EARLY ONLINE PROMOTION BY NORDIC INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Nordforsk - the Scandinavian Council for Applied Research

The first intergovernmental organization to foster cooperation in scientific and industrial research and related documentation, Nordforsk, was founded in 1949 by the academies of engineering sciences and national research councils for science and technology.

The Executive Board of Nordforsk chaired by Edy Velander convened the first Nordic symposium on documentation in Tällberg, Sweden in November 1954. Kajsa Hållström also of the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences was responsible for the arrangement. It gave a flying start to joint projects in documentation including library services in science and technology. A Liaison Group for Documentation was established to foster cooperation and to organize Nordic I&D symposia at regular intervals. (1)

As the first Nordic civil servant I was in 1956 recruited from the main chemical information service in Finland to serve as secretary of Nordforsk and its working groups and committees. It goes without saying that I did not neglect the Liaison Group for Documentation.

Online had not become a reality, but it was envisaged in bold future forecasts. A Nordic “database” on current research projects on punched cards was developed at the end of the fifties. (2)

In 1960 the Scandinavian Documentation Centre in Washington, D.C., Scandoc, was established to serve as a clearing house of difficultly obtainable government research reports for science and industry in the Nordic countries. At an OECD meeting the White House Science Advisor, Dr. Hornig, mentioned: “Why is it that only Nordic countries are able to join forces to solve problems?” Our men in Washington: Arne Sverdrup, Nils Gram, and Sinikka Koskiiala kept for more than a decade the Nordforsk Info Committee, as it was now called, ajour with developments of computer-based information services. Scandoc was closed later, when its mission was taken care of by the US Government Printing Office.

Nordic 2-week and 3-week courses for documentalists were organized in 1959-64, when no national post-graduate training was available in the region. Computer-based services were in their infancy and belonged to the course curricula.

The Nordic documentation symposia organized by Nordforsk every third year were esteemed state-of-the-art platforms. In 1967 SDI services were recommended as cooperative projects, because the Nordic study of communication of information within 400 industrial enterprises had found a substantial need for this tape service. From 1970 the documentation symposia were replaced by conferences organized by the national documentation societies in turn. The first one in 1970 held in Norway highlighted SDI and off-line retrospective searches, while the second one held in 1973 in Finland went online discussing both “home-made” systems and services by the European Space Agency. (3)

Two Nordic seminars on computer-based information were offered in the mid-sixties and a conference in 1968. At this time our experience was limited to index compilations, off-line searches and SDI-services.

Nordic conferences were convened for university professors and library directors on teaching information competency in universities in 1967 and 1968. One of their conclusions recommended training courses to be offered by university libraries to students as well as to the teaching staff in the use of computer-based information retrieval.

Within Nordforsk and its Info Committee where national information centers were represented, the consensus was that acquisition and operation of tape services should not be duplicated in order to achieve the largest possible selection of SDI services for the whole Nordic region. This policy was not accepted by all centers involved - national
and institutional as well as personal interests led to some unnecessary duplications.

In 1968 the following five centers offered SDI service:

DtB The Technological Library of Denmark
FOA The Research Institute of National Defence, Sweden
BMCD-KI The Biomedical Documentation Centre of the Royal Caroline Medico-Surgical Institute, Sweden
SNI Norwegian Industries Development Association
KTHB The Royal Institute of Technology Library, Sweden

In Finland, Helsinki University of Technology Library, after some economically less successful experiments adopted the role of “parasitology” or “symbiosis” acting as an agent for KTHB and DtB the above listed centers. Later this model was recommended for developing countries by Unesco (4). In parallel the Central Medical Library of Finland cooperated in the same manner with BMCD-KI in Sweden.

Already at this stage cooperation in database production started a.o. between DtB and SNI as well as between The Medical Central Library and KI. In 1969 all Nordic countries joined in the input into INIS, The International Nuclear Information System of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The report of a commended inquiry by Karl Stenstadvold resulting in a long-range plan of action for Nordforsk was in January 1968 submitted to its ninth plenary meeting. Plenum endorsed the plan and increased budget. The following two fields of cooperation were given top priority:
1) environmental protection problems, and
2) computer-based information services.(5)

After 1968 my engagement in Nordforsk faded as I resigned and became a Finnish librarian. I only served as a chair of the Info Committee. We established in 1971 a division of labor with the newly created NORDDOK. Coordination of participation in the work of OECD Scientific and Technical Policy Group stayed with us simply because I served as its vice chairman and later chairman. This group had in the sixties been instrumental in gaining the most important US databases for European use. (6)

The telefax experiment of the national resource libraries in technology of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden was exciting - the only problem was technological: the transmission of one A4 page required four minutes staff attendance.

Scandoc's Nordic steering group consisting of the heads of Nordic bridge heads and the Local Administrative steering group in Washington D.C. consisting of the science attachés of the Scandinavian countries and of Emerik Olsoni representing Finland reported to the Info Committee.

In 1972 a thorough inventory of ADP programs for processing bibliographical data was carried out and published.

In 1973 the evaluation of information retrieval systems and functions was a timely project and in 1974 a study was made to clarify the need for a “Scandoc” for Japan and another to evaluate the use of ESRO’s databank in Darmstadt (6)

Scannet - the first packet switched international data network for information services - was under planning. It is reported on in another paper by Björn Grönlund, the secretariat member of Nordforsk, who was responsible for the project.

The key persons in the information program of Nordforsk during 1954-74 included in addition to the Nordforsk Executive Board, Plenum and secretariat the following members of the Info Committee:

D: Vibeke Ammundsen
Arne. J. Moller
Kjeld Klintøe F: Elin Tornudd
Eeva Wartiovaara N: Anton Disch
Nils L. Gram
Knut Thalberg
Valgerd Aaen
S: Kajsa Hällström
Björn Tell (6)
Nordek - the Nordic Committee of Senior Civil Servants to Institute an inquiry into a Nordic Economic Union

The idea of a common market of the Nordic countries was lively debated in the late nineteen sixties, and in 1968 a committee of ministerial officials from the four countries appointed for an inquiry. This committee, Nordek, dealt early in its work with scientific and technical information. Their preliminary report dated on January 3, 1969 (7) contain the following paragraph.

Establishment of an organization for documentation and information in the field of science and technology.

The need for an efficient system acquisition and dissemination of S&T information is increasing. Nordic cooperation in this field has already been started within Nordforsk.

The Committee proposes the appointment of a Nordic coordinating body to
- follow the operating services
- promote the use of national services to industry and research in the other Nordic countries, and
- facilitate the use of international documentation and information services by national information services.

A working party chaired by Hans Håkansson of Sweden was formed to draft a detailed proposal. After a couple of meetings, this group submitted a proposal to a Nordic coordinating committee for information and documentation - NORDDOK.

The Nordic economic union proposed by Nordek in 1969 did not materialize, but NORDDOK was created as probably the only institutional product of the Nordek negotiations. (8)

In January 1970 a Nordic working party was appointed to draft a proposal to the governments of the Nordic countries for NORDDOK statutes, and the ministries of trade and industry appointed the following members to serve in this working party:

D: Vibeke Ammundsen and Kjeld Klintöe
F: Martti M. Kaila and Elin Törnudd
N: Anton Disch and Harald Tvetereå
S: Hans Håkansson and Nils-Erik Svensson.

The proposal by the working party follows. NORDDOK was to become a vehicle for cooperation between the national councils for S&T information, each represented by two members. The task of NORDDOK was to develop and coordinate S&T information service in the Nordic countries with special attention to the coordinated use of international information systems and harmonized pricing policy, and to take care on its part of the standardization of primary publications and of cooperation in the input of Nordic material into international information systems. Further the tasks involved promotion of research and development in the field of information and documentation and the training and education of information specialists and users. This plan was endorsed by the Nordic governments in 1970. (9)

NORDDOK - Nordic Committee for Information and Documentation

NORDDOK held its founding meeting in Oslo in January 1971. It consisted of two members from each country with their personal substitutes, all appointed by the national governments on the motion of its national central body of information and documentation. One of the national members was to represent science or technology.

The first elected chairman of NORDDOK was Harald Tvetereås, National Librarian of Norway, and vice chairman Anton Disch. The secretariat for the two first years was accordingly housed in the Royal Norwegian Library Service in Oslo (10). Nils Gram was secretary. The delegates of the remaining countries were:

D: Vibeke Ammundsen and Kjeld Klintöe (Chairman 1973-1974)
F: Henrik Schauman to 1974, Eeva-Maija Tammekann from 1974, and Elin Törnudd
S: Sune Bergstrom and Hans Håkansson.

NORDDOK became subordinated the Nordic Cultural Agreement and its annual grant for development projects and administration was paid from the Nordic cultural budget.

The chairmen of the national policy bodies on information and documentation established between 1967 and 1970 were members of NORDDOK, and it was natural, that these organizations became instrumental in the drafting and follow-up of project proposals. These organizations were:

Dandok - Danish Committee for Scientific and Technical Information and Documentation
Tinfo - Finnish Council for Scientific Information
Norindok - Norwegian Committee for Information and Documentation, and Sinfdok - Swedish Council for Scientific Information and Documentation.

NORDDOK rules for decision making required consensus - each national delegation having one vote. Especially in the beginning this retarded the development of a balanced program, as the principal delegates of Norway and Sweden often had different opinions dissonances might have stemmed from the fact, that the Swedish delegation consisted of a distinguished scientist, later Nobel prize winner, and a ministerial civil servant, while delegates from the other countries were directors of research libraries and other information centers.

One of the stumbling blocks was the Swedish proposition to create a permanent star-shaped network for Nordic use of the Swedish online library system Libris. Denmark was opposed to the configuration on the grounds that online databases were offered for Nordic use by all Nordic countries.

Among the most successful NORDDOK projects was experimental offers of SDI services and retrospective searches within psychology and education by the respective national resource libraries. This was a pioneering study of computer-based information services in social sciences financed by NORDDOK and later by NORDINFO.

Within science and technology corresponding experiments had been carried out before NORDDOK was established. Another program within social sciences was the creation by the parliamentary libraries of a Nordic computer-based database and catalog of current and concluded public inquiries.

Medline searching was offered by the Biomedical Documentation Center of the Caroline Institute in Sweden to all medical resource libraries in the Nordic countries free of charge. NORDDOK helped the client libraries to pay their telecommunication bills.

A study was carried out concerning information requirements within occupational health by libraries of the national institutes of occupational health. Within library administration a study was initiated to develop a system for measuring performances in libraries and other information centers.

Therefore it has surprised me as one of the “guilty” delegates to learn about the criticism that NORDDOK neglected the problems of research libraries.

In parallel the national libraries and other major research libraries established a non-governmental Nordic Committee for cooperation, the NFBS. Its program included the Scandia Plan - a Nordic version of the famous American Farmington Plan, NOSP, a computer-based Nordic union catalog of periodicals, and a harmonization project concerning library statistics. NFBS was recipient of grants from the Nordic culture budget. They were modest: scarcely more than a tenth of NORDDOK’s budgetary grants. In the beginning of 1974 NFBS proposed association with NORDDOK.

NORDDOK was not opposed to the “marriage” but considered its own resources too small to share with NFBS. Therefore an inquiry was proposed to the Secretariat for Nordic Cultural Cooperation. This resulted in the appointment of NOSIF. (11)

NOSIF- Group for an Inquiry into Nordic Cooperation between Research Libraries etc.

In June 1974 Nordkult decided to appoint a group to examine suitable forms for cooperation between research libraries in Nordic countries and their national central bodies. Financial support for this activity as well as drawing boundary lines between NORDDOK’s programs and those of research libraries were also included among the duties. Members of this group were:

D: Martin Korst and Karl V. Thomsen
F: Henrik Schauman and Elin Törnudd
I: Finnbogi Gudmundsson (Iceland represented for the first time)
N: John Brandrud and Karl Stenstadvold
S: Paul Almfelt, Chairman and Hans Baude

Sten Berglund from Sinfdok was secretary of the group. The Finnish members were the only ones with a history from NORDDOK and were able to speak about intricacies in the formulation of Nordic information policy. Our chairman, a university administrator from Linköping and of Finnish descent was a layman as was Martin Korst of the Royal Danish Research Secretariat. Karl Stenstadvold was managing director of SINTEF, the contract research center established to operate in a symbiosis with the Norwegian University of Technology and chairman of the Norwegian Committee for I&D. All other members were directors of research libraries. Our secretary Sten Berglund was SINFDOK’s lawyer.
This group met five times in 1974-75 and reached rather soon consensus of the desirability not to draw boundaries but to integrate the programs of NORDDOK and those of NFBS. The last sceptic was Karl Stenstadvold, who envisaged a domination by national libraries and university libraries in the formulation of cooperative programs leading to negligence of information technology including the exploitation of international online developments and resources. The Finnish members of the group worked hard to convince him of the prospect of a balanced program between the different disciplines and the promotion of the latest IT.

NOSIF submitted its unanimous proposal to establish NORDINFO and to its statutes before Mid-Summer 1975, and NORDINFO became reality in the beginning of the year 1976 (11). Following the rotation praxis adopted by NORDDOK the chairmanship and secretariat was moved from Denmark to Finland. Accordingly the Finnish delegation, Esko Häkli, Marjatta Okko, and Elin Törnudd had the pleasant duty to draft the agenda for the founding meeting of NORDINFO (12).

References