education’s fundamental conditions is that it should be publicly funded. Such a standpoint is also emphasised by Unesco.”

Estonia is another country in which development is headed in the opposite direction. Taxes are being lowered, which puts funding for such things as health care and education at risk.

NOT EVERYTHING CAN BE MEASURED

Sirelius is also worried about the fact that within the EU, there is a prevailing opinion that all learning should be measurable, and that it is only worthwhile to invest in education which can be measured. This is directly contrary to the Nordic model, where measurable results never have been a major objective.

“If we start adhering to this line of thought, our results may become extremely short-term and we may wind up in a pitfall situation. It is not realistically possible to measure everything, and the men and women who lay the grounds for the adult education tradition in the Nordic countries knew this. It is important to remember that there is something called the ‘wider benefits of learning’. We simply have to trust that each Crown, Pound or Euro we use is worth investing.”

Good results can be manifested in many different ways. One place where they are prevalent is within social welfare and health care.

“A person who learns to take control of their own lives through learning is quite simply a much healthier person.”

THE THRESHOLD SHOULD BE LOW

In the Nordic Region, we have managed to instil people with an enthusiasm for learning which benefits personal devel-
opment. It is this aspect which Sirelius maintains that we should trot out much more clearly to other countries.

"The key thing is creating an awareness about why non-formal education is necessary and encouraging adults to reflect upon their own development. The world is changing at such a rapid pace that no one can cope using only old knowledge and abilities."

According to Sirelius, the decisive factor is that the first threshold should be low.

"Regardless of whether it's about building a wooden boat or learning a language, we have to offer a broad range of choices. Once someone had dared cross the first threshold, the important insight is that they have succeeded with something and therefore can dare continue to learn more. Motivation is essential."

FINLAND TOPS THE LIST
The pluralistic Nordic system, which is grounded upon the idea that governmental funding of education should be free yet not dictate the content or objectives of such education, has obviously been fruitful. Within adult education, participation levels in the Nordic countries are among the highest in the world, with Finland at the absolute top with a participation level as high as 52% of the adult population.

Naturally, this is of great interest to the EU, whose goal is to increase the average level from the present 9% to 15% before the year 2020. According to the EU's measurement system, Finland has a participation rate of 22.1%.

SOCIETIES OUT OF STEP WITH THE TIMES
Lately, both Finland and Sweden have shown similar tendencies to certain other European countries in that populist parties, often with racial overtones, have started popping up. From the perspective of adult education, this could be interpreted as a failure. According to Eeva-Inkeri Sirelius, the reason behind this could be that both the general public and industry have been out of step with global thinking already from the start.

"Industry was first off the starting line, and here you can already see a group of people moving freely from country to country, yet there is a large group that is only now discovering, to its consternation, that a great deal of industry has gone abroad. With a bit of delay, they have woken up to a new reality, which is causing them a great deal of fear and distress. Faced with this, they may believe that it is better to close the borders and shut their doors.

Yet an ever increasingly multicultural world demands that we understand and tolerate those things which deviate from the usual. This poses a great challenge for any educational system.

"I believe that we could even demand that people acquaint themselves with other cultures and extend their discussions to wider circles than their own little 'knot'. My dream is that we, in a European and global perspective, can understand that we learn, live and pursue happiness in different ways and that the world is not so black and white as we sometimes are made to believe."

CULTURAL MEETINGS AS PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE
In Finland, we have a great deal we can learn from the rest of Europe regarding a multicultural society.

"Cultural diversity, which is something we have only started to discuss in Finland, is part of everyday life in central Europe. When I discuss cross-cultural meetings with my English colleagues, they explain that for them, it is a 'non-issue' that they meet people belonging to different ethnic groups with different cultures, religions and skin colours. That is the reality they already are used to facing."

According to Sirelius, giving students the possibility of experiencing other cultures on the spot is the best means of encouraging tolerance. The EU's transnational mobility programme offers...
WE CANNOT FORGET THE WORLD AROUND US

Sirelius is sorry that since becoming part of the EU, Finland has become so centred on Europe that they easily lose sight of more global aspects. The interest of the decreasing number of civil servants is ever more occupied by EU matters at the expense of commitment to issues concerning global education. Caring about others is an important aspect of lifelong learning that Sirelius says must not be forgotten by anyone, and this includes civil servants.

"The world is actually much larger than Europe, and we should be investing much more in knowledge about developing countries. I can see this clearly in Unesco’s forum in Hamburg, where government representatives from distant countries are eager to get those of us from the Nordic countries to participate. For example, they need to get confirmation that literacy is a human right, and this is something that we need to accomplish together. We are not always aware in our Nordic countries how important we are to the rest of the world. We should let President Martti Ahtisaari serve as one of our models, since he sets a fine example of how a small nation can participate in preventing conflicts all over the world."

MUTUAL BENEFITS

In Unesco, Eeva-Inkeri Sirelius has observed that developing countries’ educational questions are about much more than just literacy, and the Nordic countries should not only act as a donor with the "poor South" as a receiver.

"Even here, we can find mutual benefits from our cooperation. The Nordic countries could learn that we do not necessarily always need both this and that in order to succeed. We could, for example, survive with fewer institutions. We might also be able to arrange for education without setting such high demands on external conditions."

TOLERANCE IS KEY

Internationally, we ought to more clearly highlight that, from a Nordic historical perspective, folkbildung is closely associated with the fight for democracy, freedom and equality, says Sirelius.

"Social responsibility and the ability to handle conflicts are central elements in folkbildung. The programmes offered within folkbildung could be based on tolerance. We have a fine programme for global education in Finland, but unfortunately it is relatively unknown. It includes elements of how we can function in a global world by respecting each other and accepting our differences."

THE FOLK HIGH SCHOOL MOVEMENT

The idea of the folk high school originated in Denmark. The Danish clergyman Grundtvig wanted to revolt against elitist pedagogy by establishing a folk high school for young people. The school would respond to the need for popular education following in the wake of early democratisation trends in Denmark. According to Grundtvig’s view, if ordinary people were to participate in ruling the country, they needed a better education than what the school system of the time could offer. Instead of books and memorisation, Grundtvig focused on the living, spoken word. His main idea was to create a “School for Life” where people all social classes could meet. His views propagating a free education style began to gain ground, and the first folk high schools were established in the mid 1800s in Denmark and in the other Nordic countries.

INCREASED LANGUAGE RIGHTS

The folk high school movement generated a considerable interest among the Faroese, and from the 1870s onwards, a significant number of people from the Faroes attended a Danish folk high school. Ever since the Reformation, Danish had been the official language of the Faroese Church, and when a school system was established in the 1800s, Danish was chosen as the language of instruction. The Faroese language was not a school subject, and several generations of Faroese people could not write their own language. As the Faroese folk high school was independent of the official school system, it could pave the way for Faroese-language education.

THE FAROESE FOLK HIGH SCHOOL

In 1899, the Faroese Folk High School was founded by two young men, both of whom had attended a folk high school in Denmark. During the first years of its existence, the School had male students in the winter and female students in the summer. The Folk High School was a central element in the national movement calling for more respect for the Faroese national identity. The students, who had never before had a chance to attend classes taught in Faroese, were now learning history, Christianity, geography and science in their mother tongue. Other subjects covered
The curriculum were Faroese and Danish language and – since both body and mind must be cared for – Physical Education.

Practical subjects such as woodwork for the boys and sewing for girls were taught so that students could support themselves later in life, while arithmetic skills would enable them to become shopkeepers. In accordance with the basic ideas of the folk high school movement, the spoken word was the main instrument of instruction. At the time, hardly any books existed in the Faroese language.

**THE FOLK HIGH SCHOOL TODAY**

Today, the Folk High School stands like an oasis in the middle of the city of Torshavn. It offers a spring-term course for young people as well as courses targeted to families, pensioners, people with psychiatric problems, and to tourists who use the school as their base during a package tour to the Faroe Islands. The students range in age between 0 and 94, and over the years we have had people from all continents except Australia," says Bjørgfinnur Nielsen, who has worked as a teacher at the school since 1982.

The autumn-term course is the longest course offered, with about 20 young people between the ages of 17 and 20 spending five months at the school. Instruction is given in academic subjects such as Faroese, history and mathematics; creative subjects like woodwork, handicrafts, art glass and pottery; as well as philosophy and writing in the form.

School days start with breakfast, after which follows a morning assembly consisting of a song, an excerpt from a film or short presentation. Then the students go to their various classes, which continue until late afternoon. Excursions to different parts of the country are an important part of the curriculum, too.

The autumn course is an eye-opener for the young participants, and their development during the 5 months at the school is tangible. For many, the folk high school experience is a kind of chronological milestone, with students referring to the time "before" and "after" the course.

A FANTASTIC EXPERIENCE

19-year-old Heðrikur Hanusarson Heinesen attended the Folk High School in autumn 2010 for five months and says that he enjoyed every single day. He had finished secondary school and at the time had neither a job nor concrete plans to continue studying. "The folk high school was recommended to me by some friends, so I chose this opportunity. It was a fantastic experience. I made lots of new friends and tried living on my own for the first time in my life. I had my privacy while at the same time friends were always close at hand", Heðrikur says. Apart from the social aspect of studying, the musically talented young man benefited considerably from the woodwork classes, where he built a drum for himself. The mathematics classes gave him a chance to improve his skills in this subject, which was never his strong suit at school.

FROM SPECTATORS TO PARTICIPANTS

Turið Sigurðardóttir is the Chairperson of the Board of the Faroese Folk High School and works as Professor of Literature at the University of the Faroes. In her view, the task of the Folk High School is to engage with the young students and equip them in the best possible way to participate actively in the present instead of being passive spectators without any significant influence on their surroundings. The participants become good at assessing and judging everything they encounter in life, which makes them more resistant and, to a certain extent, protects them from becoming victims, Turið Sigurðardóttir says. She is convinced that the school still provides a necessary service. Here each student is met at their own level, a pedagogical approach which is much needed in today’s mass-produced culture where development is expected to happen at a standardised, effective pace. The folk high school allows students to learn more about themselves and their abilities, Turið Sigurðardóttir says.

THE FOLKBILDNING TRADITION
This Friday, language consultant Christoph Schepers will open the door to his office at Studieskolen in Copenhagen at half past seven. Sometimes he comes to work as early as five o’clock in the morning, but just as often it can happen that he does not arrive until eleven o’clock. As the father of a little boy he is grateful for a workplace where the working hours are extremely flexible.
The Studieskolen Association offers various kinds of language instruction for adults; it provides instruction in Danish for foreigners, sells language instruction to companies and institutions and has a department which, within the framework of folk-bildning, provides instruction in thirty foreign languages. In this department Schepers is in charge of development, and as a specialist consultant he is also in charge of human resources.

Christoph Schepers shares the room with his colleague Eva Abrahamsen, and that is something he is happy about.

“She is the best colleague imaginable and, unlike me, she’s well organized. We both have time to talk about children and to debate concrete problems connected with our daily work,” he laughs, and asks in the same breath if he can offer us a cup of tea or coffee. In the small kitchen next to the office he opens the lid of a small tea caddy and lets the aroma flow out.

“This is what makes a person happy. But I’ll have to leave at eleven o’clock to be in time for the university, where I teach German culture. In fact, a quarter to eleven would be best for my blood pressure.”

EUROPEAN CO-OPERATION IS NEEDED

Christoph Schepers was born in Germany, but he moved to Denmark fifteen years ago. He has discovered that people in the Nordic countries are good at advances in technology but not so good at co-operation.

“We run our own systems and are fully committed to our own line of business.”

Christoph’s dream is to get all third-sector language schools to co-operate and also to turn their gaze towards the rest of Europe.

“For me the European Qualification Framework is the guiding light in language instruction, but in the Nordic countries people use it far too rarely to document language skills.”

Christoph Scheper’s main idea is that people should be able to get their language skills validated according to the same system, regardless where in the world they live, study or work. It could therefore be a good idea to

"IN THE SMALL KITCHEN NEXT TO THE OFFICE HE OPENS THE LID OF A SMALL TEA CADDY AND LETS THE AROMA FLOW OUT."

start in the Nordic countries. Over the last three years a Nordplus Adult project has developed tools which use comprehensive web-based and self-regulated tests within the competence areas described in the European frame of reference. Studieskolen’s partners are Folkeuniversitet in Norway and Folkuniversitetet in Sweden, and the three institutions are now running their second Nordplus Vuxen project to develop, test, evaluate and put into practice tools which document real linguistic competence.

“It’s an attempt to bring together an initial level test, course contents and a course description, plus the documentation after a completed course so that they make up a logical whole,” says Christoph Scheper.

Nordic co-operation has taken him one step closer to his dream, but it has also involved difficulties.

“We ran into a number of linguistic misunderstandings, which resulted in me taking a course in Swedish.”

WORK AND LEISURE GO HAND IN HAND

It’s almost eleven o’clock, but Christoph still has time to tell us about his plans for the rest of the working day. I wonder whether or when he plans to have lunch, or “frokost” as it is called in Denmark, and then he admits that the people in his workplace are not very good at leaving their work for coffee or lunch breaks.

“My boss tries to establish a lunch culture and encourages us to use our fine staff room, but this doesn’t happen very often.”

The afternoon is generally dedicated to meetings, and this Friday afternoon there will be an extra-long strategy session between 3 and 6 pm.

“We will outline our goals for the next three years. In the digital world the whole concept of learning must be redefined, and education will look quite different five or ten years from now. The fact that we’re already prepared for this at our school feels quite fantastic.”

It is easy to see that Christoph Scheper loves his work, and he admits that drawing a line between work and leisure can be difficult. He is not the only one feeling this way at Studieskolen.

“We’re all very committed, and we often send ideas to each other by e-mail after working hours. Sometimes when we have a meeting in the afternoon, people almost have to be thrown out to make them understand that it is time to go home.”

The right to make a fool of oneself without having to be ashamed of it is something that Scheper loves in Danish working culture.

“We laugh at our mistakes and correct them with a smile.”

CHRISTOPH SCHEPERS Completes Sentences:

As a colleague I try to be loyal, to listen to people, and to inspire them.

At my workplace I am especially motivated by co-operation.

I would like to learn more about pedagogics and IT.

My most important tool is my colleagues and teachers.

CHRISTOPH SCHEPERS Associates Freely:

Learning together: the only way to learn

Folkbildning: I’m afraid that it will disappear if we don’t take it into the 21st century

Grundtvig: he would love to be with us in the 21st century

Lifelong learning: a fantastic dream, and one that shouldn’t be abused by using it only for qualifications for the labour market

NORDIC PORTRAITS 15
The objective of the course Sega gubbar is to activate mature men who are free during the day and motivate them to take part in healthy exercise in the company of others. As well as Nordic walking, the course contains cycling, skiing, skating, stretching exercises, visits to the gym, and walks to places of cultural interest. Sometimes the participants have lunch together in the cafeteria at the public swimming pool and sometimes they go to the woods and have a barbecue.

The course was initiated by the course leader, Kaj Kajander. He is a retired gymnastics teacher with a great interest in preventive health care. Kaj says that the “sturdy fellows” meet every Monday at 10 am. The time is ideal for people who are free during the day. It is a good way to get out and start the week in a social and healthy way. He believes that the two main keys to the success of the project are the sense of community and the freedom to influence the content of the course. In the City of Porvoo, where Kaj is course leader, the course brings in more than forty men from a variety of professional backgrounds.

Physical exercise is always set at a pace that lets everyone talk during the exercise. And talk they do: about society, about their health, about their grandchildren and their hobbies. The spontaneous discussions about health often show what the participants are concerned about. Then the course leader will normally invite a guest lecturer who can tell the participants more about, say, PSA tests, a nourishing diet, our memory or how people can best retain their faculties when they get older.

Börje Enlund is a course leader in Kristinestad. Börje says that what is needed in starting a group is a course leader with a good sense of humour, and with a good knowledge of physical exercise and health issues.

A cookery course for men takes place in the island village of Pellinge, by the sea on the south coast of Finland. The participants are a very heterogeneous group, with ages varying from 12 to 65 years. Some of them already know a lot about cooking while others are novices. Still, they do not compete with each other. Everybody lends a hand, since they know that the evening will end with a common meal consisting of the dishes they have learnt to prepare during the day. Rabbe Rosqvist is one of the more enthusiastic participants, and he often brings his teenage son with him. Rabbe says that young boys who have come with their fathers or grandfathers generally enjoy the sense of community and the funny stories told during the cooking.

Courses in carpentry

John Whitesmith is an Englishman who moved to Finland for love. He says that courses in carpentry suit him well since they perform several functions at the same time. It is useful to learn carpentry and at the same time make things you
Adult education aimed at Finland’s Swedish-speaking population has come up with three successful course concepts with features in common – that participants can get started right away, take part in decision making, and learn by doing. I have chosen courses for men, since men are one of the target groups that adult education focuses on in Finland.

need. It’s easier to succeed when there is a capable instructor and a well-equipped workshop with tools and machines. You also gain confidence when you see what others are doing, and you can learn new things step by step. Social interaction between the participants is also important for John, who says that he can meet “just about anyone” on the courses. Participants from different professional backgrounds and age groups come together through their interest in woodwork.

CORROBORATED BY RESEARCH
Professor Rita Dunn has – together with her husband Kenneth Dunn – developed the concept of learning styles, which is based on every individual’s unique ability to learn. In the book Nu fattar jag – att hitta and använda sin inlärningsstil (Brain Books 2001) [Practical approaches to teaching young adults to teach themselves] Rita Dunn describes differences in men’s and women’s learning styles. Women have more of an auditory style of learning. Men learn somewhat better through the tactile, kinaesthetic and visual senses, and need to move around rather more. To put it in clearer terms: men learn more easily if they can hold, touch and press things. It’s a bit more difficult for men than for women to learn if they have to sit passively for longer periods of time. Dunn also believes that male learners are slightly more anti-authoritarian than female learners.

This is also corroborated by Barry Golding, a pedagogy researcher from Australia. During his visit to Finland in September 2010 Golding gave an account of his research. He has been developing and studying the Men’s Shed phenomenon, which is a growing grassroots movement in Australia. The sheds are equipped with tools and materials and give men who are free during the day the chance to work together, doing voluntary work or projects of their own. There is no instructor present, but there is a person in charge on the premises. Golding said the men he interviewed for his research liked to stress the difference between this activity and actual courses. They preferred to come to Men’s Shed, since they did not want to be instructed or talked down to by a teacher. The important thing for them was to be able to do what they liked and to be together with others.

There is a similar project at the Workers’ Institute in the City of Vaasa in Central Ostrobothnia, Finland. The Institute, which received the quality award of the Finnish Ministry of Education in 2010, has a course called Seniorsnickarna (“Senior Carpenters”). The institute is lucky to have a building of its own with a special workshop for woodwork. This makes it possible to keep it open in daytime (under the supervision of the caretaker) for senior citizens who wish to do carpentry at their own pace. In Kronoby, another place in Ostrobothnia, there is a project called Slöjdtorget, which follows similar learning-by-doing principles.
Thanks to close cooperation between the municipality, the Daghøjskole and a meat trade college, 17 women were ready and able to make healthy and organic food for children in Danish kindergartens and nurseries.
They have always loved to cook, and now they know that they have to beware of salmonella. For a little over a year ago a group of unemployed people, mainly women, finished an 18 week training course called: "Job in the childcare kitchen". The participants were of ethnic origins other than Danish and the course was conducted by the Ishøj Daghøjskole and The Danish Meat Trade College in Roskilde.

In the target group for the Danish Daghøjskoler are people who have limited education and people who are personally or socially vulnerable. The Danish Meat Trade College provides education for butchers, waiters and chefs.

INNOVATIVE COOPERATION
The course was a result of an innovative cooperation between the municipality, the Daghøjskole and The Danish Meat Trade College. The municipality needed personnel to make food for kindergartens and nurseries. The Daghøjskolerne and the employment agency were aware that it was difficult for many women from ethnic minority groups to get a job. Most of them only had limited education and had difficulty with the Danish language.

“We knew that they could make food for 100 people and good food, but they had limited knowledge of how to manage ecology, hygiene, work-place safety, time and economy” says Györgyi Csato, the leader for the Ishøj Daghøjskole.

THE LANGUAGE IS DIFFICULT
Sengül was only 14 years old, when she arrived in Denmark 33 years ago from Turkey. Since, she has had various jobs: in a flower shop, a metal factory, a fish factory and an office. But in the spring of 2009 she was unemployed.

“I have always loved making food, therefore I wanted to take the course” she says. She finds the course difficult, especially because she has experienced difficulties with the language.

“But I have learned a lot from listening and talking,” she says.

And Sussi van den Kleijn can confirm that. She works in the kitchen of the kindergarten Piletræet, where Sengül had her on-the-job training.

“She was very keen on the job from the beginning. She almost took the work out of my hands. The more time she spent here the better she became at the language.”

CUCUMBER AND FRIKADELLER
In The Danish Meat Trade College, Gitte Svensson has been in charge of the teaching.

“Although they have been deeply involved, it has also been really challenging, but the Daghøjskoleren has been able to follow up students’ progress after the course, experienced as they are in teaching and guiding women with limited education and language difficulties” she says.

Lee from Israel agrees totally, "The teachers at the Daghøjskoleren repeated and repeated everything a thousand times until they were absolutely certain that we understood, including all the names of Danish vegetables and fruits that I had hardly heard of before.”

One of the devices used to get across more difficult material is a Trivial Pursuit game about salmonella and other bacteria that educator Bettina Fellov of the Ishøj Daghøjskole, has developed herself. At the end of the course Lee considers the future to be bright: "I had no errors in the hygiene exam. And now I also know what a cucumber looks like and how to make frikadeller. I am ready for any job involving cooking,” she says with a big smile.
Working towards achieving SUSTAINABLE ASSOCIATION ACTIVITIES

Mia Hanström and Jessica Eriksson consider association work and activities to be important factors in a dynamic society, since they provide many natural social settings which encourage participation and development through meetings about shared interests. Eriksson points out that a good association offers more to its participants than it demands, and, once this basic condition is met, this benefits the individual, the association and society.

FROM THOUGHT TO ACTION
It was the advertisements about ABF’s evening course “Handling Everyday Life” which caught the attention of social worker and ICF coach Jessica Eriksson. For better or worse, she decided to get in touch with Mia Hanström, a study circle leader, in order to inform her about the company she recently started. Shortly thereafter, they met in order to consider a possible collaboration. ABF was already working with sustainable environmental and economical development at that time, so their conversation naturally drifted towards the area of associations’ levels of commitment.

“That was when the subject of association activities arose, in particular the topic of sustainable development for associations. Mia suggested that my company, ‘A Sustainable Lifestyle’, could complement their work. And that’s just it: we need to try to identify our own sustainable lifestyle before we can begin to proceed and develop further. So the focus area became sustainability, and we hope that the associations will create some form of sustainability policy adapted to the needs of each association,” says Jessica Eriksson.

Mia Hanström explains how the target group was very obvious for the adult educational association: ‘ABF is built upon its member associations, but it is also in contact with other associations, and it becomes clear that association activities can be quite demanding at times. The associations consume the energy of their members instead of instilling energy. It must be possible to get people to be dedicated in different ways. For example, does someone have special competencies which can be utilised? Or is there a limit to how much time a person is willing to dedicate to the association’s work and activities?’

THE MEETING BORE FRUIT
Hanström and Eriksson started planning an evening devoted to the topic of “Sustainable Development for your Association”. Questions such as “How shall members in an association find the motivation and pleasure necessary in order to develop?” attracted the participation of both the general public and associations.

The evening provided a lecture and workshops in which several questions pertaining to sustainability were examined. There were many more participants than Hanström and Eriksson had dared hope for, and quite a few associations were represented.

After the event, Hanström and Eriksson...
discerned that there were two groups which participated. One of these was associations which saw the advantage of discussing shared issues with other associations. The other was associations with a greater need of individual coaching in order that they establish realistic expectations of the association and better be able to clarify or perhaps even delimit their association’s purpose.

When ABF-Åland presented “Sustainable Development for your Association” to Nordic ABF, they were met with a great deal of interest. The study circle leader was able to describe how they attracted 22 participants to the evening and how the participants’ evaluations showed that they were quite satisfied. They also expressed an interest in examining different topics in greater depth, which is in fact already being planned for this coming fall.

PLANS FOR THE FALL

Mia Hanström explains that educational activities within ABF-Åland increasingly encompass freestanding lectures or a series of lectures with ensuing discussions. This seems to be a sign of the times, as this tendency also has been found in the other Nordic ABF associations. Hanström and Eriksson are currently planning their collaboration for the upcoming fall, both in terms of the possibilities for coaching individual associations and in terms of a series of individual evening lectures/workshops. By addressing one topic at a time, the associations can examine how to create sustainability in greater depth.

The special topic evening in April resulted in the fact that the associations were involved in and influenced the content of this coming fall’s lecture series. How about topics such as: How can we best utilise individual competencies within an association? How can an association change the age distribution of their members and succeed in reaching youths? How should we draw up a sustainability policy, what should it include and why should an association formulate such a policy?

Without a doubt, ABF has gotten off to a strong start, and the project “Sustainable Associations” will be further developed within the near future. The evening in April whetted everyone’s appetites. On the one hand, it became possible to chart which problems associations are facing at the moment and what might be the challenges facing them in their future quest for sustainable development.

On the other hand, the participants were given the opportunity to reflect upon what associations ought to consider in order to maintain a sustainable development. Participation in an association is a voluntary choice based on personal interest, yet associations are dependent on their members. It is therefore important that they listen to how members prefer to participate, both in terms of time and competencies. In order to create a sustainable association, its members need to feel motivated, inspired and happy. If an association is able to create these feelings, it need not take long before the remaining pieces fall into place. However, since motivation and inspiration are perishable, confidence, courage and creativity are also important conditions for the sustainable development of an association.
There are 400,000 Swedish Muslims and over 30 million Muslims in Europe. In the new generation of young Muslims, with their varying backgrounds, confessions and opinions, there are many who want to be able to represent just themselves.

Fazeela describes how one is constantly mistrusted as a Muslim. Without self-confidence it is difficult to engage in a dialogue and raise questions. Without a strong sense of who one is it is difficult to be a strong force in society.

We get attention for doing the right thing. The study associations Sensus and Ibn Rushd have been initiators of the Peace Agents (Fredsagenterna) project, in which thousands of young Swedish Muslims have been trained to spread information about Islam as a religion of peace. The keywords have been self-confidence, knowledge and identity. Following the example of the Peace Agents, organisations in Sweden have become more open. By inviting people and engaging in debates, the organisation has received a great deal of positive attention, which has been inspiring, and has also shown that the open attitude was the right one.

Now the concept of the project is being taken to a European level, with courses for 100 peace agents being arranged in each of the ten participating EU countries. Fazeela is one of the people who have been lobbying for the idea at the EU Commission in Brussels. Projects in France, Holland and England are already in progress. The preconditions vary from country to country, but the idea seems to be unique and it seems to work everywhere – having young Muslims gathering around peace work.

“We are very careful about having a credible and realistic representation in our projects in order to create a movement which all young Muslims can iden-
All Muslims can be involved, irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds, philosophies, political opinions, and religious or secular convictions.”

FROM A PROJECT TO A POPULAR MOVEMENT
Swedish Muslims for Peace and Justice was initiated as a further development of the Peace Agents. The organisation was founded in 1998 and is today running several co-operation projects, which in various ways strive for peace and dialogue. The association has active members who believe in what they are doing. "That is the only way to achieve long-term results which can lead to change," Fazeela says.

Before the general election in 2010, SMFR arranged a panel discussion to which it invited all political youth parties, including the Sweden Democrats, an anti-immigrant party which was subsequently elected to the Swedish parliament. According to Fazeela the atmosphere during the debate was threatening at times, but at the coffee breaks everybody talked with everybody. She believes in the power of meeting face to face, and thinks that it is important to engage in all sorts of debate, even with people who are prejudiced against Muslims.

AN ATTACK AGAINST US ALL
When a suicide bomber blew himself up in central Stockholm in December 2010, SMFR was the first organisation to arrange a demonstration condemning the attack. "The bomb was directed against us all, regardless of nationality and religion." SMFR’s demonstration got attention worldwide, with reports both in the United States and in the BBC. The latter presented a debate between Kent Ekeroth from the Sweden Democrats and Yasri Khan from SMFR. "As part of an organisation we are not afraid to make a statement and participate in public discussion. Both adult education and the popular movement where we do things together strengthen the individual. Together we can make it happen.”

HOPING FOR A SAFE REALITY
Although there are so many positive things going on, Fazeela describes how she, as a young Muslim woman, is tossed between several different realities. This has become particularly clear since she herself became a mother. While she gets appreciative mail for her work, she also sees how extremist hatred in the world is increasing. Because of insecurity there is always a plan B in her life, built on the possibility of escape. Because of fear she does not always say or write as she would really like to do. However, she hopes to be able to do that one day. ●
Learning for quality of life

Ragnhild Pehrsson is a committed enthusiast whose passionate dedication is currently benefiting the elderly inhabitants of the Dønski assisted living facility. She has started a study circle based on the core values of Folkeakademiet (an organisation promoting culture and adult learning): building the local voice of democracy – and local identity.
Ragnhild Pehrsson is interested in the role of the elderly in society and in intergenerational encounters. To her, it is crucial that impressions and experiences of elderly people’s role in society lead to insights and concrete action. With the co-operation of the adult learning association Populus, the Sandvika branch of Folkeakademiet, Dønski nursing home and the residents of Dønski assisted living facility have during the past couple of years run adult education courses in, for instance, cultural work, cultural mediation and universal design as well as a narrative workshop. – The idea behind these activities is that people retain their worth throughout their lives, Ragnhild Pehrson says.

NARRATIVE WORKSHOP FACILITATES READJUSTMENT

– Moving from one’s own home to an assisted living facility isn’t easy to adjust to at first, Ragnhild Pehrson says. The participants feel that adult education courses have been helpful in this process.

– You get new neighbours who live closer to you than what you’re used to, people with values and ways of dealing with everyday life that are different from yours. You get the help that you are legally entitled to, the rest you have to figure out for yourself. Everything is new. You need to cope with daily life and new impressions while coming to terms with the fact that the various nuisances of old age have caught up with you.

– The study circle is a forum where new and old neighbours talk about small and big problems and find solutions. The participants come to see each other from new perspectives and discover each others’ strengths. They come to see their role as a neighbour in a new light and learn from one another, she says.

The goal of the study circle is to improve the participants’ quality of life.

– We want to focus on the freedom and equality provided by this environment and how they affect one’s self-image. We try to think holistically and place issues into the wider context of the citizen-society relationship, explains an enthusiastic Ragnhild Pehrson.

A TIME FOR CELEBRATION

For the residents of an assisted living facility, religious festivals and public holidays tend to be quiet times. Relatives often go away for the holidays, so visitors are scarce. This creates an increasing need for social arenas and opens up opportunities for residents to learn about one another’s traditions. During the week before Easter, the study circle gathered to discuss Easter traditions.

Eva told the group that she grew up with the tradition of people giving each other palm branches on Palm Sunday. Another tradition she was accustomed to was that of handing out Easter lilies while singing the hymn “He is risen”. This was a custom that very few of us had ever heard about.

Rolf found the preparations for the day’s theme exciting. He can’t see very well, so he called his daughter, asking her to go online and look up the stories behind the days of the Easter celebration as told in the Bible. Rolf brought this material to the study circle with him to share with the rest of the group.

– This after all is the basis of Norwegian cultural heritage and the way in which we viewed Easter festivities were viewed back in the old days, Rolf says.

DIGITAL STORIES

Ragnhild Pehrson wants to combine this exchange of experiences with arousing the participants’ interest in modern technology. To this end, she complements the study circle by publishing results on a website called Digitalt fortalt (Digital stories). It is a website or forum containing personal narratives relating to cultural heritage from all over Norway. The website was launched during the Norwegian Year of Cultural Heritage 2009 but it lives on, with new stories coming steadily. However, this is not enough for Ragnhild Pehrson: Now she has found something fascinating for the group on Facebook, too. Every Tuesday a “Tuesday poem” is published on Folkeakademiet’s Facebook site, and she likes to bring these poems to the study circle.

– I think it makes them more curious about the internet and Facebook when they find something there that they like, she says.

A MEETING OF GENERATIONS

Every year a village party is arranged in Sandvika, but participating is difficult for elderly people who use walking frames or need other assistance. Ragnhild Pehrson solved this problem elegantly by setting up her own cabaret during the village party with the help of numerous co-operation partners. The clients and staff of Berger nursing home and Belset assisted living facility were invited. Participation in organising an event during the village party makes the residents feel that they are part of the community, Ragnhild Pehrson says. She stresses that it’s important that the elderly participate on the same footing as everyone else: by preparing their own performances! They received considerable help from students attending an optional course called “Joy of life for the elderly” at Rud upper secondary school. Ragnhild Pehrson and the participants agree that this meeting between generations is both important and exciting.

It certainly looks like the study circle will achieve its goal of improving the participants’ quality of life – thereby serving as an inspiration to each other and to you, the reader of this article.
Helping you to make sense of it all

THE THRESHOLD IS LOW at Hlutverkasetur role centre

Icelandic occupational therapist Elín Ebba Ásmundsdóttir walks with a light step to her workplace Hlutverkasetur on this April morning in Reykjavik.

Occupational therapist Elín Ebba Ásmundsdóttir has not been afraid to choose her own path in psychiatric care. Hlutverkasetur is Icelandic for "role centre", and Ebba is the creator of the centre. "After 30 years of working in the field of psychiatry I realised that I must come up with a new way of helping people with mental health problems to find their way back into an active life and regain important roles. This is something that conventional psychiatric care has often been unable to do."

It was in spring 2007 that Ebba established her own centre, not even knowing how she was going to finance it. She had picked up the idea much earlier, in 1999, in Trondheim where Dagfin Bjørgen had set up a user-led centre together with other people who had experienced mental illness. "I thought that the financing issue would work out somehow as long as the idea was good. The economic situation in Iceland was good at the time, people had money and jobs and it was easy to find cheap premises in Reykjavik city centre in a house about to be demolished." Then came the financial crisis and suddenly Ebba found herself alone with her centre. A large new group of people...
EBBA FILLS IN SENTENCES:

As a colleague I try to always communicate in a way that boosts the other person's self-confidence.

In the work community it's important that you can be yourself.

At my workplace I am especially motivated when I see that someone is able to do something they haven't managed to do before, or dares to take initiative.

I would like to learn more about ... I don’t actually know if I want to learn more about anything but I think it's important to apply in practice the knowledge you already have.

My most important tool is myself.

EBBA ASSOCIATES FREELY:

Learning together: a positive thing, that's what you do in a family

Folkbildning activities: I wish we had folk high schools in Iceland

Grundtvig: he gives us money for Nordic co-operation and widens our horizons

Lifelong learning: learning is one of our fundamental needs; even people with dementia experience a need to learn

needling support and help emerged: the unemployed. Ebba realised that their situation is in many ways similar to that of the mentally ill and decided to open up the centre to everyone in need of support without asking them why they had come.

The users would decide how everything was to be done at the centre, not the other way around. Here they would be able to start their way back into society without being stigmatised.

FULFILLING SOCIAL NEEDS

That is exactly how it turned out. Today the centre teems with activity, with a programme including activities ranging from philosophy, yoga and psychodrama to discussion groups and practical courses. Every day the centre has roughly fifty visitors, who can participate in the various activities free of charge. Occasionally weekend courses are organised for which a small fee is charged. It’s also okay just to pop in for a chat or a cup of coffee.

"What happens in between the activities is often the most important part: people who have led isolated lives or lost their jobs can find someone to talk to".

The staff consists of two occupational therapists and six people with varying backgrounds who have personal experience of mental health problems. In addition, a number of volunteers participate in the work done at the centre and make suggestions for suitable activities. The centre is financed by the state, the City of Reykjavik, and a trade union.

PATIENTS BECOME RESEARCHERS

The concept has been extremely successful in Iceland, and has now become the object of a scientific study. Thanks to the Nordplus Adult project NsN (from the Icelandic phrase Notandi spyr Notanda, i.e. users interviewing users), Elin Ebba Ásmundsdóttir has been able to continue her cooperation with the centre in Trondheim, where an entirely new way of evaluating psychiatric care has been developed.

"People who have themselves been mentally ill are trained to survey and interview others with mental problems about how they feel about their situation and about their experiences of the services available to them. The Norwegians visited us last year, and this year it’s our turn to travel to Trondheim. It is very inspiring!"

HOT SOUP AND A CHAT

It is nearly 10 o'clock when Ebba opens the door to her workplace. True to her habit, she has already dealt with some paperwork at her home computer before coming to work so she won't have to sit behind closed doors. At the centre it’s full blast all day, people wanting to unburden their minds and open their hearts, someone who feels ostracised. These are people with fragile souls who often react strongly to their surroundings. Today lunch is combined with a staff meeting where the employees discuss a user who has been very upset because the staff haven’t been greeting him. "He has been in prison and this is a sensitive issue. We talked about how important it is to acknowledge one another, and I'm really pleased that he was not afraid to approach me about this problem."

On three days a week, hot soup is on offer at the centre and everyone sits down to a meal together. The price is one-third of what a cup of coffee costs downtown, and one of the users of the centre buys the ingredients cheaply and prepares the food – on his own initiative. Today an especially tempting aroma is wafting about the centre because two older men decided to treat everyone to freshly-made waffles – again, on their own initiative. Easter is approaching, which adds its own touch to the atmosphere. Carmen Fuchs, an Austrian student doing her traineeship at the Centre, shows us how Easter eggs are painted in her home country.

"Today lots of things have happened that were not planned", says Ebba and looks slightly embarrassed as she tells me she particularly enjoyed a conversation about body hair. “We were pondering why people feel they need to shave all the hair off their bodies. We were laughing uncontrollably, and Carmen commented that perhaps it’s just as well that she doesn’t understand everything we’re saying. I would say we are all a little mad and you could describe the centre as chaotic – but with a sound basic structure.”

It’s four o’clock and it’s time to close the doors of Hlutverkasetur for the day. Ebba’s faith in her idea and initiative has been confirmed again.

“When I go to bed at night I often send thanks to a higher power, whoever it is, that I dared to take this step and try out everything I believe in. I am a well-known figure in the field of psychiatry in Iceland, I am a professional with a Master’s degree, so no-one can say I don’t know what I am doing. That gives me a lot of freedom.”
It is not illegal to grow tomatoes on roundabouts or to plant potatoes in an apartment courtyard. The transition movement encourages people to make better use of the earth’s resources and to become aware of what can be done locally, actions that people may not know are allowed or possible.

START ON A JOURNEY TO INNER AND OUTER TRANSITION

A transport strike in Britain in 2004 revealed the vulnerability of the country. If the strike had continued for two more days without food transport, there would have been a food shortage. In the autumn of 2006 this event gave birth to the transition movement, a popular movement that spread quickly all over the world, aiming to support local initiatives for increased self-sufficiency and a sustainable future. The network believes that people’s shared aims, inventiveness and knowledge can create alternatives that will make us less vulnerable to crises related to the climate, the environment and oil. Thousands of initiatives are going on all over the world. In Britain there are communities which are self-reliant, which trade with the rest of the world independently, and which have a currency of their own. There are steering groups in all the countries where the transition movement is active. In Sweden the movement has its headquarters in Sala.

AN EARTH-SHIP COMES TO ANCHOR

Kristina Eberth is a study advisor at Studiefämijandet (the Study Promotion Association) in Gothenburg and Mölndal. "We have so many associations and organisations within Studiefämijandet working with these issues; now they can do it together. This concerns them all. Not just those working on climate issues, but also those engaged with music, people running a dog club or a knitting café." The transition movement works at the grassroots level, in the daily life of the local community. And that is exactly where the study associations work.

At the Café Planet in Gothenburg, large audiences attend the meetings of the Study Association in which information is given about the transition movement. There is a constant influx of new participants. Their age varies from twenty-five to seventy-five, and there is a mix of teachers, students, engineers and farmers. They all share their knowledge and benefit from the knowledge of others. Kristina believes that the initiative is appreciated because people can meet across boundaries, co-operate around common interests and contribute by transferring their knowledge. The meetings are followed by study circles where enthusiasm is channelled into practical work. Within a study circle people build an earth-ship, a self-sufficient house made from recycled material. They use car tyres as a foundation and heaps of soil on three of the four sides of the house to provide insulation and warmth. Others start circles focusing on ecological cultivation, on accommodation on wheels or on preservation through lactic fermentation. The circles start from the interests of the participants and the knowledge of the group. The adult education movement has always worked by using old knowledge and helping to preserve it – something that is increasingly demanded.

MORE A CELEBRATION THAN A PROTEST

Kristina says that her lifestyle has become more climate-aware; she eats less meat and feels more positive about the present era. A major part of the movement is about focusing on opportunities. It is more a celebration than a protest at a personal level, and it gives her real pleasure to be in control of her life and her choices and not just "go with the flow". In her own courtyard in Gothenburg she plans to set up windmills and solar cells, and she says, "These local initiatives contribute so much to a sense of community."

She is thinking of having a transition party in the spring with artists and lectures, in order to celebrate successes and keep up the momentum. She would like to have the party in several locations at the same time, together with other study associations. She hopes that Gothenburg will become a transition city sooner rather than later.

"The idea of transition should be part of everything we do, without even having to think about it."
Everything is possible. Even people living in large cities can grow their own vegetables.
At eight o’clock, as a winter’s day is dawning in southern Sweden, Katrine Hamori starts her working day by switching on her computer to check her e-mails. She does not even have to dress before she opens the door to her study, since she works from her home in Gåsegränd, in the centre of the small town of Ystad.

On this windy day it feels especially nice for her not to have to sit in the car to get to her work, based in the folk high school of Österlen, which is located in Tомellå, 25 kilometres from here. Together with her colleague Marianne Meijer-Annerfeldt, Katrine Hamori is in charge of writer training at the school. At the moment they are busy preparing a Nordplus project, which should result in a handbook on disability. The co-operation partners are upper secondary schools for adults in Pärnu, Estonia, and in Espoo, Finland, and also the universities of Tallinn and Reykjavik. The handbook will be based on texts written by people both with and without disabilities, and it will be published on the Web in pdf format. Within the participating countries, groups of five people will write fictional texts about disability and send them to each other.

“The easiest way to transmit feelings is through fiction,” says Katrine Hamori, who is a qualified teacher of Swedish.

For five years she has been in charge of writer training courses via distance learning. This particular Nordplus project was prompted first of all by the realization that this kind of training is particularly suitable for people with physical disabilities, and secondly by her awareness that there is not enough material for teachers.

“Without Nordplus financing we could not have done this,” she says.

In a few days, Katrine Hamori and a colleague will travel to Tallinn to plan the co-operation. In Ystad they have already had a planning meeting with their partners from Espoo and Reykjavik.

“The great challenge is to find people who want to participate in
the writing. One problem is that the organizations for disabled people seem to be rather turned in on themselves."

WRITER TRAINING – A POPULAR OPTION
In her daily work Hamori and her colleague are responsible for fifty students who participate in writer training at the folk high school. The course is very popular, and every term we have between 300 and 400 applications.

"The applicants are people of all ages who want to develop their writing skills. The training lasts one term, but many students want to continue for another term and become mentors in small groups."

Remote teaching is cost-effective for the school, but more demanding for the teacher than normal class teaching.

"You have to plan and analyse in a different way, and every student must receive feedback. For example, I must be very careful with my words, because if I am vague I’ll immediately receive twenty questions by return.”

ALWAYS ENJOYABLE
As it happens, today is the day when the writing assignments for the week must be sent back to the students.

"I’ve read their texts and I can see what they need. It always feels enjoyable. It’s like writing a chapter in a book every week."

Katrine Hamori has lunch and coffee breaks when she feels like it, and sometimes she goes to the library to let her thoughts drift during the working day.

"I don’t actually miss coffee breaks with colleagues. That just takes up a lot of time, and this feels more effective. But of course this is lonely work, so I am lucky to have my colleague Marianne, so that we can toss the ball back and forth.”

NO OFFICE HOURS
One of the best things about the job is being able to give students supportive feedback that will help them to develop.

"A guy who had been a soldier in Afghanistan wrote about his experiences, and he produced a very good text. It was very difficult for him to re-live what he had gone through, but it was obvious that it did him good to get feedback about the text. It was important for him that it made a connection, and that it moved me as a reader.

Many of Katrine Hamori’s students are young and they produce texts at night or phone her after office hours. As a result, her working hours are flexible, to say the least, and she seldom closes the door to her study completely. However, for a person who is sixty-something this seems to be stimulating rather than stressful.

"The last thing I do in the evening is check my e-mails to see if there are any new texts for the following day.”

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Katrine Hamori leads courses in writing at the folk high school of Österlen. She works from home and thinks it is stimulating to have daily contact with her students by e-mail.
Today, the term globalisation is used to describe how individual countries and regions in the world become mutually dependent upon each other to an ever increasing degree. In an analysis carried out by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2005, the Nordic Countries were designated as a winning region. The analysis describes certain values as the Nordic Region’s strengths. In this report, Icelandicer Gyðfi Magnússon, Senior Lecturer at the University of Iceland and former Minister of Economic Affairs, and Tryggvi Felixson, Senior Advisor at the Nordic Council, share their perspectives on the Nordic region in the world. They base their views on the Nordic region as a Global Winner region, a discussion paper about the future of the Nordic countries, which was written collaboratively between Monday Morning (a Danish think tank) and the Nordic Council of Ministers. They were asked whether the Nordic region’s position in the world has changed in the five years which have passed since the discussion paper was published.

Globalisation is not a new feature of development. The expression “globalisation” was first used during the second half of the twentieth century, and the term became common towards the end of the eighties. In fact, one could say that the Vikings’ expeditions across Europe over a thousand years ago and, in their time, the Icelanders’ colonisation of “Vinland” were forms of globalisation.

Today, the term globalisation is used to describe how individual countries and regions in the world become mutually dependent upon each other to an ever increasing degree. In an analysis carried out by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2005, the Nordic Countries were designated as a winning region. The analysis describes certain values as the Nordic Region’s strengths. In this report, Icelandicer Gyðfi Magnússon, Senior Lecturer at the University of Iceland and former Minister of Economic Affairs, and Tryggvi Felixson, Senior Advisor at the Nordic Council, share their perspectives on the Nordic region in the world. They base their views on the Nordic region as a Global Winner region, a discussion paper about the future of the Nordic countries, which was written collaboratively between Monday Morning (a Danish think tank) and the Nordic Council of Ministers. They were asked whether the Nordic Region’s position in the world has changed in the five years which have passed since the discussion paper was published.

GLOBALISATION’S POSSIBILITIES
According to Tryggvi Felixson, globalisation allows for many new possibilities and is, after all, a prerequisite for prosperity in the Nordic Region. But adjustments are also called for in order to successfully rise up to a number of the challenges posed by globalisation. For small countries, it is sensible to attempt this by joining forces. Of the world’s some 200 nation states, five are in the Nordic Region, as well as three independent areas. In other words, the Nordic Region, especially each small country belonging to this region, is quite tiny in a large world. Joining forces can make the impact of individual small countries larger and prepare them for competition in the world surrounding them, which on the one hand is big and dangerous, but on the other hand offers many possibilities.

The United Nation’s statistics for living conditions in the world’s many different countries demonstrate that the Nordic countries have managed relatively well. The region’s five countries can be found at the top or almost at the top of the lists, almost regardless of which criterion is used. Being born and/or living in a Nordic country can therefore be regarded as picking a winning ticket in life’s country lottery. Gyðfi Magnússon says that the Nordic Region’s economic position has not changed a great deal over the last five years, in spite of the vehement upheavals of international economies. Iceland is the only exception, since it was in the middle of an economic experiment five years ago which ended badly. But all signs indicate that Iceland’s economy will recover quickly from the shock.

The other Nordic countries seem likely to survive the economic crisis relatively well, especially in comparison with those
countries which have been the hit the hardest. Without a doubt, this is due to the experiences gained during difficult times in the nineties.

PROSPERITY IS DEPENDENT ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND COMPETITIVENESS

Everything indicates that the Nordic model will survive, says Gylfi Magnússon. The countries are competitive in many areas that depend on high productivity, well-educated workers and high salaries. The public sectors are large but effective. The tax systems work well and public financing is sound. The countries have chosen different solutions regarding currencies and have access to different natural resources. In most other respects, the countries' economies are similar to other economies in North-West Europe. They all have a relatively high standard of living.

Tryggvi Felixson explains that the Nordic countries are endowed with a great deal of natural resources and are characterised by small, open economies. The prosperity of the countries is therefore greatly dependent on being able to manage the competition with foreign countries. Corporations become multinational and locate their operations wherever circumstances are optimal. The financial markets of individual countries become directly interconnected. Knowledge and ideas are transmitted at lightning speed between countries. Research and development becomes more complex and demands an ever increasing amount of resources and diverse competencies.

Specialisation becomes all the more important, yet there is simultaneously a need for more interdisciplinary cooperation where several competencies complement each other.

IT NO LONGER SUFFICES TO REST ON YOUR LAURELS

Gylfi Magnússon points out that the Nordic countries' citizens naturally need to make an effort in order to maintain this desirable position. The countries do not have anything specific which secures this position in the future, but there is also nothing which prevents them from maintaining their position.

Strong general education, research and design combined with solid structures and an effective public sector will continue to be the keys to competitive advantages for Nordic companies in international markets. Solid environmental politics also have an impact. Tryggvi Felixson adds that experiences from many countries show that the mere fact that they are endowed with natural resources does not secure wealth and prosperity for the citizens of the country in question. A number of other conditions must be met, among which are a number of values, considered to be the Nordic countries' strength. Such strengths include equality, trust, a low power distance, inclusion, flexibility, respect for nature, a protestant work ethic and aesthetics.

JOINED FORCES

It is time to ask how the Nordic Region can maintain its position of strength and if there is something that can be done in the future to secure its high rankings on the UN's different evaluation lists. For Tryggvi Felixson and Gylfi Magnússon, joining forces is still key. Tryggvi Felixson maintains that the Nordic countries have extensive and positive experiences from collaboration. There are some ten joint Nordic institutions and programs in areas where one believes that combining efforts will give better results than if working individually. Cooperation creates synergies in national initiatives. There are several agreements which give Nordic citizens the right to shared access to social services, education and a joint electricity market. There are cultural directives which encourage mobility and cultural collaboration. The general opinion is that this broad range of joint efforts contribute to the maintenance of prosperity in the Nordic Region. But is there more be done? The Nordic governments and its elected representatives have said yes. And this has given rise to a number of different new initiatives during the last few years. One could even describe it as a revitalisation of Nordic cooperation. The so-called Globalisation Initiative which the Prime Ministers launched in 2007 is proof of this. The initiative puts emphasis on strengthening collaboration in research and innovation as well as in the area of education. A strengthened international cooperation is included in Torvald Stoltenberg's report from 2009, which contains many suggestions which ought to be realised. The debate which has arisen in the wake of Gunnar Wetterberg's book United Nordic Federation, published in 2010, can trigger more ideas for Nordic cooperation during the coming period.

Gylfi Magnúsósums up by noting that there is especially one challenge which the nations must tackle. This is the demographic changes which are on the horizon for all countries. The workforce is steadily shrinking, although the Nordic position is not especially bad according to an international comparison. Still, development of European cooperative efforts will be very important for the Nordic countries, especially the development of the European Union.
Houses stand far apart in the Skærum area of West Jutland. Nevertheless, countless citizens, along with a significant number of Denmark’s foremost researchers keep finding their way to the university extension centre, which today is celebrating its 25th anniversary. One of the initiators and longstanding champions of the Centre is Gudrun Aspel, who currently works as Managing Director of the Centre as well as chairing the Board. In her youth she had to travel far away from home to study psychology at the University of Copenhagen. She has always been interested in how educational institutions might be able to reach the most remote corners of the country, where many people still live. “In my view, University Extension is among the most important democratic institutions we have because it reaches out to everyone with an interest in participating regardless of their situation. University Extension safeguards the important interaction between art, science and society, says Gudrun Aspel emphatically.

A FOCUS ON ECOLOGY AND ECONOMY

More than 25 years ago, the idea was ripening in her mind of establishing a large centre that would function as a tool for the entire Danish University Extension system through, for instance, arranging residential courses where academics and ordinary people could inspire one another. She contacted the late Thorkil Kristensen, a politician and scientist whose expertise encompassed economic issues as well as the question of ecologically sustainable development. Moreover, just like her, he had a keen interest in strengthening the dialogue between ordinary citizens and academics, including those in remote rural areas. The former Minister of Finance was a much respected person, and having him as chairman of the Board made it possible to provide the economic guarantees and support from regional politicians needed for establishing Skærum Mølle.

A PLACE FOR DIALOGUE

During the first years of its existence, the focus at Skærum Mølle was on communicating research from the field of natural sciences to the general public. For instance, the Centre organized geology courses taught by some of Denmark’s top researchers and professors. For Gudrun Aspel, however, the interdisciplinary perspective is the way forward. Therefore the Centre soon ventured into arranging courses which included elements of the humanities, social sciences and theology. The local citizens responded by arriving in such large numbers that Skærum had to improvise by temporarily renting premises at a nearby parish hall. For instance, 150 people came to listen to a lecture on author Martin A. Hansen. Today Skærum Mølle has its own spacious lecture hall,
and several thousand people from all over Denmark attend courses here each year. – We want to be the place where different currents meet. We embrace both Grundtvig’s views on popular education and Brandes’ approach of critical appraisal. Last but not least, we want to be a centre for dialogue: both interdisciplinary dialogue and discussions between citizens and academics. We have seen that this element is appreciated by the most highly specialized researchers. They enjoy coming here, finding out what people are interested in and partaking of the varied knowledge possessed by people who don’t necessarily have educational qualifications in the subject discussed, Gudrun Aspen notes with satisfaction.

**TOP RESEARCHERS DISCUSS WORLD HUNGER**

At Skærum Mølle, great importance is attached to co-operation with educational institutions, academics and citizens’ groups in Denmark and internationally. For instance, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Centre hosted several groups from Rumania with the support of the Demokратifonden (the Danish Democracy Foundation). Russian and French researchers visiting Jutland have been so impressed by the Nordic tradition of folkeoplysning that they have since tried to spread the concept in their own countries.

The Centre is currently preparing for a new high-profile event: on 4th June the doors will be opened to the participants of the seventh Thorkild Kristensen seminar, organized in cooperation with the Grundtvig Forum. The seminar will focus on how challenges such as hunger, poverty and rising food prices will be tackled in the coming decades, with the total population of the world reaching nine billion in 2050. With topics such as ethics, economy, sustainability and food production on the agenda, the seminar will certainly live up to the multidisciplinary ambitions of the Centre. The list of speakers includes two globally renowned Danish researchers: **Per Pinstrup-Andersen**, whose work has for many years focused on economic development with an emphasis on combating poverty, hunger and malnourishment in the developing countries, and **Sven Burmester**, former Vice President at the World Bank and United Nations Population Fund representative in China and North Korea. – World hunger is everyone’s business, and we were delighted to hear that these busy researchers are willing to fly out here from Washington to participate. Through this conference, West Jutland is calling out to the world, Gudrun Aspel declares.

**MORE INFO**

**The goals of Skærum Mølle:**
To promote the idea of the University Extension as a link between science, art and society
To establish and operate Skærum Mølle as a development centre for popular, open university teaching
To extend co-operation with other institutions in various fields of education and research
To work in the fields of astronomy and geology, the disseminating of older people’s life experience, the development of tourism, individual courses and international co-operation
To give people an opportunity to focus on studying specific subjects individually or together

**Link to the website of Skærum Mølle:**
www.skaerum.dk/
Estonians want to be a part of the Nordic region

This year marks 20 years since the opening of the Nordic Council of Ministers’ (NCM) offices in the Baltic countries.

Close co-operation with the Nordic countries shows that Estonians want to be a part of the Nordic region and appreciate both the Nordic model of society and mentality, notes Madis Kanarbik, the head of the Tartu branch of the NCM office in Estonia. He is responsible for the fields of education, science and public administration among others.

Madis Kanarbik is satisfied that the Baltic and Nordic countries have reached equal partnership during the first decade of this century. A good example of equal partnership is the cooperation programme for education “Nordplus” financed by the NCM and by the governments of the Baltic countries. The Baltic countries have an active role in launching and financing joint Nordic-Baltic initiatives now.

EQUAL CO-OPERATION PARTNERS

Madis Kanarbik also attaches great importance to the Nordic-Baltic Mobility Programme for Public Administration launched in 2009, involving civil servants of municipal, regional and national level. This programme can be useful for the Nordic countries because there are some things to learn from the Baltic countries, too. It is said, that Iceland, for example, can be interested in how the Baltic countries were preparing themselves for joining in the European Union. Other Nordic countries might be interested in how the Baltic countries were able to sharply reduce their public finances during the recession however managing to keep the public sector in function.

One of the topics of relevance for Estonia is the administrative reform and therefore there are several projects within the mobility programme for public administration related to administrative reforms in the Nordic countries. Civil servants from Estonia plan to study for example how the Danish and Swedish local government reform have been developed and how successful they
have proven to be. Similar mobility programmes have been initiated in the fields of business and culture. These mobility programmes offer a good possibility for exchange of experience and building of networks between the Nordic and Baltic countries.

Estonia and the Nordic countries have been successful in their cooperation in the field of adult education, Madis Kanarbik says. In the beginning of 1990 the Nordic countries took actively part in building up the Estonian adult education training centres network. In addition, many of the current Estonian adult education trainers got their professional preparation in the Nordic countries folk high schools. Co-operation between Estonia and the Nordic adult educators will continue. A good example in this field is the program "Nordplus Adult".

**HIGHER EDUCATION - KEY TO SUCCESS**

Madis Kanarbik notes that several Nordic and Estonian universities have already developed strong partnerships. There is a great deal of co-operation, active exchange of students and co-operative networking based on various disciplines. This cooperation is supported by the program "Nordplus Higher Education". During the meeting of the Baltic and Nordic ministers of education and research held in Copenhagen in November 2010 it was decided that the existing cooperation be deepened even further so that a common higher education and research area could emerge. The importance of cooperation in the field of research has been stressed in particular. When young scientists get to know one another early on in their studies they are also more likely to create regional collaborative research networks later on during their future career. The cooperation of universities is also backed by an important political program paper – the "Baltic Sea Strategy". The strategy emphasizes that more attention be set on higher education and research in the Baltic Sea Region.

**MADIS KANARBIK** is satisfied that the Baltic and Nordic countries have reached equal partnership during the first decade of this century. "It’s admiring what Estonia has achieved during the time of freedom, since 1991 and there is no doubt about that the next 20 years will be a remarkable time in Estonian history as well," states Berth Sundström, director of the NCM office in Estonia.

"We will celebrate the year of anniversary by looking forward. During May we do it by showing Nordic design at the Nordic Look fashion exhibition sale with focus on sustainability and innovation. On 15–17 September we will continue the celebrations under the topic Green Growth with seminars about sustainable future in Tartu and Tallinn, and with an electric car parade and exhibition in Tallinn as well. We hope that our anniversary activities will contribute to the new spirit of responsibility among citizens and decision makers."
During the last few decades, the Nordic welfare model has been contested by many. One of many justifications for challenging this model has been that it creates a passive population which becomes dependent on subsidies. Western society in general has evolved towards economic liberalism. The spirit Level was published in Great Britain in 2009 and was translated into Swedish 2010. Since the Nordic countries’ welfare system plays a prominent role in the book, it has caused an intensive debate in Scandinavia. The researchers/authors Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett account for an extensive amount of research findings which all conclude that all groups in society benefit from increased equality, including the wealthy. One of the reasons behind this is that human beings are extremely social, and it is important that we feel involved and trust each other. Significant inequality creates hierarchies and fear. Significant inequality creates hierarchy which all conclude that all groups in society benefit from increased equality, including the wealthy. Wilkinson and Pickett examined 23 rich, developed countries, among which were Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway. Iceland was excluded since they lack statistics about income inequalities. This research clearly demonstrated that country.
tries with high income inequalities also had a greater share of social and health related problems. Such problems related not only to average life expectancy but also to obesity, teenage pregnancies, violence, mental illness and to the general experienced “level of happiness”.

Regarding education, it may not come as a surprise that children of well educated parents stand a better chance of becoming well educated themselves. However, Wilkinson and Pickett demonstrate that a good education also depends on which country you live in. A comparison of literacy levels between Finland, Belgium, Great Britain and the USA demonstrated that the more equal countries Finland and Belgium had significantly better results across the board than the more unequal Britain and USA. Moreover, the differences between the best and the worst results were larger in the countries with less equal societies.

A STRONG GOVERNMENT IS NOT A PREREQUISITE
Several researchers have also demonstrated that countries in which the welfare state has been in place for a long period of time often show better results. For example, Sweden and Finland are way ahead of Greece and Portugal in terms of reading abilities among fifteen-year-olds. Still, the authors point out that a strong government is not necessarily a prerequisite for creating a more equal society. In Japan, social expenditures’ share of the GNP is very low in comparison with other large industrial countries. Yet income differences are not so large in Japan, and according to the book, this is an important factor behind Japan’s low level of health related and social problems. Such is also the case for the state of New Hampshire in the USA, which achieves its high degree of equality through “an unusual evening out of market income levels”. The authors ascertain that it is the final level of equality which is decisive – not the road travelled attempting to get there.

AN AMBIVALENCE REGARDING MATERIAL WEALTH
In the introduction, Wilkinson and Pickett describe Harwood Institute for Public Innovation in the USA’s report Yearning for Balance. According to this report, a large proportion of the population was deeply ambivalent to wealth and material assets, and wished for a society which could “change the course from greed and overabundance towards a lifestyle more focused on values, solidarity and family.” However, they did not believe that others felt the same way, which resulted in that they often experienced a sense of isolation.

The Spirit Level has caused a great deal of debate in Sweden. It is perhaps not a surprise to anyone that it is applauded by those to the left on the political scale and questioned by those on the right hand side.

Those with the most positive opinions of the book hope that the results of its meticulous research will change the spirit of the time and inspire people to care more about each other.
Folkbildning/liberal adult education is...

A LIFELONG LEARNING
something that sparks your interest,
and gets you going

MAKING NEW FRIENDS
learning by laughter
learning by doing
vering you to participate

PUSHING, PROBING AND CREATING DEMOCRACY
learning to become human and get a grip on life

A PLACE FOR GROWING
fighting prejudice, mine and yours
Nordic Lust

DEVELOPING PRACTICAL SKILLS
helping you to make sense of it all

A PLACE for learning
easy to access

empowering you to participate

where we decide ourselves

WHAT TO LEARN

SKANDINAVISK SEKTION