

# Chapter 7

## Translation of Globalisation and Regionalisation in Nordic Cooperation in Higher Education

Peter Maassen, Agnete Vabø, and Bjørn Stensaker

### 7.1 Introduction

Norwegian research and higher education are positioned in a number of international arenas, including the Nordic region consisting of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the autonomous areas of Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland.

Nordic cooperation in higher education has a long tradition. As such, it can be characterised as a specific form of internationalisation in higher education, i.e. regional cross-boundary cooperation. In an increasingly internationalised and globalised sector, Nordic cooperation in higher education is an interesting object of study, especially since it was established well before the current interest in higher education as an economically important sector. As such, it is an example of the many ways internationalisation is manifested in higher education. While the traditional rationale for Nordic cooperation in higher education was culturally and academically based, in this chapter we discuss how such traditions are challenged by emerging new rationales for internationalisation; those related to economy and market competition.

Based on a number of studies of Nordic cooperation in higher education (Maassen and Uppstrøm 2004; Stensaker and Danø 2006), data analysing institutional behaviour and strategies, Nordic cooperation schemes within the sector, and recent Nordic policy initiatives concerning future cooperation, a discussion is made of the factors that hamper and stimulate current cooperation. In addition, the relevance and potential effects of suggested future strategies for the survival of Nordic cooperation are analysed.

The chapter is organised as follows. In the next section, a short history of the Nordic cooperation is presented including how the Nordic higher education systems participate in European integration efforts through the Bologna process and the Lisbon agenda. Thereafter, data from a study on how Nordic higher education institutions participate in various Nordic and international cooperation schemes

---

P. Maassen

PFI, University of Oslo, P.O. box 1092 Blindern, NO-0317 Oslo, Norway

e-mail: Peter.maassen@ped.uio.no

and initiatives are presented, including institutional views on future options and strategies. These findings are then discussed in the light of recent policy initiatives concerning internationalisation, both at the European and Nordic levels. In the conclusion, a discussion is made of whether Nordic cooperation is changing, and what the future of this kind of regional cooperation is in a more globalised higher education sector.

## 7.2 Nordic Cooperation

The Nordic Council was founded in 1952 as an organ for parliamentary cooperation between Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. In 1971, the Nordic Council of Ministers was established as a forum for Nordic governmental cooperation. This Council of Ministers has a formal constitution which varies according to the theme to be dealt with. All in all, the work of the Council is subdivided into about 20 separate councils, including one which is responsible for education and research. Decisions by the Council of Ministers have to be unanimous, and they are binding for the members states. In some cases, decisions must also be approved and ratified by the national parliaments.

Comparable to the EU with its Lisbon Agenda, in 2000 the Nordic Council of Ministers also adopted a Nordic Agenda and a strategy for Nordic cooperation. The Nordic Agenda highlights five areas of special importance for Nordic cooperation:

1. Technological development with special reference to information society and Nordic research.
2. Social security and the possibility for Nordic citizens to live, work and study in another Nordic country. Questions of demography and migration.
3. The internal Nordic market and cooperation for abolishing border obstacles.
4. Cooperation with neighbouring countries and neighbouring regions.
5. The environment and sustainable development in energy, transport, forestry, fishery, and trade and industry. (Nordic Council of Ministers 2002)

As a consequence of the agreements reached in the Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers over many years, the Nordic countries have had a common labour market, have established common institutions in various policy areas, and have developed cooperation schemes and programmes. With respect to education, this has resulted in various mobility programmes for pupils, students, teachers and researchers (including the NORDPLUS programme for students and teachers, described below), agreements for the mutual recognition of degrees and study programmes, simplified admission requirements for Nordic students throughout the region, and various expert committees for policy issues and cooperation initiatives. Further, a number of cooperation programmes have been implemented relating to research. The Nordic Science Policy council was established in 1983, and cooperation in the area of research training has existed since 1990.

The socio-economic, political and cultural similarities between the Nordic countries form a solid foundation for their long-term cooperation. Although there are clear political, economic and historical differences between the countries, policy-making in this region is often characterised as being a result of the ‘Nordic Model’ (see, for example, Fägerlind and Strömquist 2004:45–48; Christiansen 2006; Nordic Council of Ministers 2007). With respect to higher education, typical ingredients of this model are state-owned higher education institutions but with institutional autonomy in many areas, high levels of state investment, strong emphasis on equality concerning the institutional landscape, and the way in which public resources are allocated throughout the system. To complement this picture, the state has traditionally also offered quite favourable student support schemes with the aim of stimulating high participation rates in the sector.

The Nordic countries are also part of other international trade and cooperation agreements. Since three of the five countries are EU-members, and the remaining two are part of the European Economic Area (EEA), all countries are especially well-integrated into European reform and cooperation initiatives at various levels. With respect to higher education, the two most important of these are the Bologna process and the Lisbon agenda (Maassen and Olsen 2007). All Nordic countries have signed the Bologna Declaration and are active in reforming their higher education systems within the framework provided by this declaration and the biennial ministerial Bologna meetings. Hence, since 2001 all Nordic countries have amended their legal frameworks with respect to higher education, and changed the higher education degree structures, as well as having introduced a number of other ‘Bologna-related’ changes.

Important overall aims of the Bologna Declaration are the development of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and promotion of European systems of higher education throughout the world. For this to be achieved, among other things, the following objectives will have to be attained:

- Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees in order to promote European citizens’ employability and the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education.
- Adoption of a degree system based on two cycles.
- Establishment of a system of credit transfer – preferably based on the ECTS system.
- Promotion of mobility overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement for students and teachers, researchers and administrative staff.
- Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies.
- Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional cooperation, mobility schemes, and integrated programmes of study, training and research. (European Ministers Responsible for Education 1999)

One might argue that European integration represented by these processes poses a special challenge to Nordic cooperation in higher education, especially since some

of the Nordic cooperation activities, e.g. student and teacher mobility schemes, and recognition of degrees and mutual recognition of study programmes, have also been very high on the agenda in Europe. Therefore, it is an interesting issue whether Nordic higher education institutions have managed to maintain the traditional Nordic cooperation when confronted with high-profiled European initiatives in this field.

### **7.3 Institutional Practice in and Perceptions of Current Cooperation Schemes**

In 2004, NIFU STEP was asked by the Nordic Council of Ministers to study the effects on Nordic higher education of the changing context for internationalisation (Maassen and Uppstrøm 2004). For that purpose, nine Nordic higher education institutions were selected for a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of their Nordic cooperation strategies and practices. The study showed that all universities and colleges included were involved in cooperation activities with other Nordic institutions; further, that Nordic cooperation is well integrated into the general internationalisation activities and structures of the institutions, in most cases with a clearly identifiable separate position. The latter does mean that in practice in most institutions one administrator is responsible for all 'Nordic issues' in the central administration of the institution.

Furthermore, only a few of the academic staff interviewed at the institutions expressed doubts about the importance and relevance of Nordic cooperation in higher education in comparison to other forms of internationalisation. In their opinion, the Nordic countries are historically committed to Nordic cooperation and hold on to its traditional roots – even if the world outside this region is changing. In general, academic staff showed a broad support for, and appreciation of, Nordic cooperation in higher education. The developments in the environments of the institutions, including, for example, the Bologna process, did not seem to have influenced the appreciation of Nordic cooperation as such; the positive attitude towards Nordic cooperation can be regarded as an intrinsic part of the basic academic and organisational culture in Nordic higher education. However, despite the general appreciation of Nordic cooperation, nowhere does it form the 'core' of the focus on internationalisation in individual higher education institutions.

As is also the case for other similar activities related to internationalisation of education (at all levels), international exchange of staff, pupils and students is marked by many challenges and obstacles. The barriers to mobility are many, and it takes considerable resources to reach the goals for such programmes in a satisfactory manner (Teichler 2002; Vabø and Smeby 2003; Tjomsland 2004; Vabø and Nerdrum 2006). In higher education and research, the internationalisation practice has the character of a 'battlefield' in a number of ways since various programme actors compete for attention and participation from students, staff and educational authorities. At stake also is the question which countries, regions and institutions

are regarded as being politically the most important, and academically and socially the most attractive from a student perspective, and what type of measures serve the internationalisation aims in the most efficient manner. In the informal hierarchy of possible internationalisation programmes, the funding possibilities, procedures, destinations, target groups, etc., of Nordic programmes compete with other programmes, implying that the Nordic region as a destination for students and staff competes with other regions, not least the UK and Australia, but also attractive countries and institutions in other parts of Europe. On the other hand, to take part in a Nordic programme also functions in certain respects as preparation for an eventual participation in European programmes.

### ***7.3.1 Respondents' View on Nordic Cooperation in Higher Education***

The question can still be raised what the main practical and formal arguments are for Nordic cooperation in higher education. For those involved in Nordic cooperation, the answer to this question might be obvious. From a political and bureaucratic perspective, the arguments for Nordic cooperation might be taken for granted. However, given the rapidly changing nature of the international dimension in Nordic higher education as well as in the rest of Europe, it is of interest to identify the main practical and formal arguments for the Nordic cooperation in higher education.

When interviewees were asked to reflect upon what they felt were the main arguments for the special focus on *Nordic* cooperation in higher education, the following main reasons were put forward:

- The 'historical and cultural ties' between the Nordic countries.
- The quality of higher education in the Nordic countries, which makes cooperation with the 'neighbours' attractive and natural.
- In a number of academic fields, for example, health care and nursing, Nordic languages, history, and culture, educational and pedagogic sciences, and law, there are specific Nordic aspects that distinguish the Nordic teaching and research programmes from non-Nordic programmes, and make cooperation obvious.
- Especially in Denmark, Iceland and Norway, the size of the Nordic countries was seen as an issue. It was argued that it was difficult for the individual countries to be good in all academic fields.
- Many students mentioned the relative safety of the Nordic countries. Especially mature students with families saw this as a possible 'pull factor' for going to one of the other Nordic countries.

In addition, it has to be mentioned that for some, 'the common Nordic languages' formed an argument in favour of Nordic cooperation in higher education. However, for many interviewees in Iceland and Finland the use of any of the 'core Scandinavian languages' (Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish) is hampering Nordic cooperation. They preferred English as the language of communication in Nordic cooperation.

### ***7.3.2 Formal Rationale for Nordic Cooperation in Higher Education***

How do these arguments given by actors in the practice of higher education compare to the ‘formal rationale’ of the Nordic cooperation agreement as emphasised by the Nordic Council? The elements that are argued to shape the Nordic identity and as such form the rationale for Nordic cooperation in general are:

- Geographic location and climate.
- Common language and religion.
- Comparable politics.
- Specific societal dimensions, such as the mixed economy, the focus on equality, the welfare state notion, the focus on a clean environment, and a common legal conception.

With respect to the Nordic dimension in higher education the NORDPLUS programme is aimed at creating a foundation for Nordic interdependence in higher education. This programme has three specific goals:

- To support and intensify the cooperation between Nordic higher education institutions in order to establish a Nordic educational higher education community.
- To increase the number of Nordic higher education students undertaking the whole or part of their studies in another Nordic country.
- To increase the exchange of teaching personnel with the aim of improving the quality of higher education in the Nordic higher education institutions.

Main instruments for achieving these goals are student and staff stipends, and grants for short study visits as well as for the planning and the implementation of cooperation networks. Priority is given, amongst other things, to small fields that would not survive without a joint foundation, to applications with a clear and balanced division of labour between the various participants, and to applications which manifest a good balance between student and staff exchange.

Looking at these formal arguments, goals, instruments and criteria, Nordic cooperation in higher education has traditionally been aimed at strengthening the Nordic identity. Main arguments for a specific Nordic cooperation agreement for achieving this aim are geographical (‘closeness’), cultural (‘commonness’), political (‘democratic tradition’), and social (‘equality and welfare’). The main goals of NORDPLUS are, for example, linked to the Nordic identity (*nordisk samhörighet*), although academic objectives also are part of the rationale for this programme.

### ***7.3.3 Practical and Formal Arguments Compared***

The study showed that there is a large overlap between the arguments for Nordic cooperation mentioned in the practice of higher education, and the formal arguments. However, the study also revealed that arguments justifying Nordic cooperation in

higher education that are related to the 'new internationalisation' realities (Gornitzka et al. 2003; see also Chapter 1 in this book), were rather marginal in the institutions studied. For example, economic arguments were not mentioned by academic staff as important despite the formal importance of the link between higher education and the Nordic labour market. Only indirectly, when referring to the Nordic characteristics of certain fields such as nursing and pedagogics, did some interviewees mention the labour market link. The competitive, and in some respects, commercial orientation of the 'new' internationalisation was not seen at all as a relevant element affecting Nordic cooperation.

## **7.4 The European Union as the New Competitor for Nordic Cooperation**

### ***7.4.1 Nordic Cooperation and the European Union***

If we move up one step from the institutional level to the national political level in the Nordic countries, Norway seems to be the country that values Nordic cooperation the most. One of the reasons is that Nordic cooperation in higher education is seen as a possible instrument for giving Norway (indirect) access to EU decision-making processes with respect to higher education. The assumption underlying this position is that the more the Nordic countries cooperate in higher education, the more they are potentially seen by the other EU member states and the European Commission and its staff as 'one relevant bloc'.

Traditionally, i.e. in the 1970s and 1980s, Nordic cooperation was seen as an alternative to intra-EU cooperation (Friis 2007). The Nordic countries for long took the position that Nordic cooperation was to be preferred over cooperation within the framework of the EU. After the EU membership of Denmark, and later Finland and Sweden, the situation has changed. Now the starting point is no longer how to position the Nordic region in the best possible way as an alternative to the EU, but rather to what extent and how the Nordic countries can cooperate within the EU. This position needs to be further reconsidered as a consequence of the recent enlargement of the EU (Nordic Council of Ministers 2003). The former Finnish Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen (Aftenposten 2004) has, for example, indicated that the relative influence of the Nordic countries in the enlarged EU will diminish if the Nordic policy institutions of the Nordic countries are not adapted accordingly. These institutions, including the Nordic Council of Ministers, have been established in another era to cover other requirements than the current needs in international cooperation the Nordic countries are facing, according to Lipponen. Perhaps, as a response to this call for reform, the structure of Nordic cooperation is changing, and similarly to the case of the EU, is expanding geographically. Together, the three Nordic EU members and the three Baltic countries form a potentially influential bloc in the EU, that is if they manage to coordinate their points of view with respect to the main joint areas of interest, and agree to emphasise

their 'jointness' in EU summits and other relevant EU arenas. For Norway, a major challenge in this is whether, and if so, how it will be allowed to participate in the development of the joint views for setting a 'Nordic fingerprint' on EU policies (Friis 2007).

The EU membership of Denmark, Finland, and Sweden has made it easier, and in that sense, more natural for the higher education institutions in these countries to strengthen cooperation activities with institutions in other EU member states. As such, they regard EU cooperation at least as important as cooperation activities with the institutions in the other Nordic countries. There may also be another reason for what seems to be a developing strategy of expansion and cooperation beyond the traditional Nordic area. When going back to the study of the nine Nordic institutions (Maassen and Uppström 2004), it is interesting to note that especially the Finnish and Swedish higher education institutions included clearly were more interested in European cooperation than in specific Nordic cooperation.

### ***7.4.2 The Nordic Cooperation and the Bologna Process***

With respect to the internationalisation of higher education in Europe, few actions have been more influential than the signing of the Bologna Declaration in June 1999. The Bologna process, which follows the signing of the Bologna Declaration, seeks to create a 'European Higher Education Area' (EHEA) without barriers. The EHEA is expected to contribute to a higher goal, i.e. to strengthen Europe as a unity, necessary for improving its competitive power compared to other parts of the world. This is supposed to contribute to economic progress, a better functioning labour market and larger internal social cohesion. There is a commitment to implement a clear set of objectives and an accompanying action plan embodied in the process. For those countries that signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999, the whole reform is intended to be implemented in 2010.

It can be stated that a common Nordic Higher Education Area already exists, and as such, the main aim of the Bologna process, creating an open European Higher Education Area, has been realised in the Nordic region. However, while the Bologna process is aimed at taking away structural barriers for European cooperation in higher education, Nordic cooperation was far less based on a structural homogenisation process, for example, a harmonisation of the degree structures. In that respect, Nordic cooperation in higher education is streamlined even more by the Bologna process. Nordic collaboration was previously hampered by significant systemic and political differences with respect to higher education in the Nordic countries. For instance, during the 1990s attempts to increase Nordic cooperation in the area of researcher training were subject to national limitations on the realisation of internationalisation policies (Vabø 2003). More recently, processes of convergence could take place due to Nordic countries' adjustments to European processes of standardisation of higher education – the goals of the Bologna process. This seems to make Nordic cooperation in higher education more coherent and efficient, at least in terms of dominating political ideologies.



Since the signing of the Bologna Declaration, many meetings have taken place at which the Bologna process has been discussed, also at the Nordic level. Nordic university leaders met in Tromsø in August 2002 ‘to discuss the challenges of the Bologna process to the higher education systems of the Nordic countries and ways for Nordic higher education to contribute to the Pan-European process with and Bologna process based on mutual understanding between governments and universities’ (Nordic University Leaders 2002). The core issue, according to the so-called Tromsø Statement, is that the Bologna process must be focused on recognition, not on harmonisation. In addition, it should be a process of convergence, not of uniformity. The main challenge for the involved authorities is to prevent harmonisation and uniformity/homogeneity, and to maintain and protect diversity. The other issues included in the Tromsø Statement represent the general European university leadership interpretation of the Bologna process, as well as more specific Nordic dimensions. Among the first is that university leaders expect the authorities to respect institutional autonomy (in line with the *Magna Charta Universitatum* of 1988). Further, that with regard to the WTO/GATS negotiations, the university leaders support the statement in the Prague Communiqué that higher education is a public good.

More specific Nordic aspects include the emphasis on the involvement and participation of students in the governance of higher education institutions, and the emphasis on the importance of lifelong learning. In addition, the Nordic university leaders want to make the Nordic Space for Higher Education an area of easy transition. A first level degree from any Nordic country should be accepted as a sufficient condition for a second level degree in any other Nordic country, not only formally but also in practice. Further, it was indicated that there is a shared understanding of academic quality and quality assurance in the Nordic countries. The Nordic university leaders would like to develop a Nordic platform for quality assurance in higher education. It is important that this work is done in collaboration with the national agencies in this field, the higher education institutions and the students.

## 7.5 A Changing Nordic Policy Vista

Nordic cooperation in higher education seems to be rapidly changing its agenda and partly also its rationale for cooperation. Some of the main developments taking place suggest that the traditional academic and cultural motives are being supplemented by economic and more market-based motives.

One of the events that support this argument is the report ‘*Norden som global vinderregion*’ [The Nordic Region as a Global Winner Region] published jointly by the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2005. It is argued that the Nordic region is under pressure from globalisation and increased international competition from China and India, and that this prompts the question as to what the Nordic region will live by in the future.

A point is made that it may seem paradoxical that small Nordic countries with high taxation, large public sectors and comprehensive welfare systems can

still achieve top positions in various economic rankings, such as competitiveness indexes, the World Bank's knowledge economy index, economy growth rates, and adaptation of ICT in society. Interestingly, the arguments used when trying to explain this situation are mostly related to social and cultural factors (Nordic Council of Ministers 2005:91). Common Nordic values are the basic factors claimed to result in the top positions, and include equality, proximity to power, inclusion, and flexibility, as well as some basic shared conditions related to the social systems in each country: linguistic similarities, identical level of self-realisation with respect to socio-economic dimensions, and the fact that the Nordic countries often use each other as a frame of reference. Although not claimed to be scientifically validated, the report attempts to make a link between these values and the level of competitiveness in the region. The suggested links between values and economic strengths are:

- Welfare products (linked to equality).
- Innovation (linked to trust).
- Management based on procedural strengths (linked to proximity of power).
- Broad, strong skills base (linked to inclusion).
- Adaptability (linked to flexibility).
- Sustainability and a holistic approach (linked to respect for nature).
- Industry, personal responsibility and efficiency (linked to the Protestant work ethic).
- Design and functionality (linked to aesthetics). (Nordic Council of Ministers 2005:92)

However, it is interesting that while the 'Nordic values' are emphasised as directly or indirectly influencing the strengths above, a rather different conception concerns the education system. When specifying general recommendations for the future, typical measures mentioned are 'mutual learning', 'marketing the Nordic welfare model', and 'branding the Nordic region' (Nordic Council of Ministers 2005:93–95). With respect to education, the objective stated is that the region should have 'the world's best education system'. This rather ambitious goal is followed by suggestions for 'exploiting the brightest talents' and 'investing more heavily in high-level research than currently is the case' (Nordic Council of Ministers 2005:95). As such, the idea of regional development through collaboration in education, research and innovation is increasingly important.

Given the growing interest in the role of regions in the economic literature, this may not come as a surprise. It is rather typical for the spreading of ideas (Kohler-Koch 2005; Gornitzka 2007), as well as illustrative of how the ideology about the value of cross-national educational cooperation develops among actors in the field (Corbett 2005). Another related development is that in recent years the Nordic Council of Ministers has also recruited leading administrative staff with professional experience from the European Commission.

Although the idea of 'Nordic benefit' has gradually developed as a part of the political vocabulary of the Nordic Council of Ministers since the mid-1990s (Brofoss et al. 2003), the report 'The Nordic Region as a Global Winner Region' takes a further step. This document is concerned not only with the cultural and academic

rationale for cooperation between the Nordic higher education systems and absorbing typical contemporary ideas about ‘regional cooperation’, but also focuses on turning the attention of the Nordic cooperation from an introvert Nordic/Baltic focus to an extrovert, global approach. In line with this new rationale, the Nordic Council of Ministers now seriously considers closer collaboration with actors in the Asian region due to the heavy investments in science and technology currently made in these regions.<sup>1</sup>

Without regard to how ethnocentric the ideas about genuine Nordic qualities as discussed above as well as in other publications, might appear, they seem to serve as a symbolic universe – myths – of which ideologies can justify the Nordic policy initiatives that are put into practice. It should also be mentioned that this symbolic use of politics is also justified by widely- shared concerns about the needs of the future knowledge based economy, in terms of skills, knowledge, as well as due to possible effects of academic migration, demographic patterns (ageing).

In addition to the ‘regional ideology’ and the ‘EU higher education ideology’ (Maassen and Olsen 2007), the idea of the Nordic higher education region as a global winner is also nourished by a growing international acknowledgement of the Nordic region due to the emphasis of the Nordic countries on combining expansive national policies for innovation with goals and values of the welfare state (Kallerud 2006). Finland and Denmark are considered as particularly successful examples in this respect.

## 7.6 Talk Followed by Action

In recent years, talk has been followed by action when trying to implement this emphasis on research and education. For example, NordForsk, as an independent institution responsible for Nordic cooperation in research and research training, and operating under the Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research, was established January 2005. NordForsk sponsors Nordic Centres of Excellence (for example, in Molecular Medicine, Welfare, and Food, Nutrition and Health), research programmes, networks, researcher training schools, particularly where Nordic collaboration is assumed to produce added value. Central participants in NordForsk are the national research councils. NordForsk also cooperates with the Nordic Innovation Centre, as both organisations work for the positioning of the Nordic research and innovation area.

In higher education, several initiatives have also been taken. Since 2004, the NORDPLUS programmes cover five different sectors within the system of education. In addition to NORDPLUS Higher Education come NORDPLUS Junior, NORDPLUS Adult Learning, NORDPLUS Neighbour and NORDPLUS Language. In many respects, NORDPLUS now mirrors its EU counterpart – SOCRATES, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Norden og Asien: ‘Globalisering og partnerskap’. Nordisk ministerråd. København 24. januar 2006.

not only because of the inclusion of all educational sectors within one programme. In previous periods of the Nordic cooperation involving schemes in education and research, economic support was granted on the basis of very little competition and/or evaluation of output. Nordic networks and institutions were supported on a more or less regular basis. Since 2004, and in line with the economic and market competitive rationale for such Nordic cooperation, the NORDPLUS activities have been transformed into programmes subordinate to strategic goals of which 'Nordic benefit' (contra the European dimension) is the overall goal. Actors receiving support on a more or less regular basis, such as within the sector of lifelong learning, now have to compete with other actors.

Although somewhat disputable, it is argued that Nordic countries form a distinct region closely related with the Baltic region (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). Historically, particularly Finland (especially with Estonia), and Sweden, have had many bounds to the Baltic region. Similar to the Nordic countries, the Baltic States are also nations with relatively small populations, and are therefore believed to benefit from collaboration in education and research. The Baltic countries as well as North-West Russia have had access to Nordic collaboration and funding through the NORDPLUS Neighbour programme.

Whilst the NORDPLUS Neighbour programme originally had the 'character of aid', since it was not based on co-founding with the Baltic or Russian governments, the Nordic Council of Ministers has now decided that as from 2008, the Baltic States should be invited to participate in programme cooperation on equal footing within NORDPLUS Higher Education, NORDPLUS Adult Learning and NORDPLUS Junior. For the years to come, Nordic collaboration in education and research with North West Russia, will be followed up through other programmes and agreements.

For more than 20 years, the Nordic Council has supported research and teaching within the academic field of Nordic language and literature. Whether Nordic collaboration should be based solely on the Nordic/native languages or should allow the use of English, has been highly disputed among various actors. In order to keep up the support for collaboration in Nordic languages, the NORDPLUS Language programme is closely associated with it, even though it is not formally part of the Nordic Baltic NORDPLUS cooperation. It is too early to say whether this is to be considered an ad hoc solution to achieve a compromise between conflicting interests, or whether it is to be regarded as a differentiation of international activities necessary for the Nordic countries in order to keep up with the needs at both the traditional Nordic and the wider Nordic level. If the latter is the case, we may expect further differentiation of the needs for closer collaboration with other regions in Europe as well as Asia. It depends, we believe, on how these challenges are interpreted and translated at both the national and the Nordic levels. There are already many signs of the Nordic countries developing cooperation with Asian countries and institutions in the years to come. Undoubtedly, in the Nordic context there is competition between different discourses on how to internationalise education and research with respect to the languages used, rationale for cooperation, but also with regard to region – for instance, to what extent it should be directed towards aid and solidarity with more underdeveloped regions (Frølich and Stensaker 2005).

The Nordic Council of Ministers has also suggested launching ‘Nordic joint degrees’ in areas where the Nordic region has specific and high-level expertise (Stensaker and Danø 2006). This measure is meant to be an initiative in the recruitment of the best talent from inside and outside the Nordic region, and the suggestion is also made that the whole area of quality assurance associated with these new degrees should be part of an integrated Nordic region. This would mean that national quality assurance agencies from one Nordic country could operate in another Nordic country, a procedure that would be rather innovative, also in a global context (Stensaker and Danø 2006:28).

In sum, these changes may have a profound impact upon Nordic cooperation in education and research, and may also be a sign that the overall rationale for Nordic cooperation is undergoing a transformation.

## 7.7 Conclusions

Nordic cooperation in higher education has a long tradition. Even though it is not the core area of internationalisation at the institutional level in the Nordic countries, it is appreciated by academic staff and students, and seen as an important dimension by the institutional leadership. Nonetheless, the changing political and economic context of the Nordic region, and especially EU membership of three of the Nordic countries and many neighbouring countries such as the Baltic States, has potentially far-reaching consequences for the position and nature of Nordic cooperation in higher education.

While the traditional rationale and motivation for Nordic collaboration in higher education continues to be emphasised at all relevant levels, one can also see clear contours of new ideas underlying Nordic cooperation in higher education. This first concerns the way in which the old cooperation structures, such as the Nordic Council of Ministers, should be adapted in order to make them more flexible and effective (Aftenposten 2004; Friis 2007). Second, the way in which the Nordic region is ‘split’ between the intra-Nordic collaboration and the strategic alliances between the Nordic EU members and other countries/regions, with the aim of adding a Nordic flavour to EU policies in areas of strategic, political importance to the Nordic countries. A third aspect has to do with the renewal of traditional views and the introduction of new cooperation initiatives. A clear example of the former concerns the *Norden som global vinderregion* policy document (Nordic Council of Ministers 2005). With respect to the latter, we can point, for example, to the initiatives for developing joint Nordic degree programmes in higher education (Stensaker and Danø 2006).

The coming years will show whether Nordic collaboration can find a specific, at least partly new, niche in the changing European and global higher education landscapes. For this to be successful and more than symbolic it is, among other things, of importance that the Nordic countries develop joint policy views on a number of areas where a ‘Nordic fingerprint’ might be of relevance. This concerns,

for example, a joint Nordic policy on tuition fees (or lack thereof) for EU citizens as well as non-EU citizens; the promotion of Nordic strengths in higher education related to the current focus on learning through disseminating information on best practices (Gornitzka 2007); and a convincing presentation of the advantages of a strong public foundation in the governance of higher education as an alternative to the global promotion of the marketplace.

## References

- Aftenposten 2004, *Vil Sanere Nordisk Samarbeid*. 22 March. ([www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/uriks/article.jhtml?articleID=757757](http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/uriks/article.jhtml?articleID=757757)).
- Brofoss, K.E., I. Ramberg, and V. Schwach 2003, *Felles Nordisk Forskningsstøtte. Styring og Nytte*. NIFU skriftserie 23/2003. Oslo: NIFU.
- Christiansen, N.F. (ed.) 2006, *The Nordic model of welfare: a historical reappraisal*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Corbett, A. 2005, *Universities and the Europe of Knowledge: Ideas, Institutions and Policy Entrepreneurship in European Union Higher Education 1955–2005*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- European Ministers Responsible for Education 1999, *The Bologna Declaration*. Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education.
- Friis, L. 2007, *Norden og EU – Nye europæiske vinde?* Nordic Council of Ministers. ([www.norden.org/unr/session2001/sk/nye\\_europæiske\\_vinde.asp?lang=6](http://www.norden.org/unr/session2001/sk/nye_europæiske_vinde.asp?lang=6)).
- Frølich, N. and B. Stensaker 2005, Academic, economic and developmental strategies – Internationalization of Norwegian higher education institutions. In J. Huisman and M.C. v.d. Wende (eds.) *On Competition and Cooperation II: Institutional Responses to Europeanization, Internationalisation and Globalisation*. Bonn: Lemmens.
- Fägerlind, I. and G. Strömquist (eds.) 2004, *Reforming Higher Education in the Nordic Countries – Studies of Change in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning ([unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001390/139015e.pdf](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001390/139015e.pdf)).
- Gornitzka, Å. 2007, The Lisbon process: A supranational policy perspective. In P. Maassen and J.P. Olsen (eds.) *University Dynamics and European Integration*. Dordrecht: Springer, 155–178.
- Gornitzka, Å., J. Trondal, and M. Gulbrandsen (eds.) 2003, *Internationalisation of Research and Higher Education, Emerging Patterns of Transformation*, Oslo: NIFU Rapport 2.
- Kallerud, E. 2006, Den nordiske modellen - redefinert og ettertraktet, *Forskningspolitikk* 4/2006: 8–9.
- Kohler-Koch, B. 2005, *European Governance and System Integration*. European Governance Papers (EUROGOV) No. C-05–01. (<http://www.connex-network.org/eurogov/pdf/egp-connex-C-05-01.pdf>).
- Maassen, P and T.M. Uppström 2004. *Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Northern Europe in the Light of Bologna – Rethinking Nordic Cooperation in Higher Education*. Rapport 2004 nr 8. Oslo: NIFU
- Maassen, P. and J.P. Olsen (eds.) 2007, *University Dynamics and European Integration*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Magna Charta Universitatum 1988, Bologna: Bologna University.
- Nordic Council of Ministers 2002, *Cooperation Nordic Strength*. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers. ([www.norden.org/faktab/uk/nordiskstyrka.pdf](http://www.norden.org/faktab/uk/nordiskstyrka.pdf)).
- Nordic Council of Ministers 2003, *Det Internationale Norden - Nordisk Samarbejde i Europæisk ramme* (ANP 2003:750). Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Nordic Council of Ministers 2005, *Norden Som Global Vinderregion*. (ANP 2005:777). Copenhagen: Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers.

- Nordic Council of Ministers 2007, *What Lies Ahead for the Nordic Model?* A discussion paper on the future of the Nordic welfare model in a global competition economy. (ANP 2007:725). Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers. ([www.norden.org/pub/ovrigt/ovrigt/sk/ANP2007725.pdf](http://www.norden.org/pub/ovrigt/ovrigt/sk/ANP2007725.pdf)).
- Nordic University Leaders 2002, *A Nordic Space for Higher Education*. A Statement by the Tromsø Meeting of Nordic University Leaders, August 15–17, 2002 ([www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Nordic.pdf](http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Nordic.pdf)).
- Stensaker, B. and T. Danø 2006, *Nordisk kvalitetssikring av høyere utdanning. Muligheter for gjensidig godkjenning og økt samarbeid?* Arbeidsnotat 16. Oslo: NIFU STEP.
- Teichler, U. (ed.) 2002, *Erasmus in the SOCRATES Programme. Findings of an Evaluation Study*. Bonn: Lemmens.
- Tjomsland, M. 2004, *Internationalization at Norwegian Universities and Colleges after the Quality Reform*. Bergen: Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies. WP 6.
- Vabø, A. 2003, *Barriers to Mobility in Researcher Training in the Nordic Countries*. Rapport. Nordic Academy for Advanced Science.
- Vabø, A. and L. Nerdrum 2006, *NORGINSA and ACTION NORVEGE. An Evaluation of Two Programmes for Norwegians in French Higher Education*. Bergen: The Norwegian Center for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU).
- Vabø, A. and J.C. Smeby 2003, *Evaluering av Leonardo da Vinci og Sokrates i Norge*. NIFU skriftserie 19/2003. Oslo: NIFU.