

Nordic cooperation on higher education and research on disabilities and human rights

Project report

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Nordic cooperation on higher education and research on disabilities and human rights

All the Nordic countries and autonomous areas have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention is implemented through national legislation and other measures that aim for equality regardless of a person's functional abilities.

Still, there is need for major change in the Nordics as a region if it is to function well for everyone, and in accordance with the vision of every person's right of self-realisation and the protection of every person's right to be self-sufficient.

It is imperative that national and Nordic initiatives surrounding human rights and disabilities are based on a proper knowledge-base. In the field of disabilities, however, there is limited research. This applies in particular to research based on the environment-relative approach to disabilities. This perspective focuses on the relationship between the individual with a functional impairment and the surrounding environment and especially on the environment as enabling or disabling the individual. There is also a significant lack of disability research based on human rights.

Good quality higher education and research are imperative to the development of future policy for, and the living conditions of, disabled persons, regardless of age or gender.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' Action Plan for disability co-operation has three focus areas: Human rights, Diversity and Freedom of Movement. In each area, there are three concrete measures supported by various policy areas. The activities aim collectively, and individually, to make the Nordic collaboration into an effective tool for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all areas of society.

The purpose of the focus on Human Rights area is to support and strengthen the work of implementing and monitoring the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This shall be achieved by developing ideas and proposals for enhanced cooperation on disability and human rights in higher education in the Nordic countries. The aim of this activity was also developed under the Finnish presidency.¹ One objective of the cooperation should also involve the need for future leaders and academics to mobilise and show stronger confidence in matters relating to disability. The cooperation and

¹ The Nordic Council of Ministers (2015) Action Plan for Nordic Cooperation on Disability: Human rights, Diversity and Freedom of Movement. The Nordic Council of Ministers, Copenhagen

network of experts should be able to generate, strengthen and develop the new Nordic confidence.

The Nordic Council of Ministers Committee of Senior Officials for Education and Research (ÄK-U) decided in spring 2016 to fund a development forum on higher education, human rights and disability.

The forum was held in close collaboration with the Nordic Network for Disability Research (NNDR) in June 2016 in Mariehamn. The meeting was attended by thirty experts and other key persons from education, organisations for the disabled, ministries, government agencies and Nordic collaborative bodies.

The meeting was opened by the Åland minister of Nordic cooperation and was part of the Finnish Presidency Programme for the Nordic Council of Ministers. The aim was to draw up a proposal on how cooperation surrounding this topic can be developed and implemented moving forward.

Nordic Council of Ministers is the Nordic governments' official co-operation body. The Nordic Council of Ministers of cooperation coordinates the overall work. There are Councils of Ministers for ten different policy areas.

Nordic Council is the Nordic parliamentary official cooperation body. The Council's presidium, committees and electoral and supervisory committee include a total of 87 members of parliament.

Nordic Welfare Center is an institution under the Nordic Council of Ministers for Health and Social Policy. The Department is working with the current welfare in welfare policies, disability, labor inclusion, alcohol and drug issues and welfare technology.

Nordic Welfare Centre takes concrete proposals to politicians, compiles research and organizes Nordic and international conferences related to these issues.

Council for Nordic Cooperation on Disability is an advisory body to the Nordic Council of Ministers. The secretariat for the Disability Council is a part of the Nordic Welfare Center. The Council consists of 16 members from all eight Nordic countries and autonomous areas. Half of the members are appointed by the government and half by disability organizations at national level. The Council's mandate is valid until December 2017.

Nordic benefits arise when the cooperation:

- gives significant added value compared to what the same activities would give if they were implemented nationally*
- manifests and develops Nordic solidarity*
- strengthens competitive advantage and competence*
- supports Nordic influence internationally*

Proposal regarding form and content for continued and strong Nordic collaboration

Below is a list of proposals for how the experts at the meeting in Mariehamn see continued cooperation in this subject area. The experts also discussed Nordic added value in relation to what can and should be done on the national level and in terms of other international collaborations. For each proposal the experts have discussed which players are affected by the proposal and potential sources of funding.

Develop a Nordic master's programme in disability studies

Currently there are master's programmes in disability studies in Norway, Sweden and Iceland. Finland has had funding for a programme which expires in 2018. There are sound reasons to develop and implement a Nordic master's programme, both to share resources, and to further knowledge development. It would safeguard the academic quality and tradition of collaboration on this subject.

One idea is to start with a collaboration project where at least three Nordic universities/university colleges work together to draw up a common course plan based on existing educational programmes. This work could also include exchange Nordic experiences internationally and in Baltic States. The central theme could be to develop the Nordic perspective, the Nordic welfare model and what it is in the Nordic context that has contributed to a special tradition in disability studies and research. The ambition is for this collaboration to grow to become a master's programme.

The Nordic added value lies in sharing and developing knowledge and resources, e.g. the educator's teaching efforts. Students could also more easily opt to take parts of their education at other Nordic schools. Also to continue to develop and define concepts and understanding of the subject, for example, in relation to the Nordic model and with regards to disability studies and research in other parts of the world.

The actors involved in this cooperation are NNDR and the universities and university colleges with experience from existing national master's programmes (Norway, Sweden and Iceland). Denmark and Finland are participating, and the ambition is to include the university college environments in Greenland, Åland and the Faroe Islands.

Nordplus is regarded as a potential funder for the first collaborative project.

Establish a Nordic arena on disability and human rights

There is a great need for knowledge development and knowledge distribution surrounding disability and human rights. A number of target groups need to participate in these two processes, such as

researchers, disability organisations, law students, servicemen and politicians.

It is an idea to look for inspiration to the International Summer School on Disability and Right in Galway, Ireland and create a Nordic version of it. The basic perspective is that the content shall be inclusive, all target groups shall find it relevant. The profile of the event should, in comparison to the Irish version, put the Nordic model in focus while at the same time recruiting international experts and motivators. As a suggestion, we could add more modules adapted per target group in connection with the summer school, such as shorter postgraduate courses, training courses for organisation representatives, business leaders, researchers and lawyers.

The Nordic added value lies in it being based on the Nordic context. We share welfare policy traditions while at the same time the individual rights perspective is becoming increasingly more important. Travel costs will in many cases be lower than for summer courses arranged outside the Nordic countries.

The stakeholders are NNDR, universities and university colleges, Nordic Welfare Center, the Nordic Disability Council, national agencies, and stakeholder organisations that want to contribute to the development.

Can perhaps be co-funded by Nordplus, but also through universities, university colleges and other knowledge organisations contributing with their time and premises. Some entry fee. Some funding can possibly be found at those ministries that are responsible for coordination in terms of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Continue to design and implement common postgraduate and research education

This type of initiative has also been previously arranged as a Nordic collaboration project. Administratively, doctorate courses are simpler to arrange in many ways, since these courses do not require that collaborating universities draw up a common curriculum, etc. A postgraduate course could possibly be arranged in conjunction with the arena/summer school.

Designing curricula for the training of special target groups

A number of professions in Nordic countries require a basic education on human rights and disability studies. This need has increased with the countries' ratification of the UN Convention related to this field. These professions also need to acquire knowledge on what existing research has to say.

Examples of professions that need to raise their competence are:

- Lawyers
- Teachers
- Management
- Disability organisations

The Nordic added value is that this is a need that the Nordic countries have in common, and therefore all curricula and pilot training would be of great value if they are drawn up in collaboration with each other. Subsequently, the curricula can be implemented on a larger scale at national level.

The stakeholders are those professions that are involved, but also government agencies and those responsible for training in the workplace.

Nordic research programme on disability

The universities and university colleges conducting research on the subject of disability will be able to participate and contribute to a larger Nordic research programme. There is need to draft a strategic plan for disability studies and research. This plan should state what research is available and what is lacking.

One way to start this work would be to arrange a seminar at NNDR's conference in Örebro in 2017. Possibly, after this seminar some researchers could be commissioned to compile a survey followed by a strategic plan. One of the objectives of the strategic plan is to produce more collective Nordic resources for disability research.

In the programme theme-related research compilations could be produced in Nordic languages. The purpose of this is to make research more accessible to a broader audience than can be reached through publications in narrower, often English-language journals.

The Nordic added value is in efficient use of resources and improved opportunities to conduct cross-sectoral and complex studies for which there is a need. A Nordic research programme in disability studies would mean that the Nordic countries promote themselves to the world as a region where collective and interesting research is being conducted.

The stakeholders are NNDR, Nordic Welfare Center and the Nordic Disability Council.

Nordforsk's section for programmes is a potential source of funding.

Initiate projects on inclusive student life

Studying is so much more than participating in educational activities.

The social aspects of study and a feeling of belonging are crucial and affect the lives of students throughout their education.

A Nordic project should look at how student life works for students with various disabilities. Can student life be more inclusive? Are there good examples of university cities/towns that work better than others? Can students contribute to this development by, for example, rating student life at different universities and university colleges as a way to analyse and develop student life to become more inclusive? A possible outcome could be that students rate student life at various places, where inclusion based on disability is included, and issue a certificate of quality to those universities and university colleges that rank high.

Nordic added value in this project is, by gathering knowledge, experience exchanges and contact with students from several Nordic countries, to potentially improve student involvement in the social context and facilitate mobility of students with disabilities in the Nordic countries. There are great similarities in university environments, welfare schemes and laws concerning accessibility. This creates good conditions for cooperation.

Stakeholders could be student organisations, and universities in three to eight countries. Students that have studied in other countries. The youth division of disability organisations, and those associations that organise children with disabilities should also be involved.

Nordplus is suggested as the project financier.

Collaboration on Nordic-coordinated disability statistics

There is a lack of comparable statistics on living conditions of people with disabilities in Nordic countries. Nordic cooperation on disability and inclusion policies would be more effective if it were easier to compare statistical changes. Disability policies on a national level would also be improved if it was possible to see your own situation in comparison to other countries with more precise statistical measurements. In the long run, one could perform joint follow-up of the disability field with Nordic indicators for the entire region.

It might be an idea to arrange a seminar with the Nordic Council of Ministers' collaborative body for social statistics, NOSOSKO, and researchers in the field.

Stakeholders involved are NNDR, Nordic Welfare Center, the Nordic Disability Councils and Nordforsk.

Funding: an application for a collaboration project has been submitted to NOSOSKO.

Nordic experts in the field – this is what they say

Nordic cooperation makes smarter use of resources and gives more relevant and robust results. Experts that participated in the meeting at Mariehamn agree on this. Below is a summary of some key points of the discussion at the meeting.

Nordic cooperation is both desired and necessary

There are big differences in the basis for disability research in the Nordic countries. In some countries it is difficult to create strong research environments. This has been identified in the Danish SFI report *Current Scandinavian and British disability*².

- There is a great need for strong cooperation between research environments in Nordic countries. Strong environments can raise small environments, however, there is also need for research funding to foster cooperation, said Inge Storgaard Bonfils, lecturer at Metropolitan University College, member of NNDR's Board of Directors, and member of the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability, when she summed up the council's stand on cooperation.

Through cooperation, resources such as research funding, competence, research respondents/participants and students are used more effectively. These countries are small, together the basis becomes larger. Patrick Kermit, professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim and member of NNDR's Board of Directors, described the requirements for cooperation related to a master's level education.

- We need to discuss sustainability issues concerning a master's programme in the Nordic countries, not least in terms of the student base.

Education is expensive to carry out. The number of students in disability studies compared to the number of schools and countries is often too low to afford developing bigger programmes of good quality. On a whole, joint efforts are more financially sustainable for both the educational institutions and the students. Currently, students can participate in disability research programmes at British universities, for example, but it is expensive.

- It is expensive for students to study abroad. Even taking into account all the stipends and support, students are paying thousands of Euro to study abroad. It could be more economical for students if the Nordic countries could cooperate better, said Rannveig Traustadóttir, professor at the Disability department at the University of Iceland, and member of NNDR's Board of Directors.

² Bengtsson, Steen & Dorte Laursen Stigaard (2012) *Current Scandinavian and British disability. A survey of environments*. The Danish National Centre for Social Research SFI, Copenhagen

Nordic cooperation is special compared to other international collaboration.

There is a Nordic perspective within international disability research, among other things, as applies to interpretation and meaning of terms used.

Disability, functional impairment, functional ability and other terms in the field are used in different ways in different contexts. Also the group "persons with functional impairment" is defined differently based on the different conditions and needs related to data collection, for in turn, different sorts of studies. This can be seen as complicated and is discussed in the anthology entitled *Handicapforståelser*³.

Simo Vehmas, professor of Disability Studies at the University of Helsinki, and Chairman of NNDR, described the normative aspects of disability as a phenomenon:

- Disability as a concept reflects the ideas of how human beings "should be", and how society should be constructed to treat its members fairly.

Even if there is great variation in how the concept is used, it can be generally said that Nordic disability research is characterised by a relative view on what disability means in a given situation or within a certain context. By relative we mean the interaction between the individual's physical, cognitive and social conditions and the environment's hindering or enabling design is taken into account.

The relative approach to disability differs from the more strict medical, individual-focused perspective where the individual's body and functionality is assessed based on a perception of what is regarded normal functionality.

- Functional impairment has traditionally been viewed as a problematic/negative aspect of diversity and to be compensated for by "correcting or adapting" for the individual, Rannveig Traustadóttir described.

The stricter perspective according to the social model on the other hand looks at the surrounding environment as crucial to a person's opportunities to participate on equal terms and takes lesser account of the individual's functional impairment. This, often critical and socially-critical perspective, places emphasis on changing society and the environment to optimise conditions for participation. The social model was developed in close collaboration with the disability movement. Simo Vehmas described the current social perspective in disability studies as:

³ Storgaard Bonfils, Inge, Leif Olsen, Birgit Kirkebæk & Susan Tetler (2013) *Handicapforståelser mellem teori, erfaring og virkelighed*. Akademisk Forlag, Copenhagen
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- Disability is disadvantage experienced by persons with functional impairments, disadvantage arising from unfair social arrangements and ableist⁴ ideologies.

The Nordic relative approach is a special tradition in international disability research which is otherwise individual-focused or where social direction is dominant.

In Nordic countries there is also typically a connection to research on changes and capacity in the Nordic welfare model.

- Nordic disability research is closely connected to developments in the welfare state and started as an evaluation research, while British and American research was developed more in collaboration with the disability movement and by people with personal experience, which has left its mark, said Lars Lindberg from the Swedish Disability Federation, who has also conducted a survey of disability research in Sweden⁵.

Stronger cooperation between national university environments and between university environments and persons with disabilities through the organisations that represent them can provide Nordic research with better opportunities for international promotion and influence.

Involve those affected

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been signed by all the Nordic countries and autonomous territories. Article 4 of the Convention states that the parties to the Convention shall undertake or promote research and development on inclusive design and provide access to the use of new digital technology and tools. Article 31 of the Convention urges parties to take the necessary measures to improve the collection of statistics and other information. Article 32 states, among other things, that international cooperation shall facilitate collaboration on matters of research and access to knowledge on science and technology.

The Convention also stresses in Article 4.3 the importance of consultation and participation in decision-making processes. Persons with impaired functionality shall, via their organisations, participate in decisions and processes that affect them. This also applies to education and research.

The primary goal of disability research is, like with all research, to assess the field in a scientific way. For example, what it is like to have a particular disability, what people with different disabilities think and say about their lives, what impact a disability could have on family life,

⁴ Ableism like racism is a system of thought that works to the advantage of a particular group.

⁵ Lindberg, Lars (2016) Svensk forskning om funktionshinder – forskningen som haltar. Hörselskadades Riksförbund, Stockholm

participation, self-understanding, employment, education, etc. At the same time research, like all knowledge, is power, and the researcher has a position of power in terms of the topic and persons being researched. During the Nordic meeting a discussion was held as to whether it is important for people with personal experience to participate in disability research. Rannveig Traustadottir maintains that there are several arguments that support this:

- Researchers create knowledge that reflects their experiences and interests,

Academia produces knowledge that will be taken for granted as the "truth", knowledge is power and participating in this production of knowledge makes a difference.

There are many different ways for persons with disabilities to participate in and contribute to research on disability. Among other things, by being involved in decisions surrounding what is to be studied and how research is conducted, by helping to ensure that the researcher focuses on issues that are important to people with disabilities, by participating in drafting the research project and processes, critiquing and influencing research while it is being conducted and contributing to the analysis of research results.

Emil Erdtman from Handikappförbunden in Sweden described the project *Från forskningsobjekt till medaktör* (loosely translated as "from research subject to co-player"). In the project five levels of cooperation were discussed, between researchers and persons (with or without an academic education) with personal disabilities or as representatives of a particular group: tokenism, informant, advisor, co-researcher and co-director.

Methods are, for example, cooperation on preparation, planning and execution of research, advisory groups, individual advisors or co-researchers with personal experience of disability, reading of and feedback on drafts, joint writing and collaboration on life stories. The nature of the cooperation will be influenced by various research traditions such as participatory research, partnership in a specific project, inclusive research, emancipatory research and action research

Cooperation between researchers and activists is not always simple. Conflicts of interest can be complicated, however, both parties share the same goal, to describe the reality and improve the living conditions of persons with different types of disabilities. Eilinoir Flynn from the Irish Centre for Human Rights at the National University of Ireland, Galway, described the experiences from a number of international collaborations where persons with disabilities were involved in various ways.

- In some formal settings it can feel strange to work with individuals that represent the target group, but our experience shows that the results are far better when you involve the groups the research pertains to. This could mean that you have to change the way your work so that it is more accessible, which is not always a disadvantage.

Environments for higher education need to be designed according to the principles of inclusive design

University environments based on inclusive design and good information to students needing support and services is another important aspect of the conditions for involving persons with disabilities in the development of good knowledge about disability. According to the expert group, to make it possible for students with disabilities to participate and contribute to research at a higher level, and to disability research in general, the university environments have to be of inclusive design and accessible.

- Interviews with students with disabilities that have studied in other countries describe that administration personnel at the universities' international departments have poor knowledge of support schemes and a very negative attitude towards these students, said Kjetil Knarlag of Universell in Norway who is also leader of the Nordic project on this subject.

Nordic cooperation on good examples of people with personal experience of disability, poor accessibility and limited participation because of their disability can lead to better conditions for good research in the field in the future.

A brief summary of Nordic disability research

Below is a brief summary of disability research including the status of which environments are to be found in the Nordic countries. The text is compiled by the Secretariat of the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability at the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues.

Important bases also include the SFI report entitled Current Scandinavian and British Disability – a survey of environments⁶, a special edition of the Scandinavian Journal on Disability Research (SJDR) from 2013 about Nordic Disability Research/Studies and with articles from all the Nordic countries⁷ and the Swedish Forte report regarding research on functional impairment and disability 2002–2010 Surveys, analysis and proposals.⁸

Research on the situation for persons with functional impairment and conditions for participation have previously mainly focused on the individual's disability and how it can be compensated for to fit into society's various environments. Another analytical model that characterises modern understanding of the subject is that disability is created through the environment's degree of accessibility. This social model dominates British and North American research. In the Nordic an environment-relational model has emerged, where the individual and the environment are viewed together and in the relationship between them, functional impairments can be identified and how they affect the lives and conditions of people can be analysed.⁹

In SFI's report, the research environment is defined as "a research environment that comprises at least three active researchers, of whom at least one shall be at the level of lecturer or senior researcher. Furthermore, the three researchers shall have engaged in research at the research institute in question with disability as the main field for the last two years. Lastly, in order to call it a research environment we require that a PhD programme is established, and that there is at least one PhD graduate."

⁶ Bengtsson, Steen & Dorte Laursen Stigaard (2012) Current Scandinavian and British disability. A survey of environments. The Danish National Centre for Social Research SFI, Copenhagen

⁷ Special Issue of SJDR on Disability Research in the Nordic Countries Vol. 15, 2013

⁸ Rönnerberg, Jerker, Elisabet Classon, Berth Danermark och Thomas Karlsson, Kartläggning, analys och förslag (2012) Forskning om funktionsnedsättning och funktionshinder 2002–2010. The Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (FORTE), Stockholm

⁹ Storgaard Bonfils, Inge, Leif Olsen, Birgit Kirkebæk & Susan Tetler (2013) Handicapforståelser mellem teori, erfaring og virkelighed. Akademisk Forlag, Copenhagen

Nordic cooperation on disability research

NNDR is a scientific interdisciplinary disability research network that is interested in the cultural, social and environmental dimensions of disability and marginalisation. The aim of NNDR is to promote research and development in the field of disability. NNDR is primarily a forum for researchers, particularly from the Nordic countries, to present and discuss their research, and to encourage Nordic and international exchanges and cooperation.

NNDR was founded in Fredrikshavn, Denmark in 1997. In just a few years it has grown into a large network of disability researchers, which reflects the increasing interest in and significance of disability research in the Nordic region.

The most important meeting place for the network is the conference that is arranged every other year. The objective of the conferences is for researchers, particularly those from Nordic countries, to present and discuss results from social research on disability, and to foster contacts for Nordic and international cooperation. Those working with development and policy for persons with disabilities in various professions, organisations or in the bureaucracy are also welcome.

Scandinavian Journal of Disability is an electronic journal. The contents are limited to SJDR's subscribers. The journal publishes articles in English and contributions come from both the Nordic countries and abroad. A process is in progress to move SJDR to Stockholm University. Pressure, since the journal will become Open Access.

University environments in the Nordic countries have previously collaborated on disability training courses where students and teachers from other countries are welcome. This cooperation is still going on.

There has been a Masters programme in inclusive design (at the Nordic School of Public Health). There is now a Masters programme in vision pedagogy and vision rehabilitation.

Nordic Welfare Research¹⁰ is a new academic publication available in Open Access. The publication contains contributions in Scandinavian languages, with English versions twice a year.

The mobility of students with disabilities has been studied by a Nordic project group with a study supervisor for functionally impaired students and under the leadership of unit Universell at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim. Universell is the national coordinator for accessibility of higher education in Norway.

¹⁰ https://www.idunn.no/nordisk_valfardsforskning

Situation in Denmark

Disability research in Denmark is conducted in smaller scale environments at universities and university colleges. The environment is relatively fragmented and research is conducted with little coordination. There is a national research network.¹¹

In the SFI report, the following environments are defined: SFI – the Danish National Centre for Social Research, the National Institute for Public Health (SIF) at SDU, Center for Social Practices and Cognition (SoPraCon) at SDU, Centre for Adapted Physical Activity Participation Studies (CHB) at SDU, Center for Rehabilitation of Brain Injury (CfH), Danish School of Education (DPU) at AU, DEFACTUM, Department of Sociology and Social Work at AAU, Danish Building Research Institute (SBI) at AAU, Assistive Technology Data Denmark (HMI) and Metropolitan University College.

Situation in Finland

The University of Helsinki has a professor for disability studies at the university's Faculty of Political Science. The professorship was made possible through donations and lasts 5 years from August 2013.¹²

In the 2014 - 2015 academic year, a study programme in disability research was started with 5 courses (5 ECTS), 25 credits in total. It will continue for the 2015 - 2016 academic year.

The titles are Introduction to Disability Research, Disability in a Global Context, Disability and Finnish Society, and Disability Research's theoretical and ethical questions. In spring 2014 Disability was also added to a course in English Literature.

There is a national research network.¹³ Research is conducted at a number of disability organisations/associations, such as: Inclusion Finland FDUV already has research as one of its basic tasks. They employ full-time researchers that work only with disability research. Several of the researchers are part of the Finnish network for disability research and NNDR.¹⁴

Research is also being conducted by the National Association Trøskeln¹⁵. The Abilis Foundation¹⁶ conducts research/employs researchers. This is, however, done with project funds or other external research funds, including from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who orders investigations.

Situation in Iceland

Iceland has a vibrant and strong disability studies and disability research community. In 2004 a graduate programme in Disability Studies was established at the University of Iceland offering Diploma

¹¹ <http://www.nndr.dk/>

¹² http://www.helsinki.fi/socialpolicy/about/disability_studies.html

¹³ <http://www.vammaistutkimus.fi/index.php?pinc=8>

¹⁴ <http://www.kehitysvammaliitto.fi/pa-svenska/forsta-sidan/> in English
<http://www.kehitysvammaliitto.fi/in-english/research/>

¹⁵ <http://www.kynnys.fi/kynnys/english.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.abilis.fi/>

(30 ECTS), MA and PhD programmes¹⁷. Prior to that individual disability study courses had been offered within Social Sciences. In 2006 the Centre for Disability Studies was established in Iceland. The Centre has a wide-ranging national and international collaboration with scholars, universities and research centres in a number of countries. The Centre also works with advocacy groups, disabled people organisations, policy makers and professionals in the field of disability. A number of scholars are affiliated with the Centre including three professors in Disability Studies, an assistant professor in Anthropology, Post Doc researchers and PhD students. The research is interdisciplinary and focuses on a range of areas including culture, history, society, human rights, gender, childhood, families, employment and more. Emphasis is on intersectionality, interdisciplinary and participatory approaches. The Centre for Disability Studies is located within the School of Social Sciences at the University of Iceland. Additionally, the School of Education has a Research Centre in Social Education¹⁸ which focuses on disability research, focusing largely in the area of intellectual disability, with emphasis on participatory research, research on self-determination and professional practice of Social Educators.

At the University of Akureyri, School of Health Sciences, there is a research group in the Faculty of Occupational Therapy which has focused on disability research¹⁹.

There is good collaboration and connections between these three research communities in Iceland and there is an Icelandic Network on Disability Research.²⁰

Situation in Norway

The Norwegian Network on Disability Research (NNDR) is a national network for disability research.

Norway has a number of larger research communities and good communication between these. There is a national network in the field.²¹

In the SFI report, the following environments are defined: The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) disability studies, Uni Rokkasenteret, University of Bergen, the Work Research Institute (AFI), Norwegian Social Research (NOVA), FAFO, NAKU, Sør-Trøndelag University College, Nordland Research Institute, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, Bergen University College (HiB), the R&D Group at Lillehammer University College, Faculty of Social Sciences,

¹⁷ <http://fotlunarfraedi.hi.is/fotlunarfraedi>

¹⁸ http://www.hi.is/frettir/rannsoknarstofa_i_throskathjalfafraedum_stofnud

¹⁹ <http://english.unak.is/health-sciences/faculty-of-occupational-therapy>

²⁰ Traustadóttir, R., Sigurjónsdóttir, H.B. & Egilson, S. Th. (2013). Disability Studies in Iceland: Past, Present and future. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 15:sup1, 55-70, DOI: 10.1080/15017419.2013.800726. available at: file:///C:/Users/Notandi/Documents/Greinar%202016/SJDR_Disability%20Studies_Research%20in%20Iceland.pdf

²¹ <https://nondr.wordpress.com/>

University of Nordland and the Faculty of Health Sciences, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA). Since the report was published NTNU has merged with Sør-Trøndelag University College and NAKU. Subsequent to NTNU merging, its research environment has become the largest single community in Norway.

Situation in Sweden

In Sweden there is a national network of researchers in the field of disability.²² Research is conducted at universities, university colleges and R&D organisations in the county. The field is a strategic priority for the research council and funder organisation Forte.

Disability research is multi-faceted and included in a number of academic fields. The research community is often organised as a network or centre, such as the Swedish Institute for Disability Research, SIDR.²³

In the SFI report, the following environments are defined: Department of Social Work, Stockholm University, Department of Special Education, Stockholm University, CERTEC, Lund University, Wigforssgruppen at Halmstad University, Disability, health and social work at University of Gothenburg, Disability and Rehabilitation at Uppsala University, Centre for Disability Research at Umeå University, Swedish Institute for Disability Research (IHV), Disability Research at Malmö University, University West in Trollhättan and Education and Special Education at Gothenburg University.

Situation in the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland

There is no current disability research in Faroe Islands, Greenland or Åland. Students in this field go to Denmark, the UK, Sweden, Finland, Norway and elsewhere.

Collaboration networks and other activities

SFI has also defined relevant collaboration networks and other activities in the field: The rehabilitation forum, Forsa Norden and in Denmark the Nordic Network on Disability Research (NNDR), Network N-CORP at Umeå University in Sweden, the National network for disability research in Sweden, HAREC – Centre for Disability and Rehabilitation Research, Centre for Disability Research at Uppsala University, Disability Research in the West and the Academic Network of Expertise on Disability, ANED²⁴.

²² <http://www.snhf.se/>

²³ www.ihv.se

²⁴ <http://www.disability-europe.net/>

Official Nordic cooperation on education and research

A description of how the official Nordic government collaboration on education and research is organised follows here.

The Nordic Council of Ministers is the official organisation for collaboration in the Nordic countries and has been around since 1971. Denmark, Finland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Åland are parties to the cooperation which started with parliamentary cooperation and the Nordic Council being founded in 1952, the Nordic cooperation agreement which was signed in Helsinki in 1962 and the Nordic Council of Ministers founded in 1971.

There is a Council of Ministers for general Nordic cooperation, MR-SAM, working on behalf of the prime ministers. There are a further ten ministerial councils, various policy areas and sectors. For every ministerial council there is a Committee of Senior Officials from each country's elected ministry. The Committee of Senior Officials discuss relevant issues in their field and propose decisions for the ministerial councils. In the sectors there may also be institutions and other types of collaboration bodies that supply the Committee of Senior Officials and others with a Nordic knowledge base and more. Activities of the ministerial councils are administered by a secretariat located in Copenhagen with 120 employees.

The Nordic Council is the parliamentary cooperation. There Nordic Council has 87 MPs from the whole of the Nordic region, split into 5 committees, election committee and presiding committee. The secretariat is shared with the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The Nordic Council of Ministers for education and research policy, MR-U, manages a number of institutions and collaborations. The matters and appointments of the area are administered by the Department of Education and Welfare at the secretariat in Copenhagen.

Nordic benefits arise when the cooperation:

- gives significant added value compared to what the same activities would give if they were implemented nationally
- manifests and develops Nordic solidarity
- strengthens competitive advantage and competence
- supports Nordic influence internationally

Nordforsk

Nordforsk is a platform for joint Nordic research. This type of cooperation on research has been around since 1990. First through NorFA, the Nordic Research Education Academy 1990 - 2005, Nordic Research and Innovation 2003, and NordForsk since 2005.

NordForsk is there to help create a critical mass for research in countries with small populations. The Nordic countries often have similar needs and challenges and through cooperation problems can be solved and resources gathered. The work is structured on national efforts in the form of both knowledge and funds from national research councils. NordForsk facilitates bringing researchers and society closer to each other. The objective is to promote Nordic cooperation and contribute to Nordic benefits.

For a project to seek research funding from NordForsk co-funding from at least three Nordic countries is a requirement. The institute arranges calls for proposals by international peer review.

NordForsk's current programme for health and welfare 2014 - 2018 has the following goals:

- To stimulate Nordic research cooperation on health and welfare with focus on Nordic added value
- To improve health and welfare in the Nordic region
- To find solutions for societal and public health challenges through high quality research
- To analyse policy issues in the Nordic countries that are relevant to health and welfare research and propose solutions to support Nordic cooperation.

More information: nordforsk.org

Nordplus

Nordplus is an organisation for cooperation on mobility in the educational sector in the Nordic region. The work is managed and funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers. All Nordic countries, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland and the Baltic countries are included in the cooperation.

Nordplus has three programmes: Nordplus Higher Education, Nordplus Junior and Nordplus Adult. Apart from these, there is Nordplus Horizontal and Nordplus Nordic Languages

The total annual budget is approximately EUR 9 million, with EUR 4 million to Higher Education.

The programme supports various types of activities, both individual mobility and project and network activities.

In the Nordplus Higher Education programme, activities financed include mobility (teachers and students), projects such as intensive training courses, joint educational programmes and development projects as well as networking, meetings, seminars, short visits, dissemination and language training.

Two ways of using Nordplus funding to support disability work and to promote human rights can include extra support for individual students that have special needs and also to support projects within these topics. Individual participants: mostly support for student's mobility. Projects on the topic can in of the forms listed above regardless of subject area.

More information: nordplusonline.org

Nordic Master's programme

The Nordic Council of Ministers has special funds to support Nordic Master's programmes according to a special concept. It is a requirement that at least 3 universities or university colleges are involved in the collaboration.

It is possible to seek funds for the implementation of programmes that must lead to a degree. Covers all subject areas. Grants are most often given as lump sums and can also be used for participants with special needs.

More information: nordicmaster.org

Erasmus +

Erasmus + is an EU funded programme to promote student mobility. One of the most important goals of the programme is inclusiveness. Possibilities for additional support for participants with special needs (individual mobility, participants in projects=.

The programme also works with strategic partnerships, supports many different types of activities (development of training courses, virtual mobility, etc.) and stakeholders other than just educational institutions may participate, both public and private. Inclusiveness, disability and human rights are the subject areas that can be supported.

More information: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_sv

Official Nordic cooperation on disability

Below is a description of how Nordic inter-governmental cooperation on disability is organised and how the subject of disability studies is addressed.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' disability council, the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability has been around since 2013 and plays a consultative role to the entire official inter-governmental cooperation. Half the disability council comprises government-appointed experts and the other half are representatives of disability organisations. The council can receive requests and assignments from the Council of Ministers and its presidency, however, both the countries and individual members may take on initiatives that the council can pursue based on interests and needs.

The Nordic Council of Ministers Action Plan for Co-operation on Disability is for the period 2015 - 2017, and has these focus areas: Human rights, Diversity and Freedom of Movement

In May 2015, the members of the Nordic Council for Co-operation on Disability met with the Board of the Nordic Network for Disability Research (NNDR) in conjunction with the NNDR2015 conference in Bergen. The aim was to learn about each other and discuss possible common interests and potential future cooperation.

Researchers on the NNDR Board represented the five Nordic countries. The council members represented the entire Nordic region, including

the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. The researchers described the state of disability research in each country. Thereafter, topics and ideas for future cooperation were discussed. There was mutual interest in cooperation and it was decided to keep in contact.

Subsequent to the meeting the disability council set up a task group to prepare a proposal for other members on how to proceed with the subject. Members of the task group comprising council chairman, Inge Storgaard Bonfils (Metropolitan University College), Pirkko Mahlamäki (the Finnish disability forum, Vammaisfoorumi ry) and Ola Balke (the Swedish Agency for Participation) met in Helsinki on 15 June. The Nordic Disability Council endorsed the task group's proposal.

The disability council also gathered knowledge on user participation in disability research during autumn 2015. This work is currently still in progress.

More information: nordicwelfare.org/Om-oss/Funktionshinderradet

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