Universitas Borealis:
Existing Institutions and their Integration

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Being now in the heart of the lands of the Sami people it would have been particularly interesting to consider educational and scientific contacts or, shall we say, potential contacts with Sami communities east of the border. Unfortunately, I have nothing to say about such connections, nor of common research interests among people who have similar cultural and linguistic foundations. I have only noted a remark made in a previous conference on the North Calotte (Nordkalotten) that a special chair, an empty chair, should be designated for future observers and participants from the Kola peninsula and Sami regions further east. I presume we have such a chair here, perhaps several chairs, to be occupied in future conferences.

But now, allow me to introduce the concept of the »immaterial institution«, a strange, but potentially very useful concept. Among the more lively institutions for research and higher education in Norway is one whose image has been that of being »immaterial«. At the time when this institution was being planned and established it seemed very important to maintain this particular feature, and I would assume that the relatively great success in terms of educational and research objectives somehow must be due to the very material fact of being defined at least at the outset as being immaterial. What I have in mind, is Norway's Advanced School of Fisheries, a decentralized institution, having a Secretariat located in Tromsø, its own board of directors, and research and teaching activities shared between Tromsø, Bergen and Trondheim according to a division of labor which, as far as I know, has functioned quite well. Having now reached a certain maturity the immaterial institution is in the process of being materialized which means that it will be organized in Tromsø and presumably as an identifiable yet integrated part of the University of Tromsø.

I would like to conceive of Universitas Borealis as an immaterial institution having a high rate of activity and producing, indeed, very concrete, visible and, for that matter, material results.

Responding to a proposal to establish a Research Council of the North the University of Oulo some fifteen years ago perhaps wisely pointed to the difficulty which might arise if one university or research institution were to be made responsible for the coordination of research. One would, it was said, encounter problems of prestige, for example. Such problems are always hard to tackle, and instead the establishment of some kind of ethereal infrastructure would seem desirable.

Call it an immaterial institution. I would much rather see an immaterial institution having material products than a material institution having immaterial products, or perhaps no products at all.

The Commission for Cooperation

Oulo’s response was prompted by a resolution adopted by the student group participating in the North Calotte Conference in 1968. Oulo went on to propose that a Commission for Cooperation between the Universities and Colleges of the North be established. This organization was born in 1971, having the University of Oulo, the University of Umeå, the University of Tromsø, and the Technical University of Luleå as members. Later the Lapland college of Rovaniemi, the College of Forestry of Umeå, the Regional Colleges of Finnmark and Nordland provinces in Norway, plus * Rector, University of Bergen.
the College of Engineering at Narvik have been added as members. The University of Iceland holds associate membership, while there has been some contact with the University of Alberta in Canada, and in particular, a contact with the Boreal Institute of Northern Studies in Alberta about setting up an organized scheme of cooperation.

The Commission meets once a year, having from one to three representatives from each institution.

The tasks of the Commission may be summarized as follows:

1. Exchanging information about the member institutions' activities, problems, and planning.
2. Promoting direct cooperation between researchers in the North, within all fields.
3. Facilitating cooperation in the fields of university teaching.

The Commission has promoted research cooperation by coordinating research proposals and applying for support from the Nordic Council of Ministers. Approximately 40 different projects have been supported, but the grants have been small, generally less than NOK 10,000 (NOK: Norwegian Kroner) per program, and the total until now is approximately one quarter million (NOK). In 1982 the member institutions agreed to contribute annually about NOK 100,000 each out of their own budgets, to be distributed on the basis of applications for support of projects.

The cooperation in the fields of teaching has had a somewhat lower priority. However, one of the last grants from the Nordic Council, in the amount of NOK 150,000, was applied toward the development of a special catalogue describing the curriculum requirements of the various institutions and pointing to possibilities of combinations across the national boundaries and between institutions.

This catalogue draws the attention of biology students in Umeå to the possibility of studying marine biology in Tromsø, or it shows that geology students in Tromsø may study applied geophysics in Luleå, or that Finnish speaking students from Northern Norway or Northern Sweden may study architecture in Uleåborg/Oulo rather than taking that education in Trondheim, Stockholm, Gothenburg or Lund. And so forth. Also, the catalogue tells where to write for which information, it gives an overview of cost of living, stipends, insurance, etc.

I find, by regarding the minutes of the meetings of the Commission, that it plays an important role in putting on the agenda and actively pursuing a great number of items which are of vital importance to higher education and research in the northern regions of the Nordic countries. For example, the minutes of the June meeting of last year shows

- that information about new programs and other developments in the individual institutions was exchanged on a wide range of topics
- that the Commission functions as sponsor of specialized conferences and symposia (one of which — dealing with aquaculture in Subarctic Areas — has just been completed in Umeå)
- that a symposium to be arranged in Norway in 1986 will deal with the history and cultural development in the North
- that efforts to influence the profile as well as the amount of support from the Nordic Ministerial Council is a matter of considerable concern and effort.

On this matter the Council, though its Secretariat in Copenhagen, in a recent document gives a review of the history of the Commission’s work. The initial period