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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

IJS - 35 NOTES ON ENLIGHTENMENT AND
TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION III:
THE NORDIC CULTURAL CONVENTION

P. O. Box 14246
Nairobi, Kenya
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Mr. Richard Nolte
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Dear Mr. Nolte:

Attached you will find the third installment of a four part series about the problems of transnational cooperation in matters of enlightenment.

This third newsletter reports the activities under the Nordic Cultural Convention and of its Secretariat, which is very new among multinational organizations. The Convention itself seems to be unique among multinational agreements and offers much promise.

I believe that the promise of the limited record of the Nordic Cultural Convention indicates the possibilities of multinational cooperation in matters of enlightenment.

Since this series is in reality a continuing essay, I use continuing pagination to relate this part to the whole.

Sincerely,



Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr.

III. THE NORDIC CULTURAL CONVENTION

The Nordic Cultural Convention is a very young agreement -- it was implemented only on 1st January 1972 -- although it came into operation in the framework of a long history of both formal and informal cooperation among the Scandinavian countries in cultural as well as economic and social affairs. It is an independent agreement but part of a series of compacts including the Helsinki Treaty of 1962, as revised in July, 1971, which set up a number of discrete but interconnected forums for cooperation among Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.

The history of Nordic cooperation prior to the 1970's usually manifested itself in informal arrangements among various combinations of Nordic countries and formal programs of cooperation. An example of informal cooperation is a program of training and apprenticeship for steel craftsmen throughout Scandinavia, which is located in Sweden. An example of a formal endeavor is the Scandinavian Research Summer School, where the Nordic countries pooled resources for summer graduate programs in various fields; also they shared national based research institutes in subjects such as nuclear physics, in which, we should note, they associated with CERN in various ways. But the great thrust of Nordic cooperation in enlightenment matters before 1972 was in report writings: whole bookshelves have been filled.

The history of Nordic cooperation in cultural matters prior to 1972 was characterized by two difficulties: first, when operational cooperation was undertaken, its ad hoc character meant that there was little systematic follow through by the governments and groups involved; second, most of the formal governmental cooperation was in the preparation of reports and recommendations which usually did nothing more than collect dust on shelves. In other words, attempts at Nordic cooperation in enlightenment matters suffered from the faults of most other exercises in international and multinational cooperation in matters of enlightenment. Yet one should clearly understand that this long history of cultural cooperation provides a setting for more extensive and formal cooperation that is likely to contribute to the success of large scale, formal endeavors.

In order to overcome the various shortcomings of past Scandinavian cooperative exercises, the Nordic countries signed the Nordic Cultural Convention, whose most important innovation was the establishment of a Secretariat to encourage and coordinate cooperation in cultural activities among the member countries. There was some disagreement among the Scandinavian countries about the idea of a Secretariat: there was fear of intervention by supranational bureaucracy. Norway seems to have been especially concerned about this problem. And most of the ministries likely to be affected by the new agency had members who were apprehensive. But as both Bjorn Thomasson, an official in the Swedish Ministry of Education, and Mr. J. J. Engelhardt, the Dane who is Director of the Education Section of the new Secretariat, told me: the agreement was an indication of

political will by all of the Scandinavian countries to cooperate in cultural matters; therefore, the details of implementation were carefully considered but never put into doubt the overall success of the Convention. And the innovation of having a Secretariat was specifically designed to transcend the weaknesses of past Nordic attempts at cultural cooperation.

The Secretariat, which is the major organizational innovation, is divided into three sections dealing with education, research, and general cultural activities. Each section is advised by a committee made up of representatives from all of the participating states. The Secretariat reports to the Nordic Council of Ministers through a Committee of officials drawn from each country.

The current activities of the Secretariat give some indication of the scope of the activities pursued through the good offices of this new agency and of the potential under the Convention. I should emphasize the word "potential", because in the order of international life, operations of less than two years give time to show little more than potential.

Under the coordinating wing of the cultural activities section of the Secretariat, there is a study of the Scandinavian television systems and an attempt to develop strategies for coordinating the programming and financing of the participating networks.

The education section has two major projects in hand. An adult education project involves a survey of existing adult education activities in all of the Nordic countries, a study of the potential of multi-media adult education as tried in a number of countries, including the five Nordic countries, and, in the future, the development cooperatively of selected adult education programs. This adult education project is presently funded at half a million Danish Kroner. Its administration is typical of the projects undertaken by the Secretariat and the participating countries. The general policy is set by a committee of officials and the education advisory council, consisting of ministerial level appointees from all of the countries. Then there is an advisory group of experts in adult education. Finally there is a working group of ministry bureaucrats and adult educationists coordinating the various components of the project through the offices of the Secretariat.

The second project in the education section is a program to "harmonize" the curriculum in English and Mathematics in the primary and secondary schools in the five countries. One must distinguish the Nordic conception of "harmonization" from the use of the concept by the bureaucrats in the EEC. Mr. Engelhardt indicated that he and the Secretariat use "harmonization" to indicate cooperative curriculum development and teaching programs instead of common educational requirements for certification. The harmonization project involves experts in the two fields as well as representatives of teachers groups and ministries. Both research groups involved in this project have written draft curricula for their subject areas, and these drafts are being circulated to all of the potentially

interested groups in the five countries. When the curricula in English and Mathematics are completed, the Secretariat intends to carry on the work in these two fields but not by constructing more detailed curricula. Instead it will support continuing research and development work in the two fields. There are already some national projects running which are of common interest to all of the Scandinavian countries. An example of a project which might be supported is a Finnish research project concerning the problems of weak performers in Mathematics. There is no expectation that there will be one detailed curriculum being taught in these subjects in every school in the five countries. It is just hoped that the joint development of materials will lead to a common thread tying together the curricula in all of the countries, for it is thought that the schools in all of the countries share similar cultural and social problems and possibilities in these two subject areas.

The two educational projects as well as the television project share characteristics which are likely to contribute to their success. They are supported by an institution which enjoys both political and financial commitment from all of the participating countries. There is continuing and close consultation among the governments and bureaucracies involved in all of the countries. And most importantly, all of these projects go out into the countries to involve the professionals who are affected by and must implement any policies generated by the activities under the Convention. Existing governmental chains of communication are used but not solely relied upon: there is a clear recognition of the importance of involving those who will affect and be affected by the work of the projects in their ultimate success or failure. New channels of communication and new paths for future implementation are being created through the ongoing work of the projects and the good offices of the Secretariat.

Overall the provisions of the Convention and the activities of the Secretariat have greatly increased the communication and consultation among the interested parties in the participating governments. Mr. Olav Hove, Director General of the Norwegian Ministry of Education, said that there was always some communication among the ministries of education in the Scandinavian countries, but that now this communication has become much more regular and the consultation routine. Although, as Mr. Thomas Mauritzen, another Norwegian official and one of the men most responsible for the implementation of the Convention, said, probably much of this communication and consultation would have happened anyway; but agreements help.

Not only is general communication among the ministries on a whole series of problems enhanced, but the operation of the Convention has brought various practices in the ministries closer together. The activities and budget of the Secretariat operate on a three year forward planning basis (later it will be a four year rolling cycle), so all of the participating ministries must be willing to do this planning, at least in regard to the Secretariat's budget. In fact all of the Scandinavian countries are now moving to three and four year forward planning and budget systems for all of their activities; a trend which has been accelerated by the activities under the Nordic Cultural Convention.

The importance of activities under the Convention to the cultural pocket-books of the participating countries is not indicated by the size of the 1972 budget, which was 42 million Kroner. This amount was only about 1/2 of 1% of the overall education budgets of the countries (to isolate a measureable "cultural" component of national budgets). One can best characterize the claims of the Convention on Scandinavian cultural-financial resources as presently small but not negligible; and the money is invested with an eye to its strategic effect on innovation in the national systems.

The participating countries seem to view the Convention and its Councils as the "donor of next resort": that is if a ministry has a project which is important but which it does not feel it can support out of its own budget, the ministry is likely to go to the Secretariat and ask for support on a joint basis among the Scandinavian countries. Of course all such projects must have a multinational benefit potential.

This view of the Secretariat as an alternative source for meeting national priorities in a multinational setting provides a forum for joint Scandinavian decisions about the allocation of some cultural and enlightenment resources, which creates a momentum far exceeding the relatively small amounts of money involved. The habit of joint decisions about common problems and activities becomes regularized in a way which enhances and is enhanced by the close communication which is encouraged by the Convention.

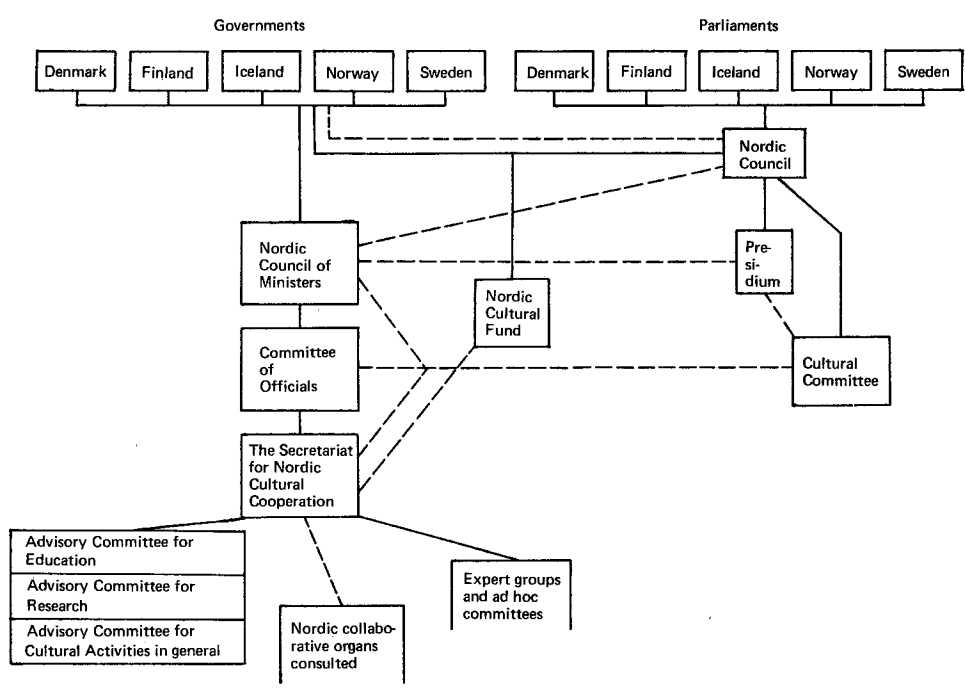
The Convention specifically encourages division of labor among the Scandinavian countries in regard to various enlightenment activities. As Norway's Director General Hove said: the purpose of the agreement includes not only greater communication and promotion of joint projects but also the allocation of particular cultural assignments among the various Scandinavian countries in a manner which reduces the redundancy of effort among them all and improves the quality and overall effort of the whole range of activities.

The lesson for the foreign observer in all of this is that the Convention and the Secretariat have been designed to coordinate various national activities in areas where such coordination is perceived to be useful by the participating parties. And it has grown out of a long history of ad hoc cooperation among a group of countries which share a very similar cultural and social background and contemporary reality.

Also, it should be clearly noted that the Secretariat of the Convention sees its role as one of only providing good offices for systematic cooperation in areas where there is a shared commitment for action among the countries but where the resources of individual countries do not match the needs.

As an organized intervention in the enlightenment processes of Scandinavia, the Nordic Cultural Convention shows great promise just because of its limited view of its own role. This limited view is complemented by an environment where multinational cooperation has a distinguished pedigree. Both aspects of the life of the Convention seem to bode well for its future. And both shed light upon the conditions necessary for successful multinational and/or international collaboration in enlightenment matters. It is to a more general discussion of these conditions that we must finally turn.

Table showing the organization of Nordic cultural cooperation



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