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Theme: Future of work - after Corona



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Even Santa Claus is hit by the Corona crisis

The Nordic model is not past its best-before date. On the contrary, it is needed and it has shown its strength during the Corona pandemic. But it faces new challenges, which call for innovative welfare system finance solutions when new forms of employment and new technology disrupt entire sectors.

EDITORIAL

10.12.2020

BY BJÖRN LINDAHL, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

On 26 November, Denmark's Minister of Employment opened the final Nordic Future of Work conference.

The many tripartite agreements that were rapidly reached in Denmark were one of many examples of why the Nordic model is still very relevant, he pointed out. But you cannot spend too long in a room with social researchers before they start to highlight the differences between the Nordic countries.

At its core, the Nordic model is more a system for facing challenges than relying on solutions set in stone. So the model needs to be examined and adjusted, and in some cases, it needs to go through more thorough changes over time.

The Nordic Future of Work is the largest labour market research ever project financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

30 researchers from a range of Nordic research institutes and universities have studied and analysed developments in different areas. The project has been coordinated by Jon Erik Dølvik and Kristin Alsos from the Norwegian Fafo research foundation.

The Nordic Labour Journal has followed the research project from the start, and has reported from previous conferences in Stockholm and Reykjavik. We have also been responsible for the official documentation of these two conferences. The research was also the Nordics' contribution to the ILO's centenary celebrations last year. Four of the Nordic countries joined the organisation the year after its foundation, and a new book looks at Sweden's 100 years' relationship with the ILO.

Its Secretary-General Guy Ryder also participated in a webinar on the book, where he presented worrying numbers for jobs lost globally as a result of the Corona pandemic – 495 million.

The Nordic region has also been hit. Not even Santa Claus has been spared, as Bengt Östling's and photographer Cata Portin's report from Santa Claus Village in Rovaniemi in Finnish Lapland shows. Last year half a million people visited the village, where businesses had a shared turnover of 42 million euro. This year's turnover will be a fraction of that.

Rovaniemi's tourism industry actually began with a visit from Eleanor Roosevelt, the widowed former first lady and UN ambassador, in 1950. Finland could not accept Marshall aid after the war but could get humanitarian help for war-ravaged Lapland. Roosevelt wanted to see how that aid was being used, but perhaps her actual visit was what in the end had the greatest effect?

In these challenging times, let us not forget that there are those who have it worse!

We wish all of our readers a Very Happy Christmas and look forward to what will hopefully be a brighter 2021!



Jon Erik Dølvik: Stored demand could help create jobs

The largest research project ever to be financed by the employment ministers at the Nordic Council of Ministers was about to conclude just as the Corona pandemic hit. How will the pandemic and the economic crisis in its wake impact on the advice the researchers will give on the future of work?

THEME

10.12.2020

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Jon Erik Dølvik and Kristin Alsos from the Norwegian research foundation Fafo have coordinated the 30 researchers from a range of Nordic research institutes and universities. Dølvik will also open the concluding Future of Work conference on 26 November, which will be hosted by the Council of Ministers' Danish Presidency.

Dølvik will be in Oslo because the event will, not surprisingly, be online. The Danish hosts might be somewhat distracted by the political crisis surrounding the Minister for Agriculture's decision to order the culling of all Denmark's minks – with-

out having the mandate to do so. Around 15 million animals must be killed, and 6,000 Danes will lose their job.

This is just one example of how the Corona crisis hits in ways that are nearly impossible to predict.

"That is why we have also been granted an extended deadline for the final report. But it will be done in time for the planned employment ministers' meeting in March 2021," says Jon Erik Dølvik.

“I am happy for this extra time, as it allows us to take a better look at the second Corona wave's impact on employment and the economy.”

Four main areas:

The research project aims to analyse the consequences of societal change for the Nordic model across four main areas:

- What impact will ageing populations across the Nordic Region (and elsewhere in Europe) have on the labour market?
- How will growing globalisation influence labour markets – or will globalisation slow down?
- How will new technology and new ways of organising work impact on jobs, the demand for skills and employment?
- What will climate and environmental change mean for future decision-making?

The researchers have also studied two horizontal issues: How do work environments develop across different sectors? And what will that mean for reforms of Nordic labour legislation? Finally, the report will describe what all this will mean for the Nordic model.

“The future is open, but it is in no way a blank canvass. Our options are constrained and shaped by inherited means and conditions – economically, socially and environmentally,” says Jon Erik Dølvik.

What has changed?

This will not be the first time Dølvik presents the Future of Work project, and it is also not the first time he talks to the Nordic Labour Journal. This time the interview focuses on how the Corona crisis is different from other crises.

“We know from earlier crises, like the 2008 financial crisis, that it takes a long time before a country gets back to pre-crisis employment levels. After the financial crisis, it took nearly ten years for Denmark and Finland to get back to pre-crisis employment levels. After the economic crisis in the 1990s, it took even longer for Sweden and Finland.

“We risk even stronger effects this time. More people will be competing for fewer jobs in the parts of the labour market where wages are lowest and jobs most precarious.

“How will those entering the jobs market during the crisis do? Will we see a Corona generation displayed as a peak in future unemployment graphs?”

The Corona crisis differs from former crises because services have been the hardest hit – and not so much the production of goods.

“The sectors that have the lowest threshold for those who struggle to join the labour market – retail, hospitality and tourism – have been the ones particularly hard hit by the Corona crisis.”

Other parts of the economy have improved, like digital communication, others have not had to put people on furlough or shut down. Public sector employees have been able to carry on working as before, many of them on the frontline in the fight against the pandemic.

Dramatic effects

The effects of the first wave were dramatic. Unemployment rapidly rose to record levels across the Nordic region.

Meanwhile, state measures to support businesses, jobs and incomes were introduced on an unprecedented scale as a result of tripartite agreements.

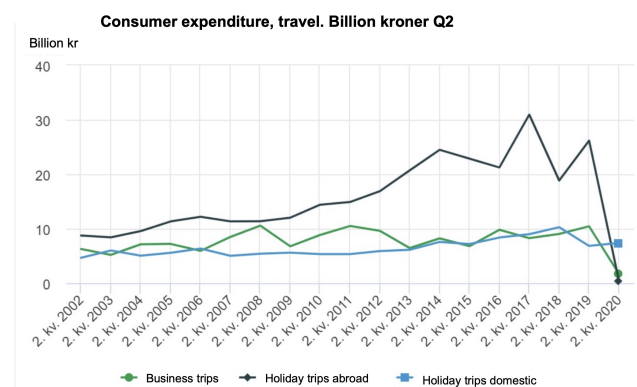
“The result was that the fall in spring was followed by a nearly equally rapid recovery after the summer – yet with much lower activity and employment levels than pre-crisis. The question is whether we will see the same development during and after the second wave of the pandemic and whether we risk even deeper and more long-lasting effects on the labour market,” says Jon Erik Dølvik.

In an earlier interview, he talked a lot about how wealth is divided ever more unevenly, leaving the biggest companies with a greater share of the winnings and incomes. This is partly due to the consequences of technology, according to Dølvik.

Companies like Google, Amazon and Facebook have established near-monopoly conditions for some services, where the extra cost of servicing one more customer is minuscule since everything is digitalised. If these giant players are not taxed, or invest in job-creating activities, we could end up with a lack of demand for labour.

Money saved

“The Corona crisis has made it more difficult to travel, go to the pub and to do many other things we are used to – like going to the gym. This means people have spent less money. If we look at the normal spend on foreign travel, we are talking some 100 billion Norwegian kroner (€10.7bn) a year.



Where does the money saved on foreign travel end up? The graph above shows Norwegians' expenditures during Q2

from 2002 to 2020. The black line is foreign holiday expenditure, which has plummeted. The green is business trips which also have plummeted. The blue line is expenditures for holiday travel in Norway. Despite much media attention, the expenditure here has not increased.

“There is a ‘stored demand’ which we need to consume or invest in a way that creates jobs.”

If not, the risk is that people’s savings will be used to outbid each other to buy things like housing or holiday homes, which will make property more expensive but in the end is a zero-sum exercise which will not lead to increased welfare or new jobs for those hit by Corona.

So this “stored demand”, argues Jon Erik Dølvik, must somehow be channelled so that it leads to investments in new businesses and activities that create jobs. He is not opposed to the idea of introducing a Corona tax to fund activity measures or funds in the Nordic countries which can be invested in more environmentally friendly technology, new green jobs and skills development for those who have been hit by the Corona crisis.

How important are demographic changes?

“However, one of the greatest challenges facing the Nordic welfare states are the demographic changes, with more old people and fewer people to look after them.

“After 60 years of strong workforce expansion, this implies a radical shift in the basis for expanding activity, employment, and welfare funding. This will probably be accentuated by intensified trans-border competition for labour due to declining workforces in Eastern & Continental Europe, making labour migrants more expensive and harder to attract.

“A key task for the Nordic countries will therefore be to improve employment rates, skill and inclusion among those who are struggling to enter the labour market – in particular young people and others with low education, which include many with minority backgrounds. To make that happen we need to create enough economic growth and an increase in the demand for labour,” says Jon Erik Dølvik.

Productivity growth

Therefore, whether the Nordic societies will find ways to share and apply the fruits of techno-driven productivity growth to resolve the unmet needs that fuel national labour demands, depends ultimately on how we organise – or reorganise – our political economies.

“In short, are we – in the face of global megatrends and the current upheavals – able to preserve and renew the Nordic tools for the redistribution of income and wealth in ways that can strengthen our economies’ capacity to meet the rising need for renewable goods and services, as well as mobilising the labour and skills needed to deliver them?” asks Jon Erik Dølvik.



Nordic labour law must face the future

Is Nordic labour law ready to face the future of work? New technology and ways of working are already putting pressure on established structures, but experts believe there is light at the end of the tunnel.

THEME

10.12.2020

TEXT: LARS BEVANGER, PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

“The big question we have asked ourselves is whether Nordic labour law is ready for the future of work,” Marianne J. Hotvedt told the webinar Nordic Future of Work at the end of November.

She is an Associate Professor at the Department of Private Law at the University of Oslo, who together with Kristin Alsos from the research foundation Fafo has coordinated the work on the report the Future of Nordic labour law, which makes up the final analysis of the research project Nordic Future of Work.

Necessary renewal

The report looks at how Nordic labour law can and must be renewed in the meeting with new technology and new forms of work.

New flexible contracts and the platform economy represent fundamental challenges for labour law. From a legal perspective it is crucial to distinguish employment contracts from other relations, particularly self-employment, she pointed out.

“To preserve the societal functions and purposes of labour law, we might have to reform it, said Hotvedt.

Cracks in the foundations

The concepts of employer and employee form the very foundation of labour law. This develops cracks in the face of new forms of work like you find in the platform economy, argued Hotvedt.

“The concept of employee determines who may be covered by collective agreements, and the concept of employer pins the legal responsibilities on the principal.”



Marianne J. Hotvedt has led research on what Nordic labour law says about who is an employee and who is an employer. Here the former head of the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise, Kristin Skogen Lund, is peering over her shoulder. (The picture is taken before the Corona pandemic).

Yet an increasing number of people now work in a grey area where their employment status is unclear. These are not employees in the traditional sense, and also not self-employed. This is particularly true for platform workers, since they do not have the protection of an employee nor the independent responsibility for their own job like a self-employed worker has.

Hotvedt and her colleagues have also studied similarities and differences in labour law between the different Nordic countries.

“This was useful as it allowed us to stress-test the legal framework and its ability to cope with changing labour relations, but also the strengths that give us a basis from which to develop legislation in the right direction.”

Strength in a flexible legal framework

“Employee” is a fairly flexible concept in all of the Nordic countries, said Hotvedt. It gives the courts the freedom to gradually adapt the concept and define what it means in legal terms on a case-by-case basis.

“A platform worker who is formally operating as self-employed is therefore an employee in legal terms if there in reality is subordination and dependency of a principal,” explained Hotvedt.

Many types of non-standard work are also recognised as employment contracts in Nordic labour law, including agency work.

“There are a number of interesting examples of collective agreements regulating platform workers as employees. If the social partners have leeway to define workers in the grey area as employees, this is a potential for further adaption,” argued Hotvedt.

One clear example can be found in Sweden, where collective agreements can include an intermediary category – independent contractors.

More challenges remain

Nevertheless, the report’s authors want to underline that many challenges remain. Determining employee status on a case-by-case basis does not provide the clarity needed for labour law.

There are for instance still no court cases in the Nordic countries guiding the classification of platform workers.

The authors therefore recommend that employment status be anchored in so-called legal presumption, which means platform workers are presumed employed until “the opposite is proven” by the company.

“Then it would have to be proven in court that a worker is truly and generally self-employed,” said Hotvedt.

What is an employer, and what is it not?

But Nordic labour law also faces challenges when it comes to the definition of “employer”, especially when it comes to platform solutions like Deliveroo and Uber.

“Here we are less optimistic. This concept is generally less inclusive and adaptable than the concept of employee,” said Marianne J. Hotvedt.

“The employer is the stronger contractual party in an employment relation, and the legal framework rests on an assumption that the contractual party and the principal with employer function and powers is one and the same. This is not always the case in for instance the platform economy.”

But there is light at the end of the tunnel here too, according to the authors.

“In Nordic labour law, the employer’s responsibility is not solely related to a contract of employment. If you connect the dots of all the different nuances, a rough pattern is that employer functions can justify at least some legal obligations.”

Is the Nordic model under threat?

The Nordic model is supported by legal norms like collective bargaining, protection of health and safety and basic social security.

If we fail to adapt labour law to include protection also for those in new forms of work, the Nordic model itself might be at risk, argue the authors.



*Jeremias Adams-Prassl, who explores the idea of innovation and entrepreneurship in depth in his book *Humans as a Service: the Promise and Perils of Work in the Gig Economy*?*

Support from British professor

Jeremias Adams-Prassl is Professor of Law at the University of Oxford, and joined the webinar with his comment on the presentation of the Future of Nordic labour law.

He pointed to the paradox that the further away you are from stereotypical employment, the more protection you need from labour law.

“And yet the law tends to end up protecting those who are least vulnerable socio-economically more than the socio-economically vulnerable,” Adams-Prassl told the webinar.

So far this has been particularly relevant to platform workers. Adams-Prassl believes there now are signs in Europe that this sector could be facing important changes – although perhaps not the kinds of changes companies like Uber would embrace.

Nothing new under the sun

“The gig economy for a long time was characterised by two narratives – one, that it was all about entrepreneurship, and the second that it was all about innovation.

“And the point of these narratives was to say ‘it’s entrepreneurship and therefore it’s not employment, and it’s innovation and therefore it’s new and different and shouldn’t fall under the existing framework,” Adams-Prassl told the Nordic Labour Journal after the webinar.

He argues that the algorithms used by platforms like Uber and Foodora are actually very strict and have little to do with entrepreneurship, and that their basic business model is the same that existed 200 years ago.

“What we now are seeing is that courts all over Europe are starting to wisen up to precisely that. They’re starting to say that actually, when it comes to working for a gig economy platform, given just how tightly regulated it is, given just how much control is exercised, these people are workers, they’re not entrepreneurs.”

Important supreme court rulings

He mentions how the French supreme court in March ruled that Uber drivers must be considered employees and the Spanish supreme court that said the same in September about people working for the food delivery service Glovo.

“Senior courts around Europe are not buying the narrative of entrepreneurship and innovation.”

Adams-Prassl himself is a tech enthusiast, as long as employers use technology on a level playing field.

“Genuine innovation can only happen when there is a set of rules that everybody plays by.”



17 types of employment – and the rest

The Nordics have not become a region of freelancers, but there is a growing multitude of different forms of labour. The Corona pandemic has also made life for people with non-standard work even more precarious, confirmed experts at a Nordic conference on the future of work.

THEME

10.12.2020

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Nordic cities have a plethora of bicycle or moped food delivery services, clearly visible with their company logos and carrying big, square bags on their backs. While bags and working tasks are the same across different companies, the workers' job conditions differ. Those with blue bags work for Wolt and are not covered by any collective agreement. Riders with pink bags work for Foodora and are covered – but only in Norway.

“The future is here”

The cycling food delivery workers are but one example of many new types of jobs that are offered and carried out by Nordic citizens in new and very different ways – typically with much flexibility and without the job and pay protection traditional employees enjoy. Such as collective agreements securing a decent salary, the right working hours, paid holidays and pensions.

A Nordic online conference held in November 2020 focused on these new types of labour. It was organised by the Nordic Council of Ministers to present the results of the joint Nordic

research project “Nordic Future of Work” which has been running for several years.

Denmark currently holds the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers, and the conference was opened by Denmark's Minister of Employment Peter Hummelgaard. He praised the report and the conference for highlighting how Nordic labour markets and the Nordic labour market model can tackle the major changes facing the labour market – including new types of employment.

“The future of work is already a reality in the Nordic region,” the minister said, alluding to digitalisation, new technologies and new forms of employment.

Unchanged scope but new types of labour

The researchers behind the report “Nordic Future of Work” have made several new discoveries, including the fact that the number of people in non-standard work has not risen for a good while. As new forms of non-standard employment

began to emerge a few years ago, many predicted that the Nordics would turn into a region of freelancers.

Yet the Nordic Future of Work report shows that that prophecy has not come true, said Anna Ilsøe, Associate Professor at the Employment Relations Research Centre (FAOS) at the University of Copenhagen.

She and her colleague Trine Larsen have coordinated the Danish part of the Nordic Future of Work report.

“It surprised us that the scope of non-standard work has largely remained unchanged over the past 20 years. But we also found that there are troubled waters under the still surface,” Anna Ilsøe told the conference.



Anna Ilsøe and Trine Larsen, FAOS, Anna Pärnänen, Statistics Finland

Even though the scope of non-standard work has not grown, many Nordic citizens have this type of jobs – between one in three and one in four of workers do not have permanent full-time work with at least 30 hours a week. Many combine several income streams and have several different forms of employment – often temporary jobs with few or no guaranteed hours, also known as zero-hours contracts. The researchers' case studies in Denmark, Sweden and Finland show that up to 50% of people working in care homes and hotels are on such contracts.

Non-standard employment is particularly widespread in the hospitality sector, retail and cleaning as well as in the event and creative industries, where time-limited contracts and freelance jobs are common.

The researchers see two opposite trends among businesses – some make use of even more forms of non-standard work, others are beginning to offer people in non-standard jobs more employment safety and security.

A need for more security

The researchers from FAOS said people in non-standard jobs face a lot of job and income insecurity, and many of them are involuntarily in this type of employment. 70% of temporary workers in Sweden, Norway and Finland have not chosen this voluntarily.

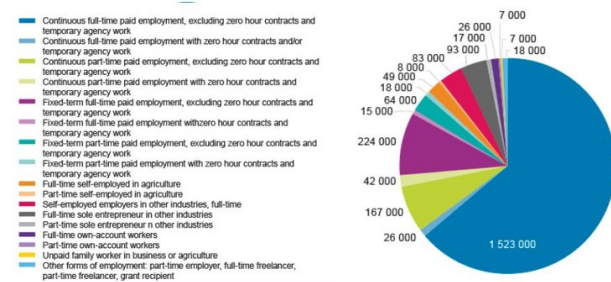
The Corona crisis has had a very negative effect on job and income security among people with non-standard work, Trine Larsen explains.

“People in non-standard employment have been particularly hard hit by Corona because many of them work in sectors that have struggled because of the crisis.”

It has also proven difficult for many in non-standard work to benefit from state help introduced by Nordic authorities to help the labour market through the crisis. Yet there are some positive signs here too, according to Trine Larsen.

“Nordic governments and the social partners have launched a range of initiatives aimed at people in non-standard work, as well as new innovative social security measures. But despite the Nordic governments' good intentions, we see that many people in non-typical employment still struggle and face higher job and income insecurity.”

Different forms of employment, employed aged 15 to 64, 2014 Finland. Source: Labour force survey



Senior Researcher Annan Pärnänen from Statistics Finland tried to illustrate the development in the number of different types of employment for the conference participants in a graph. Not an easy task, she confessed.

“I have tried to divide the Finnish workforce's employment forms into categories, and have arrived at 17. I admit that this makes it nearly impossible to read, and this does reflect how complex the number of different forms of employment has become.”



Future of work: Is there space for people with disabilities?

There is no lack of technology to help people with disabilities enter the labour market. The main obstacle remains attitudes among employers and in society as a whole. More than a quick fix is needed to move beyond this.

THEME

10.12.2020

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

That was the main message from the conference "How can future workplaces work better for people with disabilities?", recently hosted by the Nordic Welfare Centre, an institution under the Nordic Council of Ministers.

All the speakers highlighted the fact that things do not work particularly well right now, and that new technology will not be an "open Sesame". Several also pointed out that the pandemic is hitting people with disabilities harder than others.

"People with disabilities are hard hit by the pandemic both in health terms and because it has made it harder to find a job," said Stefan Trömel, Senior Disability Specialist at the International Labour Organisation ILO.



Stefan Trömel, Senior Disability Specialist at the International Labour Organisation ILO.

There was great interest in the online conference and it gathered people from across the Nordics, as well as from Europe and even other parts of the world. Stefan Trömel said digitalisation and new technology can create avenues into the labour market for people with disabilities, but the question is how to guarantee this new technology will actually benefit them.

“People with disabilities must be a particular focus when it comes to new technology, said Stefan Trömel.

Obstacles and bridges

Thomas Bredgaard is a Professor at the Aalborg University and works at a research centre for disability and employment, established in 2018. He has studied obstacles and bridges between people with disabilities and the labour market. Many want to work, but in reality it is harder for them than for many others, according to research from the centre. On average, 84% of employable people in Denmark work, but only 64% of people with some form of disability do. The figure for people with severe disabilities is even lower. There is a clear gap.



Thomas Bredgaard is a Professor at the Aalborg University and researcher at a centre for disability and employment, established in 2018.

Thomas Bredgaard has found that the type of physical disability plays a major role in the chance of finding a job.

“The type of disability determines a lot. It is far harder to get into the labour market for people with mental disabilities compared to people with physical disabilities,” he said.

Education is another obstacle. Many people with physical disabilities have lower education than average, and research shows the higher the education, the less of a gap there is. Many people with physical disabilities also have lower self-esteem, which in turn impacts on their chances of being hired.

“People with physical disabilities are more dependent on employment offices in order to find work. For them, this is more important than social networks, which often are smaller for people with physical disabilities,” said Thomas Bredgaard.

Talking about your disability should be OK

Many employers are also openly discriminatory. “We are not adapted for disabled people” is not an unusual answer when employers are asked about what they think about hiring people with physical disabilities. There is no doubt that there is a need to find new ways of matching people with physical disabilities with the labour market.

So how do you turn the obstacles into bridges? There is no quick fix or miracle cure, according to Thomas Bredgaard. Many measures are needed, including improved education and making it easier for people with physical disabilities to talk about it and about what aids they need – without being automatically excluded from the shortlist of applicants. Employment offices and employers also need to improve their cooperation, and jobcentre workers need expert knowledge. Yet despite the discouraging statistics, Thomas Bredgaard is optimistic about the future.

“Denmark has good legislation, but there is a need for better awareness and for a recognition of the existing obstacles facing people with disabilities who want to get into the labour market.”

Maria João Maia from Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) also focused less on technology and more on social and practical obstacles, as well as the need for information and communication about which aids actually exist to help people with disability participate in the labour market.

“Many fairly simple and easy adjustments can help include people with physical disabilities. But the most important thing is society’s mentality and the will to expand the inclusive society,” she said.

Technology must be tested in real life

Professor Jan Gulliksen from the Royal Institute of Technology KTH in Stockholm believes the research on technological solutions aimed at helping people with physical disabilities find jobs is split. There is truly a lot of technology out there, but it is not enough to simply come up with technological solutions if you do not test them out in real life.

“It is difficult to see how important technology can be if you don’t get further than ‘it works’, and fail to describe which technology actually does work.”

Technology also changes quickly. Today a lot of technology is part of existing systems in workplaces and is often aimed at helping everyone. The list of useful technology is long, and includes artificial intelligence, apps, cloud services, communications technology, exoskeletons and much more.

But all technological systems in the workplace depend on training information and support, pointed out Stefan Johansson from KTH, who is also a member of the association and company Begripsam, which works with how society is adapted to help people with physical disabilities. He also wants to see statistics over which technological solutions work and which do not.

“We need to begin introducing technology in the workplaces. That is the missing link,” said Stefan Johansson.

Research on technical aids is predominantly focused on mobility and hearing loss, and less on cognitive disabilities.

“The focus is often on technology, but beyond technological solutions, an organisation is also about attitude and the wider world. That’s why it is important to focus on both,” said Jan Gulliksen.

“It is also important to think about the fact that if you are in a job and something happens, you will get access to aids, while it is much harder to get the help you might need if you are outside of the labour market,” said Stefan Johansson.

Let their abilities shine

The conference ended with a discussion with Lars Lars Löw from the Swedish Public Employment Service, Sif Holst, Vice-Chair of the Disabled People’s Organisations Denmark (DH) and Fredrik Ruben, CEO at Tobii – a world-leading company developing eye-gaze controlled devices. This can for example allow people with very reduced mobility control a computer with eye movement.



Fredrik Ruben, CEO at Tobii.

“Hire people with physical disabilities and let them become stars. Having a physically handicapped colleague is what teaches you new things, not reading reports. There is a lack in our knowledge of physically handicapped people today,” said Fredrik Ruben.

He thinks existing rules in the Nordic labour markets are good. Yet with the exception of the shining example of Norway and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration NAV, the way rules are adapted and technical aids are introduced varies a lot between different regions. To get help you often need a strong parent. He wants to see that those who work with people with physical disabilities understand technology, and know what is available.

Sif Holst from DH thinks the trade union movement needs to get involved.

“Being a trade union member is of great importance for people with disabilities. We also need to learn from good examples. I often hear ‘we have no jobs for people with disabilities, there is no space in the reception area’. There is a lack of awareness that people with disabilities can also contribute in so many other areas,” said Sif Holst.

Lars Löw refers to a report he wrote 20 years ago: “Sweden is segregated and we are too proud to notice”. He believes we still struggle to see that all parts of society are also a part of the labour market.

“We need to have a broad perspective in order to face the challenges. And we must see the possibilities,” said Lars Löw.



Rovaniemi's Santa is on his own a lot this year

Christmas music plays on speakers everywhere. The sun sets around 1.30 pm. Santa Claus Village in Finnish Lapland is like a wintry Las Vegas, but far less busy.

NEWS

10.12.2020

TEXT: BENGT ÖSTLING, FOTO: CATA PORTIN

"I have not been completely on my own here," says the Finnish Santa Claus as he receives the Nordic Labour Journal.

There are usually long queues for a short meeting with Santa. It is free, but if you want to buy photos afterwards they are surprisingly expensive.

Santa's office is the highlight for most visitors to the Santa Claus Village in Rovaniemi, near the Arctic Circle and a city with some 50 shops and restaurants.

Many tourists from the UK, China and the Middle East arrive on charter flights for short visits. They want to go on sledging trips in the white wilderness, eat good local food, shop and meet Santa. But this autumn both Santa's office and the shopping paradise have been empty.



More than 500,000 tourists visited Santa Claus Village in 2019 to see the Christmas country. Lapland has seven

airstrips to receive tourists who can choose between seven large ski resorts and more than 100,000 beds.

The people of Rovaniemi are said to have an ambivalent attitude to the Christmas industry, and in particular "joulupukki" as Santa is known in Finland.

The international guests are gone. Instead, the locals and their children now come. This year Santa will not let the children sit on his lap. He keeps his distance and talks to them through a sheet of plexiglass to reduce the risk of infection. He is not wearing a face mask over his large, white beard.

To get any presents, at least the Finnish children must have been good this year. This year, "being good" means following rules to stop the spread of Corona. Wash your hands properly, keep your distance and do not cough on other people.

"Good children do all that," says Santa.



In the 1990s, the then Ministry of Trade and Industry looked at how to get the entire world to see Finland as Santa's real home. A Santa strategy was written, aimed at making Christmas a marketable asset globally. It was a success – right up to the Corona pandemic.

Now there is a feeling things might go downhill. The Santa Claus Village is very quiet. The area is adapted to accommodate large groups of tourists, but now there are only a few milling around. Worst of all, there are nearly no customers for all the shops and restaurants, despite promises of considerable discounts on all goods.

At least a year with no income

The Corona pandemic reached Finland at the height of the winter season when most people had their Easter holidays cancelled. Ski resorts were blamed for spreading the virus.

Since then, foreign travellers have not been allowed or have not dared to travel to Finland. Many in the hospitality industry will have lost around a year's income. That hurts.

Across Lapland, 700 million euro has been lost and 5,000 jobs are under threat.

"Mass unemployment and the economy will remain a major problem for many families and municipalities with poor economy. Many are dependent on tourism. Lapland's industry is in danger," warns Sanna Kärkkäinen, CEO of Visit Rovaniemi.



"All Finns agree that Lapland is where Santa Claus comes from," says Sanna Kärkkäinen, CEO for Visit Rovaniemi.

Right now, no-one can guarantee when the pandemic will be over. Travel agents need to know this with certainty, preferable a year in advance, before making big hotel reservations and bookings for planes and guided tours.

This autumn there was at least hope Finnish tourists would come to Lapland, but this is not enough to keep the travel industry afloat, says Sanna Kärkkäinen.

State help needed to avoid bankruptcy

60% of Lapland's tourism companies say they cannot survive another empty winter. Trade will end if international tourism is not allowed. That would herald a wave of bankruptcies and many unemployed tourism workers, warns Kärkkäinen. Many have already been furloughed.

Legislation is needed so that hotels and restaurants can stay open, as well as enough stimulus measures and economic support to rebuild the tourism industry, argues the tourism boss.

Testing must be improved so that tourists can move freely if they are healthy, argue Finnish tourism companies.

Hope remains until the winter of 2022

"Santa Claus will play an important role for Finnish tourism regardless, he has become a calling card for the whole of Finland. This makes Finland stand out on the international stage," says Sanna Kärkkäinen in Rovaniemi.

Many letters to Santa from children around the world also arrive in Rovaniemi.

“In these Corona times, the Finnish Santa Claus represents much longed-for playfulness. The past year has been hard for many people. They are worried about the health of their families and others, their lives and their future economies. We have definitely seen Santa Claus become more important,” says Sanna Kärkkäinen at Visit Rovaniemi.

Santa Claus gets more and more requests, and now they are virtual. Many appreciate him and he has become a symbol on someone who listens and who you can talk to.



Julie from France was happy she could speak French with the friendly Santa. She is an exchange student with a Finnish family in Kittilä. Her visit to Santa Claus Village was a highlight of her year.

“Corona has not been that scary in Finland. It was worse in France in the spring,” she points out before her meeting with Santa.

And finally – if you want to hear a greeting from Santa Claus (in English), click on the picture which will take you to our Facebook page.





Elves, dogs and reindeer suffer as tourists disappear from Arctic Circle

There seems to be more visitors to the post office than anywhere else in Rovaniemi's Santa Claus Village – despite the risk of infection. Auli Sihvo has worked there for 20 years and seen how Santa has improved Lapland's commercial pulling-power.

NEWS

10.12.2020

TEXT: BENGT ÖSTLING ÖSTLING, PHOTO: CATA PORTIN

The post office sends tourists' Christmas cards and receives letters to Santa from children around the world. The letters are still coming in in droves, but everything else stopped in 2020.

Auli Sihvo became one of the many in the tourism industry who were furloughed long-term. She has spent seven months at home since the Corona pandemic struck. Sihvo calls her-

self a happy Santa grandmother who looks after her grandchildren. So it being at home is not that hard.

It is better to be furloughed than being unemployed and forced to look for another job, she points out. Everyone knew the post office would reopen, and it is a safe, public employer.

“Young people who don't get any experience from working life have it worst.”

Most shops in the Santa Claus Village are privately owned. During the crisis, the owners are the ones trying to keep the wheels spinning, perhaps with the help of one employee. Many have been furloughed, but there are also many who now cannot get a job – young seasonal workers who would normally work during the Christmas high season. There was also hardly any need for extra summer staff this year.

“People who want internships are also struggling,” points out Auli Sihvo. The post office usually takes on five young workers, but now must settle with just a few extra.

It has been worse, of course. Massive unemployment in the 1970s led many young Finns from Lapland to look for work in Sweden. A few hours away lay the Haparanda jobcentre, which dished out jobs across Sweden. Many never returned.

Auli Sihvo's own father worked in Stockholm for a while, but Auli herself has stuck to the Rovaniemi post office. She empties the post boxes of Christmas cards and sells stamps and souvenirs.



Saskia and Charlotte, from Germany and Belgium.

Foreign tourists are particularly popular

Rovaniemi's Santa Claus Village is open 365 days a year, including the Christmas holidays. Auli Sihvo believes she will have time off over Christmas. Many younger workers gladly work holidays, which pays double.

Two girls are sat at a table with mounds of Christmas cards to be written and sent. Christmas is near, so the cards can be sent straight away. But it is possible to put Christmas cards in the postbox all year round. They are saved and then sent in time for the next year's Christmas.

Saskia and Charlotte, from Germany and Belgium, have been exchange students at the University of Oulu since September. They are on a day trip to Rovaniemi to see the famous Santa Claus Village.

The two students have discovered that they are unusually popular customers in all of Rovaniemi's shops. There are not many foreign visitors buying souvenirs right now.

They have not talked that much about the Corona pandemic at university. The virus has a devastating effect on business, marketing, HR and international trade – subjects which they both study. The issue has not been a big part of their studies, despite all their teaching having had to be done remotely this autumn.



Popular alpacas, reindeer and dogs

Outside the post office, three alpacas are wandering around together with some tourists. They are part of the tourist bait together with other animals from the local animal farm.

Reindeer play an important role in the mythology surrounding Santa Claus, and they are also important to Lapland's Sami population. A reindeer sleigh-ride has been on the tourist schedule since the very beginning. It is an experience which fascinates tourists, in particular during winters with much snow.

When not pulling sleighs, the reindeer wander around freely and drivers are asked to be cautious since the animals often walk along the roads in groups.



Dogs increasingly important

Dogs have also become increasingly important to the tourism industry. One hour's drive north of Rovaniemi, in the village of Sinettä, lies the Bearhill Husky kennel. Owner Valentijn Beets from the Netherlands has nearly 90 dogs roaming across 150 square metres.

He rears dogs and offers adventures for tourists. They can go dog sledding or take a trip in specialised terrain vehicles along trails around the kennel.

Right now, the problem is that no tourists can or dare travel to Lapland and Finland. And it is usually the foreign tourists who want to go on a dog safari.

"A dog safari is always worth the money"

"Finnish tourists seem blasé and can't see the unique nature around them. They see the dog farm as my hobby. That's why many Finns also think it is too expensive to go out on a trip," says Beets.



Valentijn Beets from the Netherlands owns nearly 90 dogs, and now he worries how he is going to be able to feed them all.

Foreign tourists might think so too. But they are willing to pay for an experience in unique nature which they will remember for the rest of their lives, believes Valentijn Beets. They also get to see the best sides of the Nordic right of public access.

Valentijn Beets looks after his 90 dogs lovingly, together with his wife and two employees. They are now partly furloughed, but employees are needed. The dogs need time and attention, training and activation.

"Right now we have no customers for neither short nor longer trips. And we cannot really afford to train the dogs either. You need a lot of expensive equipment."

Beets points to some small red rubber shoes which most of the dogs wear after their morning training. These protect their paws against icy surfaces. The shoes often break and

new ones are needed after each training session for each of the 16 dogs in a sled. 1,000 little red dog shoes cost around 650 euro plus tax. Right now he cannot afford that.

His business used to grow by around 40% year on year. Last year his turnover was nearly two million euro. Now he is lucky to reach 300 000 euro – and one-third of that is state aid and EU funding, explains Valentijn Beets.

Previously he could vary his products – long expeditions in the Arctic or shorter tips with day-tourists from Helsinki. He had Finnish and foreign tourists in both winter and summer. Now everything is going wrong.



How will the dogs survive?

Bearhill Husky is a "no-kill-kennel", so no animals are put down, explains Valentijn Beets. But other businesses have been forced to take drastic action.

All kennels in Scandinavia face problems, so all try to reduce their number of dogs. But when this happens everywhere, it is also impossible to sell dogs. There is a surplus of sledding dogs. Valentijn Beets share experiences with colleagues and competitors in Norway and Sweden. They are all lying low.

"Alaska, Canada – everyone has problems. It's the same for kennels across the whole of the Arctic, including around Lake Baikal, in Arkhangelsk and in Karelia."

Political worry for 8,000 dogs

The kennels' struggle to feed their dogs has even been discussed in the Finnish parliament. Many politicians are worried for 8,000 huskies and around a hundred business owners in the trade. In this case, you cannot retrain people to do something else.

"It is inhumane and heartless to force the business owners to put their animals down. They are colleagues and family members," Leena Meri from the Finns Party said in a question to parliament. After the Corona crisis, they would have to start from scratch and train new animals.

Valentijn Beets agrees. He loves his job and his animals. But he must also be able to feed and house his family.

The Coronavirus is causing a lot of stress right now. State support comes with complicated rules and will probably not be enough, reckons Valentijn. For now, he hopes to get by on loans and savings.

There is still a silver lining – the dogs will not starve to death. They are being given help from various people. There is now a network of adopters, indulging former tourist guests, who have taken on the responsibility for individual dogs while they wait to get out on safari again.

There is also a dog foodbank. At least one dog food producer has promised food donations for customers who need them. 50,000 portions of nutritious dog food have been secured. This might be an advertising stunt, and it might be new test products or food that would otherwise go off as no-one can afford to buy it. Nevertheless, it is welcome news when both dogs and business owners are struggling to survive the winter.



War destitution created Lapland's tourism boom. It began here.

The tourism industry in Finnish Lapland has a lot to thank Eleanor Roosevelt for. The presidential widow's visit to Rovaniemi and the Arctic Circle set in motion an international Lapland industry. This year is the 70th anniversary of her visit.

NEWS

10.12.2020

TEXT: BENGT ÖSTLING ÖSTLING, PHOTO: CATA PORTIN, THE PROVINCIAL MUSEUM OF LAPLAND

Santa and the whole Santa Claus Village near Rovaniemi airport started with one single cottage. It was built in two weeks for the posh and unexpected visit in 1950.

The so-called Roosevelt Cottage is still there. We are being shown around by Antti Nikander, Head of Development for the cooperative running the Santa Claus Village. There are plenty of black and white images and films from the construction of the first cottage and the visit itself.

Burnt-down war zone

Here you also get an understanding of why the former first lady's visit was so important to Lapland.

After WWII, Rovaniemi and the whole of Lapland had been burnt down by the retreating German army in 1945. The civil population of some 100,000 people had been evacuated in October 1944. The material damage was considerable.

90% of buildings in the largest city of Rovaniemi were destroyed by bombs and fires. The infrastructure was in an even worse state than it was before the war. There were also many landmines still left in the area, which killed and maimed several mine clearance workers for years after the war.



Eleanor Roosevelt greeted at the airport. ©The Provincial Museum of Lapland

The UN Commissioner on Human Rights Eleanor Roosevelt was the widow of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. She dedicated herself to charity work after WWII through UNRRA, the precursor to UNICEF.

Midnight sun and help to help themselves

America wanted to see where help was needed, and show empathy. Mrs Roosevelt also wanted to see the midnight sun at the Arctic Circle.

Her visit was announced in May 1950. There were two weeks to set up a programme for the visit and a destination in war-ravaged Lapland.

At that time, the Arctic Circle was not a big tourist destination. It just ran somewhere across the marshes of Lapland. Firm ground was found and roads and a cottage worth of a former first lady were built in record time.



Eleanor Roosevelt at the Polar Circle. ©The Provincial Museum of Lapland

Today the brown forest cottage is still there and still in use as a museum café and souvenir shop.

The construction of the surrounding area started six years later. Many more people have started selling souvenirs in the area since.

Despite the Corona pandemic, the 70 year anniversary was celebrated in the summer, attended by the US ambassador to Finland. There is still a lot of gratitude in Lapland and UNICEF is given a prominent space in the little exhibition presenting the cottage's history.

The visit in 1950 was the beginning of long-lasting aid to Lapland. Two planes landed in Rovaniemi – one carrying thousands of tonnes of aid, the other former first lady Roosevelt and her delegation.

Sustainable construction record

The cottage is also used as a major memorial of Finnish construction workers' professional talents. Designs were drawn up in record speed, and the timber was carried up from nearby forests. The cottage was erected in less than two weeks. The solid building was renovated five years ago.

Legend has it the doors were put in as the former first lady and her entourage landed at Rovaniemi airport on 11 June 1950. Cleaning staff left by the backdoor as the guests approached the front door.



The cottage is inaugurated. ©The Provincial Museum of Lapland

The log from some working plan meetings are dated around midnight during construction, which shows how hard people were working, points out Antti Nikander.

At the time, the Roosevelt cottage was the only building in the area. Today it is surrounded by the considerable Santa Claus Village and other commercial activity. Route 4 runs close by, one of Finland's main arteries leading traffic from Helsinki in the south up to Lapland, past Rovaniemi to Utsjoki and further into Norway near the Russian border.

More than a symbolic gift

The UN charity was welcome in Lapland. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration sent things like food, textiles and utensils. Much of the help came from the US and Sweden.

It was a huge donation and important to Lapland. Without it, people there would have suffered. The shipment was far more than symbolic, points out Antti Nikander.

The willingness to help has also been interpreted as a part of the superpower play between the USA and the Soviet Union. The USA wanted to keep Finland in its “Western” sphere of influence.

Finland could not accept Marshall aid from the USA, out of political considerations and because of its relationship with the Soviet Union. On the contrary, large war reparations were paid to Moscow.

The Western humanitarian aid to Lapland’s suffering people was acceptable, however.

Now Antti Nikander hopes the Coronavirus will let its grip go by next summer.

“We are used to living in six-month cycles, and usually look half a year ahead. We understand the reality we’re living in,” he says.

There will be no winter season. The aim now is to secure more domestic tourism next spring and summer. Prices have been adjusted to the domestic market, which means things are cheaper. Antti Nikander believes tourism will never be what it was again. This time, not even the Americans can help.



In any case, the visit created Lapland’s first tourist destination. Just like the former first lady, many have since wanted to buy souvenirs and send a postcard from Lapland with a special stamp from the Arctic Circle. Over time, this has become a centre for the entire Lapland tourism industry.

Help is needed once more

The Santa Claus Village has drawn millions of tourists who have wanted to see Santa Claus' office. The Roosevelt cottage still has thousands of visitors every year.

In 2019, more than half a million people visited the area, says Antti Nikander. The cooperative had a turnover of more than 42 million euro. In addition to souvenirs and design product sales, services and various programmes are important.

But the midnight sun that tempted the former first lady in June has lost some of its importance. Now the main visiting month is December. Except for this year.



Covid threat to Nordic “julebord” tradition and restaurant survival

Julebord is a Christmas office party on steroids and a major tradition in Norway and Denmark. This season is already a crisis for restaurants and food providers say enterprise confederations. But at least there will probably be fewer #metoo situations.

NEWS

10.12.2020

TEXT: BJØRN LØNNUM ANDREASEN, BJÖRN LINDAHL, MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Julebord – literally Christmas table – is a particular phenomenon in Norway and Denmark – only the Danes call it julefrokost – Christmas breakfast. It usually means that everyone working for a company is invited to a lively party at a restaurant. Many eat more than they can and drink at least as much alcohol. As a result, you will find hundreds of stories from both countries if you google “julebord/julefrokost and #metoo.

Employers in other Nordic countries invite workers to socialise before Christmas too. But the big office party can be held any time of year and does not necessarily have to be an extravagant Christmas do.

“Julbord” in Finland and Sweden is more about how the table is laid and what is eaten. Family and friends might also gather to *julbord* in restaurants.

In Denmark and Norway, they merge the office party and *julebord*. The julebord is an important day in the social calendar. It can be a good catalyst for social equalising between colleagues, but it can also end in sexual harassment.



The office party is not so closely linked to Christmas in Sweden and Finland as it is in Denmark and Norway. But they evolved in the 70s when it became accepted that the boss and the reception lady were on the same level. These two film posters show the difference.

The Danish office *julefrokost* has historically had a reputation for being an event where the alcohol intake is large, and the socialising more easy-going than in everyday life. This has sometimes ended in situations where employees have felt harassed.

Before the 2018 *julefrokost* season the Confederation of Danish Employees wrote to their members urging them to keep the *julefrokost* “decent”:

“Sexual harassment, unwanted sexual attention and other harassment has no place anywhere, and absolutely not at work. The office *julefrokost* is for many a joyous occasion which they look forward to. It is important to have clear guidelines for what constitutes proper behaviour.”

From bad to worse

This year the *julebord* season is different because of Corona and the limitations put on the serving of alcohol and the number of party-goers.



*The tables are ready but there are no guests at Theatercaféen. Shipping magnate John Fredriksen usually hosts a spectacular *julebord* here every year.*

Many fear an avalanche of businesses going bust in the new year. “New situation report: The crisis in hospitality has gone from bad to worse,” says the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise NHO.

Eight in ten businesses have seen *julebord* bookings halved compared to last year, shows NHO’s fresh survey of hospitality sector members. 95% of Oslo’s hospitality businesses say bookings are down by half or more, according to the survey. And the figures are not much better for the country as a whole:

83% say *julebord* bookings are half or less compared to last year. Just two percent of the businesses say they see the same level as last year.

Worse in Denmark

According to the NTB news agency, in Denmark nine in ten *julebord* have been cancelled. The Danish hospitality sector is expecting to see just 10% of ordinary turnover this December. The Corona pandemic and restrictions in its wake mean *julefrokosts* get cancelled.

Julefrokosts usually represent a turnover of 2.5 billion Danish kroner (€336m) for the Danish hospitality sector. Yet a survey of members of the trade organisation Horesta shows they believe 90% of this turnover will disappear this year.

Denmark has introduced a ban on gatherings of more than 10 people. The restaurant trade is already hard hit by the Corona pandemic. Their December turnover normally helps them through January and February, the months with the lowest turnover.

Several major Danish employees have now followed a request from Horesta to give employees restaurant vouchers for Christmas.

A possible solution

Norway’s Minister of Finance Jan Tore Sanner (Conservatives) recently confirmed that restaurant vouchers or restaurant expenses will count as a company’s reasonable welfare measures and be tax-exempt. So a good alternative to the traditional *julebord* would be a small group of employees, observing infection control measures, going out for Christmas dinner on company expenses, he said. Denmark has similar solutions.

There have been dramatic drops in turnover in Sweden and Finland too. Takings have plummeted after the government’s ban on alcohol sales after 10 pm along with other tightenings of the rules, the hospitality sector organisation wrote in a press release on 25 November.

Hotels’ turnover is down by more than 75% in the latest week compared to last year. Restaurants have lost nearly 70%. The situation is critical, and the government must improve its support as soon as possible to save jobs and businesses.

“The situation is extreme and it is getting worse by the day. The government must present stronger, better and longer-lasting support which can really save jobs and businesses,” says Jonas Siljhammar, CEO at the hospitality sector employers’ union Visita.

Finland tightened its rules on alcohol service and opening hours on 3 December, but rules vary between different parts of the country. In Uusimaa, the region where you find the capital Helsinki, all service must close at 10 pm. Restaurants that serve mainly alcohol can only run at half their capacity. Restaurants that serve mainly food can run at 75% capacity.



Magdalena Nour: Raze barriers against international talent

Sweden lacks doctors, nurses, teachers and IT engineers, yet foreign-born job seekers struggle to access the Swedish labour market. If they make it as far as an interview, the experience often makes them feel surprise and frustration.

PORTRAIT

10.12.2020

TEXT: FAYME ALM, PHOTO: MOHAMMAD AL-BALOUT

“They get a friendly reception but are not allowed to show their diplomas. The interviewers only want to see a one page CV. And they might be told in a slightly patronising way that they are so clever. The meeting usually ends with the employer saying they’ll let them know, but then – silence. Total silence. In a country they have got to know as equal and democratic.”

So says Magdalena Nour, Managing Director for Mine – an NGO working with “inclusive leadership to increase diversity to benefit businesses in the labour market”. Its clients are foreign-born academics.

Magdalena Nour was born and raised in Skanör Falsterbo in the south-west of Sweden. Her mother and grandfather both worked for the main Scandinavian airline, so going out into the world came natural to her.

“If you have money to spare, you travel. That’s how I was brought up.”

She has studied and worked in Cairo and worked for an international recruitment company with colleagues and clients in several countries. Today her focus is to tear down the barriers between employers and international talent.

The Nordic Labour Journal meets Magdalena Nour to find out more about the bigger journey – the one where positions move and obstacles are cleared away. All to promote a labour market where skills trump heritage.

A historic venue

We meet at Gängtappen (also known as The Threaded Pin) in Malmö. The house was built as the headquarter for Kockums, one of the world's largest shipyards in the 1950s and 60s that employed many people of foreign heritage.

Today the house is owned by an insurance company which uses it as its regional office and shares its 14 floors with Mine and other businesses.



Magdalena Nour with colleagues Ivar Nilsson and Francois Perigault.

From here, Magdalena Nour has a view of Västra Hamnen, a rapidly expanding neighbourhood which is often used to symbolise Malmö's transformation from an industrial to a knowledge-based city. New jobs have been created and will be created in the area, even in the face of the Corona pandemic.

"They all need skilled staff, but many employers have outdated ideas of what kind of labour force we have today," says Magdalena Nour.

We shall come back to how she and Mine work to change these ideas, but first an insight into the interviewee's own experience.

Links and consequences

"I have always been very interested in society. That's why I studied political science, communication, Middle Eastern studies and Arabic at Lund University, to understand how things are linked and how this influences people."

The studies were, of course, interspersed with travel and when Magdalena Nour figured out she could make money as a travel guide while visiting new places she took a study break and ended up in Cairo.

"I was working for a Danish travel agency and their cultural tours around Egypt, which taught me a lot about both the so-

ciety and the country's culture and literature. Suddenly I was being sucked into a more than five-thousand-year-old history.



She met her future husband in Egypt in the mid-1990s, a native who worked as what foreign correspondents call a "fixer".

"He was the expert who could answer all the questions, fix everything I needed but did not know myself where to find, and he even solved problems whenever they arose. Nothing seemed impossible to him. In Egypt, I was the underdog and he was in charge."

When she returned to Sweden, this time with her Egyptian husband, they not only changed countries but roles too. She was now the one who knew more and who introduced him to her and her family's networks – with good results. After delivering newspapers for a while, he got a job at a Malmö travel agent. Today he is head of customer services at Malmö's largest housing company.

Focus on the result

Magdalena Nour herself chose to use her interest in society to focus on the labour market. She was hired by an international recruitment agency and worked with people from the other Nordic countries and from around the world.

"We worked together in teams and you could not think that for instance a Chinese acted funny or that a Frenchman or Latin American behaved strangely. We had to deliver or risk losing the customer. You just had to enjoy the ride, also while working with people who did not speak Swedish."

13 billion lost

As Managing Director at Mine she has realised that when she and her husband met he had the same background as many of Mine's clients have today: He came from a well-established middle-class family, had a university degree and a high social status. He spoke English and had been working with English people and North Americans.

“In Sweden, many foreign-born people find themselves in a situation where they are overlooked because of their language, ethnicity and culture, despite having been well-established in their home countries. As if they’re not able to contribute because they can’t speak Swedish or because their nationality or mother tongue somehow influences who they are as human beings.”

Magdalena Nour says she struggles to understand this attitude, and it is also not a very rewarding one. She points to a 2018 survey carried out by the then Jusek trade union representing academics:

“Public finances could gain nearly 13 billion [kronor, €1.28bn] a year if foreign-born academics were given jobs matching their education. Today, 55,000 foreign-born academics are over-qualified for their jobs, according to a new research report done on commission from Jusek.”

Equal and democratic – and also exclusive

Both small and large Swedish municipalities lack academic workers, and at the same time it is difficult for foreign-born job seekers to find work in the Swedish labour market, points out Magdalena Nour.

It is as if their formal skills are not enough, she says, and compares the situation to the glass ceiling that has become a known metaphor in debates about gender equality. The glass ceiling must go before the job seeker can get the dream job he or she is so qualified for, and the employer gets a skilled employee.

So what is needed to crack the ceiling and create a relevant image of the labour available in the eyes of the employers?

Self-perception is a start

Magdalena Nour and her colleagues speak to many employers but rarely meet any kind of racism when talking about hiring foreign-born academics. What they do encounter is fear and a lack of knowledge. That is why Mine use an exercise where they ask employers to draw how they want their next hire to look.

“The pictures mirror the patterns we have. We want predictability and safety. Therefore the patterns are neither racist nor actively exclusive, but they are based on how our brains work. The more we know, the safer we feel.”

But before this knowledge can be used you need a level of self-perception. The first thing Magdalena Nour advises you to do is to do an online search for “Swedishness” to find out more about how Swedish norms in the labour market might look.

“There are good films made by Swedish comics who clearly and satirically highlight the crazy things we are doing. Even if much is implied it is still easy to understand for us Swedes. Impossible to understand for others.”

Another tip is to challenge yourself and to consider whether what you have always done really is the best possible way of doing it.

A third tip is training, and Mine offers this through its workshops. Bosses and other top management get the chance to take on roles with other people’s skills, and also discuss how intersectionality – “an analytical perspective to highlight how superior and subordinated relations develop and are maintained in terms of ethnicity, physical handicaps, class, gender, religion and sexuality” – determines attitudes to foreign-born job seekers.

Courage and patience both necessary

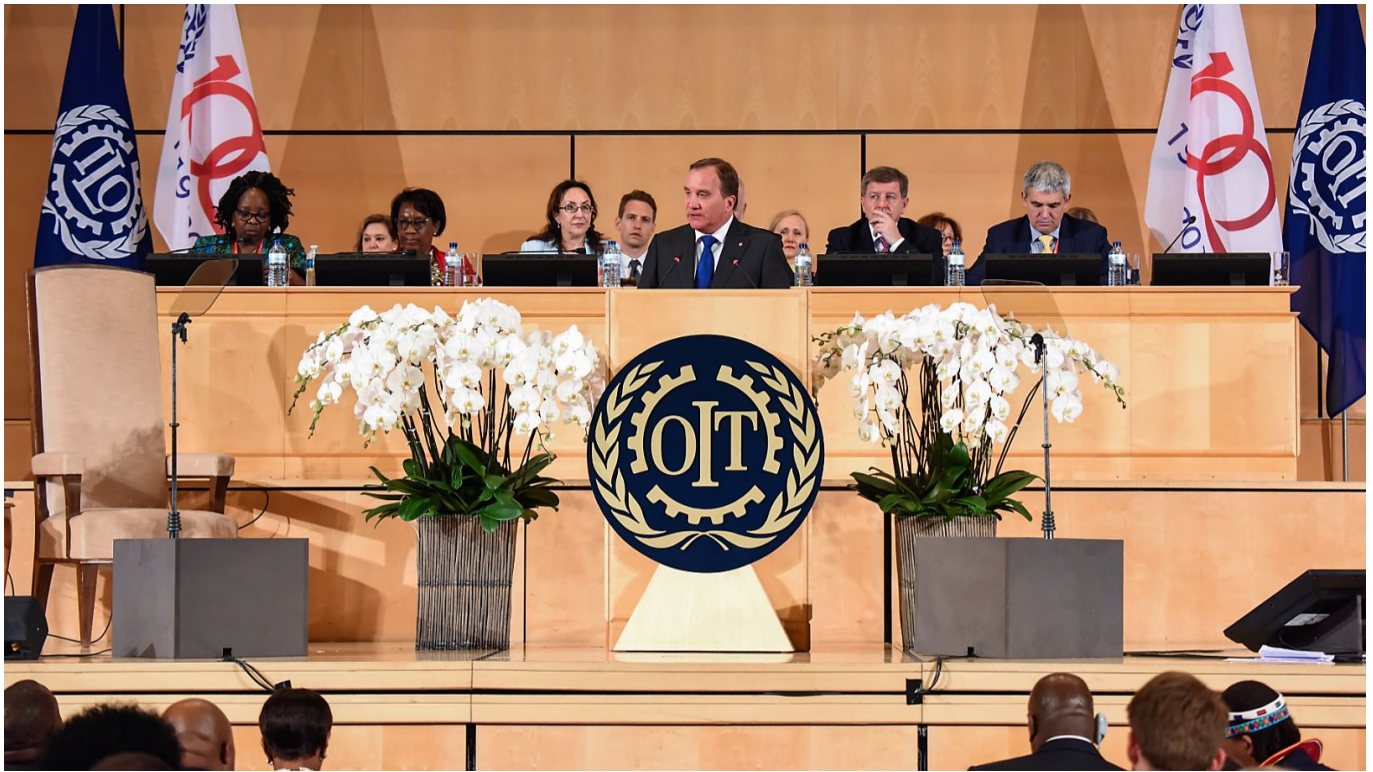
But to get new thoughts and innovations out into the open you need both courage and patience. As well as time. Magdalena Nour again draws a parallel between the development of gender equality and changes to what is considered to be a good employee.

“We don’t notice the slow changes. Women used to be shut out from certain positions in our society, now gender no longer plays a part in traditionally male-dominated occupations like doctor or priest.”

The inclusion that Magdalena Nour is working for is summed up in Mine’s main motto: Letting business advantages, social advantages and company advantages go hand in hand.

“Employers must dare to face the challenges if they are to benefit from the advantages of inclusive leadership. That way you get a win-win-win situation and things can go as far as you want them. But this does not happen by itself.”

And with those words ends the interview with Magdalena Nour in the house from where Kockums has shipped many vessels far, far out into the world.



Sweden's century-long relationship with the ILO

Sweden has had a relationship with the ILO for 100 years. Yet the country never ratified the labour organisation's first convention. There have been tensions behind the scenes from time to time – like when the conventions have clashed with the Swedish model for collective agreements.

NEWS

10.12.2020

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL, PHOTO: CROZET / POUTEAU, ILO

This emerged when the Swedish ILO committee held a webinar to present a new anthology called *Sweden and the ILO – One hundred years of tripartite cooperation for a better working life*. Petra Herzfeld Olsson has been the anthology's editor.

The Swedish ILO committee is the government's advisory body on ILO issues. It was the first committee of its kind to be set up by ILO member states, back in 1927. The work in the committee also builds on the cooperation between government representatives and the social partners.

"The committee is almost unknown in Sweden, but is it a world celebrity within the ILO?" asked Hanna Svensson, before partly answering her own rhetorical question.

She and Linnéa Blommé have written the chapter on the ILO committee. Both work at the Swedish Ministry of Employment.

The ILO celebrated 100 years last year. Sweden became a member in 1920, alongside Denmark, Finland and Norway.

"The ILO was established in the difficult period after World War 1 and during a different pandemic to the one we have to-

day: the Spanish Flu. That pandemic killed between 50 and 100 million people globally, and 37,000 in Sweden between 1918 and 1920,” the Minister for Employment Eva Nordmark reminded the audience.



Guy Ryder during his visit to Iceland in 2019 – the first-ever by an ILO Secretary-General. Photo: Björn Lindahl

ILO Secretary-General Guy Ryder also participated down the line from Genève, bringing sombre figures of how many jobs that have disappeared because of the Corona pandemic.

“We’re talking about 495 million jobs lost since the pandemic broke out. The world’s workers have lost 10.7% of their total earnings or 3.5 trillion US dollars, in the first three quarters of 2020, compared with the same period in 2019

“That’s why we need what we call a human-centred recovery and a new drive for multilateral negotiations,” said Guy Ryder.

Right now, many international organisations are struggling. The USA left another UN agency this year, the World Health Organisation. The ILO has not been immune to stormy weather either, and the multilateral cooperation has at times more or less ceased to exist. In 1977, when the confrontation with the Soviet Union was at its peak, the USA also left the ILO for three years.

“Despite the political turbulence, the technical cooperation did continue and new conventions and recommendations were produced. The cooperation was not so paralysed as you might think,” said Kari Tapioka, the ILO’s former Deputy Secretary-General and Executive Director. He has written an overarching chapter on the ILO’s history spanning three time-periods.

Tapioka described the final period, leading up to today, as the ILO’s search for a social dimension within globalisation.

Sweden sometimes thinks it is so far ahead of the ILO when it comes to introducing new labour market rights that ratifying ILO conventions is but a formality – the minimum standard

has already been met. Minister for Employment Eva Nordmark nevertheless underlined that it is not a given that all conventions are ratified, since they are far from toothless.



The ILO’s first Secretary-General, Albert Thomas from France, visited Sweden in 1927 in the year the Swedish ILO committee was created. He was impressed by the organised manner in which negotiations between workers and employers took place in Sweden. Photo: ILO archive.

Sweden has not ratified conventions on working hours noticeably often, pointed out Kerstin Ahlberg, who wrote the chapter on the ILO, Sweden and work environments.

“This goes beyond convention number 1 about the 48-hour week. Out of 14 conventions with associated recommendations that concern different aspects of working hours, Sweden has only ratified five.”

So what happened with the ILO’s very first convention? Why did Sweden never ratify that?

Kerstin Ahlberg explained this by pointing out that Swedish legislation got there first with introducing a 48-hour week. This had been done to get to grips with revolutionary tendencies among workers in Sweden in the 1920s. The law became a forerunner that did not fit with the convention. There were consequences to not ratifying it in 1936, when the government refrained from ratifying convention 47, which detailed a 40-hour week.

Convention 47 was not ratified until 1982 – ten years after the 40-hour week was introduced in Sweden, and 47 years after the convention was first written.

Kerstin Ahlberg sees a pattern where conventions dealing with working hours are not being ratified by Sweden. Convention 1 was also not ratified by any of the other Nordic countries.

“Working hours are to a great degree a collective agreement issue in Sweden. Sweden joining the 1919 working hours convention would have been an unwelcome limitation to the freedom of contract for the social partners.

“Traditionally, the Swedish social partners have broad freedom to agree on exceptions to existing working hours legislation,” pointed out Kerstin Ahlberg.

According to the ILO’s own overview of how many conventions have been ratified, Sweden is not even top of the Nordics.

Country	Conventions
Denmark	73
Finland	102
Iceland	26
Norway	110
Sweden	94

Compared to other countries, the Nordics are quite high up, however. The UK has ratified 88 conventions, Germany 85 and the USA only 14. France is higher with 127 ratified conventions.

ILO convention 182 is the most ratified one. It deals with the worst types of child labour.

“This became historic on 4 August 2020 as the first ILO convention to be ratified by all of the ILO’s 187 member states,” said Ulf Edström, who has written about the ILO from employees’ perspective.

Göran Trogen has written about the employers’ view of the ILO, while Martin Clemensson describes the ILO’s technical department which has a budget the size of the organisation’s regular budget – both nearly 800 million dollars.

One of the newest conventions, number 190, deals with violence and harassment at work.

It was voted through in June 2019 with 439 for, seven against and 30 abstentions. The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise was among those 30, while employees’ organisations and the government voted for.

In one of the concluding chapters, Ann Numhauser-Henning compares the Swedish view of gender equality issues with the ILO’s view of how sexualised violence and harassment should best be fought. She says there are two models:

- The discrimination model, where the employer is ultimately responsible to make sure violence and harassment does not take place.

- The honour model, where sexual harassment is treated in the same way as bullying and physical violence.

“By focusing on the perpetrator and dealing with sexual harassment as an attack on the woman concerned and her honour, we render invisible the structural and systematic way in which women are treated in working life, of which sexual harassment is a symptom, as we saw with the #metoo movement,” said Ann Numhauser-Henning.



A “Nordic”, independent Scotland post-Brexit?

The last time the Scots went to the polls to vote for or against independence from the United Kingdom, there was speculation whether an independent Scotland would seek to link up with the Nordic region. Next year things might get serious.

NEWS

10.12.2020

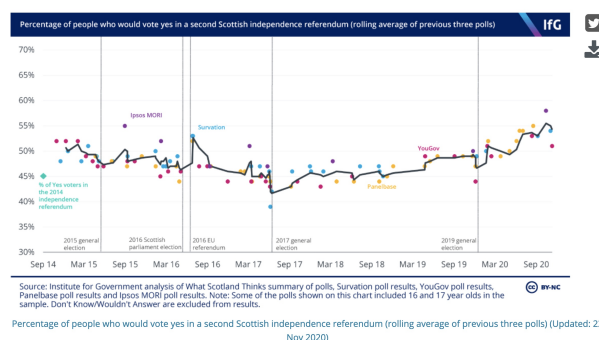
TEXT AND PHOTO: LARS BEVANGER, GRAPH: INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNMENT

As the United Kingdom enters what could be the last week of negotiations with the EU, it still looks like the country might crash out of the union without a trade deal on 1 January 2021.

In Scotland, where 62 % voted against Brexit, those who want independence for the nation have even more reason to agitate for separation.

Certain of victory

“Scotland is ready to take our place in the global family of independent nations. Scotland is now a nation on the brink of making history. Independence is in clear sight, I have never been so certain that we will deliver it,” said Scotland’s First Minister Nicola Sturgeon as she opened her governing Scottish National Party congress last weekend.



Percentage of people who would vote yes in a second Scottish independence referendum (rolling average of previous three polls) Updated: 23 Nov 2020

In 2014, 55.3% of Scots voted no to independence. The referendum was supposed to be a once-in-a-generation vote, but after Brexit the Scottish government believes it is time to ask one more time.

And since March this year, the yes side has enjoyed a several percentage point lead over the no to independence camp.

Cast off and drift north?

A new referendum could happen as early as next year. But a newly independent Scotland would not be able to automatically return to the EU as a member state. The country would have to apply again, and after negotiations, all 27 member states would have to agree to let it in.

So it might be easier to “become a part of” the Nordic region. On 30 January this year, the day before Brexit became reality, a delegation from the Nordic Council of Ministers’ presidium visited the Scottish parliament. Both sides highlighted the close historic and cultural links between Scotland and the Nordics.



Nicola Sturgeon has always been a friend of the EU. Here with former EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. Photo: Etienne Ansotte/EU

“Historically, there have always been close ties between the Nordic countries, Scotland and the rest of Britain. The Nordic Council will do everything in its power to ensure that this close co-operation continues,” said Silja Dögg Gunnarsdóttir, the President of the Nordic Council in 2020.

“Despite Brexit, we want Scotland to know that she will always have friends in the Nordic countries.”

A big enough region as it is

But could Scotland really apply for membership of the Nordic Council if the country were to become independent from the rest of the United Kingdom? Swedish Radio put that question to the Nordic Council’s Director Britt Bohlin in 2017.

“It is a long journey to get there, and not something that could happen overnight. It is a big step to make the Nordic region bigger than it is today,” Bohlin said back then.

The Nordic countries will also need to continue to cultivate their close relationship to the UK after Brexit – with or without Scotland as part of the Kingdom.

Looking north regardless

What is certain is that the Scottish government has already started looking in other directions to position the country in a world undergoing major geopolitical change.

Last year the government in Edinburgh launched a new political framework called “Arctic Connections” which it says will build a new platform for policy and knowledge exchange.

“The Scottish Government intends to strengthen the foundations of a long-standing two-way discussion with its Arctic partners. We want to share Scottish expertise while underlining our desire to learn from others,” writes Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs Fiona Hyslop in the introduction.

East meets Nordics in EU road transport show-down

The Nordic countries are celebrating that the EU has finally approved rules aimed at fighting social dumping in the international road transport sector. Meanwhile, a number of low-pay countries in the east have asked the EU Court of Justice to annul them.

NEWS

10.12.2020

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG, EDITOR EU & ARBETSRÄTT

The road transport market is more regulated than the market for other services in the EU. The main rule is that transport operators are only allowed to carry out work within a national market when this is inside the member state where they are established.

The exemption is if the operator delivers goods from its home country to a recipient in a different member state. It can then carry out transport inside that country's national market on the way back from the cross-border job – so-called cabotage.

The Nordic countries have regularly complained about foreign operators abusing the cabotage system to stay and carry out domestic jobs on a near-permanent basis, while their drives are paid as if they were working in their home countries.

So it was considered a big step forward when in the summer the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union managed to agree on a comprehensive “road package” which would give drivers better working conditions and tighten the rules on cabotage.

Inter alia, employers must now pay for drivers' lodging during their weekly rest, which cannot be spent in the cabin of the vehicle. In order to prevent the possible misuse of driving cabotage and use letterbox companies, the drivers and the vehicles must also regularly return to their home country.

These rules are now being fought by at least six countries – Bulgaria, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Rumania and Hungary (more might join). They argue that the rules discriminate against member states on the fringes of Europe's borders and that they will lead to increased pollution because drivers and vehicles must return with regular intervals.

They might get support on that last point from the European Commission, which opposed the rules during negotiations,

claiming they were incompatible with EU's climate goals and the so-called Green Deal.

As a result, the Commission is now analysing the consequences the new rules might have for the climate, the environment and the functioning of the internal market. It could also propose new legislation to prevent the new rules coming into force. And most Eastern European countries are cheering it on.