

## *Kaarle Nordenstreng*

*Noen gjennomlyste forsommerdager i slutten av juni møttes mediaforskere fra hele Norden til konferanse på Voksenåsen ved Oslo.*

(For a few bright, early summer days at the end of June, media researchers from the whole of Scandinavia gathered for a conference at Voksenåsen in Oslo.)

So begins Sverre Høyer's foreword to the report entitled *Mediaforskning: Kommunikasjon og samfunnsansvar* (Eng: Media research: Communication and social responsibility). Published by Institutt for presseforskning, Universitetet i Oslo (Eng: Institute for Mass Communication Research, University of Oslo), the 150-page "Stensil nr. 29" of the Institute's series (1973) presents the proceedings of the conference's three days, including overviews of media research in the Nordic countries, a state of the art for influence research, and accounts of whom the mass media are to serve.

In his foreword, Høyer acknowledges the self-appointed organizing committee, comprised of Stig Hadenius and Dan Lundberg from Sweden, Kaarle Nordenstreng from Finland, Niels Thomsen from Denmark and Anita Werner from Norway. Together with Høyer, these contributors stood for the conference programme. Høyer also reminds the reader that the idea for this conference had been born two years earlier at a regular meeting in Oslo of journalism teachers in the Nordic countries, also attended by several researchers (including myself). Accordingly, the roots of our 40-year conference tradition lead to journalism education.

The conference had 82 participants – less than a fourth of us here today. From Denmark there were 15 participants, including names such as Robin Cheesman, Frands Mortensen and Karen Siune; from Finland 11, including Pertti Hemánus, Veikko Pietilä and Tapio Varis; from Sweden 33, including Lars Furhoff, Olga Linné and Lennart Weibull; from Norway 23, including Maarit Bakke, Jon Dørsjø and Helge Østbye. Anybody other than Sverre, Helge and me here today who was there 40 years ago?<sup>1</sup>

But let us move from that first conference to the big story behind it. Modern mass communication research began spreading in the Nordic countries in the sixties. For example, the Institute for Mass Communication Research at the University of Oslo was established in 1963 – with a part-time position held by a young political scientist, Per Torsvik, who later moved to Bergen and became one of Nordicom's founding fathers. So the roots of the field are in the legendary decade of the sixties, but the real growth was in the fantastic decade of the seventies – along with the tradition of our Nordic conferences and their international umbrella the IAMCR, which most of us attended every second year. And the field has grown rapidly, both here in the Nordic countries and elsewhere in the world – so rapidly that it has now surpassed sociology, as measured

by publications documented by *Web of Science*<sup>2</sup>.

Lesson one is that Nordmedia conferences are a reflection and indication of how the field has grown, in the number of researchers, students and publications. Surely the growth has taken on different paces and routes in different countries – for example, I used to classify Nordic countries in the seventies into two categories: series A being Denmark and Finland with their dynamic and intellectually innovative approaches, while Sweden and Norway were in series B, with Sweden having an enormous volume but normal science and Norway remaining very small in numbers. By now this division is long extinct, and there is a good deal of everything in each Nordic country, including the smallest one, Iceland.

Lesson two is Nordicom – itself a manifestation of the field's growth. Nordicom served as an infrastructure for maintaining the conference tradition as well as many other functions. We did not need to establish a Nordic association like most other academic fields have done for maintaining and promoting networks, conferences and publications. Nordicom did this for us, in good cooperation with the national research associations, which were established in each country along with the field's growth.

Nordicom also provided documentation service for the Nordic region, and served as a model case for a worldwide network of regional documentation centres which UNESCO began to build in the seventies, covering all regions from Latin America to Asia. This COMNET has unfortunately not materialized, with UNESCO in the eighties having turned its back on communication research and becoming an instrument of corporate-driven policies. The otherwise sad story of COMNET makes Nordicom rise in the historical arena as a shining success story – an exemplary case of supporting research in a regional context.

Nordicom does not need further elaboration and praise for this audience – we all know it, and a good deal of it is packed in the *Festschrift*<sup>3</sup> to Ulla Carlsson, whom we shall hear in the last plenary on Saturday. Let me just say that Nordicom, like the Nordmedia conferences, provides us with a historical story which we can not only appreciate but also be truly proud of.

Finally, lesson three is the fact that both Nordicom and the Nordic conferences were born pretty much on their own through a bottom-up process, without much guidance or management from above. They both took shape in the course of the field's growth across the Nordic region, and their emergence was remarkably spontaneous and free from the political conflict that so often surrounds the establishment of international institutions. It has been a spectacular history, to which we pay tribute today.

## Notes

1. On the following day Hans Fredrik Dahl came to the conference – the fourth veteran attending the 40<sup>th</sup> conference.
2. See e.g. my article "Lost in Abundance? Reflections on Disciplinarity", in Barbie Zelizer (ed.), *Making the University Matter*, New York: Routledge, 2011, 194-205.
2. *NORDEN OCH VÄRLDEN. Perspektiv från forskningen om medier och kommunikation. En bok tillägnad Ulla Carlsson. Director, Nordicom.* (THE NORDIC COUNTRIES AND THE WORLD. Perspectives from Research on Media and Communication. A Book for Ulla Carlsson. Director, Nordicom.) Göteborgs universitet, 2010 (edited by Porbjörn Broddason, Ullamaija Kivikuru, Birgitte Tufte, Lennart Weibull & Helge Østbye).