NORDBIB'S FINAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP : IMPRESSIONS FROM THE ORGANISER

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Background

In the Spring of 2011, an international conference to end the Nordbib programme felt like a wonderful idea.

With the knowledge that the Nordbib programme, though evaluated very favourably by external consultants, would not continue in its present form, the secretariat was looking for a way to not only celebrate the programme, but also to point to the future of Open Access as a fitting end to it; a swan song for Nordbib as it was known colloquially at the time. The idea of an international conference was inspired by the present director of NordForsk, Gunilla Gustafsson, who made a presentation in the Spring of 2011 in Copenhagen at a big meeting about the EU's 8th Framework Programme "Horizon 2020." The topic in question was the Swedish 2009 presidency of the EU Council and how the organisers were conceptualising its final days. "Don't make another boring conference" was the advise given by many, but a conference was exactly what the organisers aimed for, albeit not a boring one. In order to give the Lund conference, as it would be known later, an appropriate impact, it would end with a declaration. The subject of the conference was the future of European research, and the rest is history. The Lund declaration has meant that the concept of Grand Challenges has become a fixed feature of European research policy discourse.

There were many possible topics for a Nordbib international conference. However, Open Access has become a much more well-known topic in the years since Nordbib started back in 2006, and Open Access now has its own established meetings and workshops. The mounting challenges of data is a newer concept – especially where it overlaps with traditional Open Access issues. Since a new round of Nordbib would have meant including data in the scope of the programme, it seemed very appropriate to focus on open digital research as a whole. Furthermore, Denmark would be EU council presidents in the spring of 2012, and it was known that a recommendation from the European Commission to the member states in the area of the digitisation of our common cultural heritage would be issued later in 2011. Therefore, it also seemed very fitting to try and look at cultural data and research data together –

especially since the Nordbib board is made up of mostly the Nordic national libraries which are heavily involved with the digitisation of cultural heritage.

The venue was set for the Danish Royal Library's Black Diamond, Copenhagen, June 11-13 2012, and the secretariat hired as scientific consultant Alfred Heller, Ph.D., of the Technical University of Denmark who has been a pioneer in research data management issues in Denmark, and we put together an advisory board with representatives from both the research data field as well as the cultural data field. The final form and theme of the conference was conceptualised during autumn and winter of 2011. The conference not only got its somewhat unwieldy name "Structural Frameworks for Open, Digital Research : Strategy, Policy and Infrastructure," the aim of which was to keep our options open, but it was also decided to let the three focus areas, also known as work packages, of the Nordbib programme itself be reflected in the focus areas of the conference.

The work packages of Nordbib are Policy & Awareness, Content & Accessibility and Infrastructure & Interoperability, and for the conference they were translated into the three segments "Strategy, Policy and Funding," "Infrastructure and Research Input & Output," and "Organisations and collaboration." It was decided that the themes did not necessarily lend themselves well to a classical conference with presentations of various papers. Also, we wanted first and foremost to bring people together and let them talk to each other. The emerging field of data management spans so many different domains that simply having some sort of overview is difficult enough. We came up with the metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle where every participant would bring one piece of the giant puzzle, and the conference itself would be the time and place for assembling it together. This also meant that we would focus more on the presentation of the participants themselves through two five-minute-madness sessions and through four workshops and through social events.

One of the reasons why the Nordbib programme has been well evaluated by external consultants is that the programme has provided a platform for Nordic collaboration extending well beyond the programme's own lifetime. We thought that if we could create some awareness about the Nordbib model of collaboration

and help forge some new strategic bonds across organisations and institutions, this indeed would be a worthy goal. In order to set a more operational goal to guide all the discussion, we let ourselves be inspired by the Lund conference, and we decided to bring all the debate from the various talks and workshops and presentations to a head in the final session where we would agree in assembly on a set of recommendations to the European Commission.

The event

In the spring of 2012, an international conference to end the Nordbib programme felt like quite a horrible idea.

Personally, I have a lot more respect for conference organisers now! We had problems with everything. The conference would open after lunch on Monday June 11 to allow someone to utilise the morning slot for some sort of pre-event, but there were no takers really. The conference software we were using, was highly sophisticated, but it could not handle payments, and we agreed that we could not let entrance be free, because then 500 people sign up, but only 75 actually turn up. We had nine speakers and luckily only one of them cancelled, but we also had four workshop managers and three of them cancelled in the final week leading up to the event. Google maps even conspired against us. Not only would it somehow translate the Royal Library into Madeira Airport in Portugal when links were emailed, it would also show the Black Diamond at a different location in Copenhagen. Then we found out that another conference with very much the same subject matter had later been arranged to take place 200 m. from the Black Diamond on the same days with much the same speakers. There were about 13 different conferences in Copenhagen on the final days of the Danish presidency on everything from counter-terrorism to waste disposal and the tourism season was beginning. We started to receive emails that there were no hotel rooms anywhere in the city. Then there were no available flights either. We had to book a room for a late registered speaker in Malmö. We also learned that the cultural data segment of people was hard to get hold of and they generally have their own conferences and meetings.

Luckily, there were things that went well too. We were lucky to book our main introductory speakers very early. Prof. dr. Tony Hey of Microsoft Research was ourr first scoop. Adviser to vice-director of the European Commission, dr. Carl-Christian Buhr and CEO of Europeana, dr. Jill Cousins accepted our invitation very quickly as well. We were fortunate to secure dr. Andrew Treloar of the Australian National Data Service and prof. dr. Martin Mueller of Northwestern University as well, and we were lucky to

get prof. dr. Sverker Holmgren of Stockholm University, who is involved in basically everything that has to do with eScience in the Nordic region, as well as prof. dr. Søren Brunak of the Technical University of Denmark, who is doing quite stunning research in the field of genomics by re-using already available data. Dr. Octavio Quintana-Trias of the general directorate for research of the European Commission accepted as well and finally dr. Stephan Winkler-Nees of the German Research Foundation filled in admirably for dr. Liz Lyon, director of UKOLN, who had to cancel.

The OpenAIRE programme decided to accept our offer of using our venue Monday morning June 11 for their summer meeting on coupling data with publications, and at the same time the Knowledge Exchange programme's expert group on research data decided to also accept our offer to make a workshop on economic models for data preservation. Then the DataCite programme decided to place their summer meeting in Copenhagen as well on Thursday June 14. Suddenly we had a lot of synergy working for us, and the social events for the two evenings were shaping up nicely. We had a canal tour arranged for Monday evening, and Tuesday the conference dinner would take place on the old military island fort, Flakfortet, in the middle of Øresund.

Evaluation

Amazingly, once the conference started, everything went according to plan without a single accident.

We had 100 people for the main conference and about double that number for all the four events put together. The programme with its switching between speakers, workshops and short presentations from the participants themselves worked very well. Discussions were very lively both at and outside the official programme, and lots of ideas and new ways of approaching challenges were bounced around.

Interestingly, though there were four workshops with four distinct subjects, they all tended to converge on the same sets of problems:

- How do we get researchers to want to hand over their data and describe it sufficiently?
- How can we describe data and make potential beneficiaries aware of its existence - especially across academic domains?
- How can we ensure that we are not all trying to re-invent the wheel on our own?

The issues were debated in the context of both technical, social and strategic considerations.

The programme, all the main speeches, the two video messages from European commissioners Neelie Kroes – commissioner for the Digital Agenda for Europe – and Máire Georghegan-Quinn – commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science – as well as all the five-minue-madness presentations are available on the conference web site: conference.nordbib.net

The letter to the European Commission got somewhat sniped by the major recommendation from the Commission to the member states on scientific information in the digital age that was published the month after. We will await the member states' answers and send the letter once Nordbib turns out the last light in the secretariat at the end of 2012.

The secretariat received a lot of praise for the spirit of the conference at the event itself and we have received a lot of emails afterwards with the same notions. But of course, it is quite easy to become a popular host, when you have outstanding catering and long coffee breaks. All in all, we believe the Nordbib programme got its well-deserved swan song, and in the end, an international conference to end the Nordbib programme was a pretty good idea after all!

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