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Nordic Net Centre (NNC) and Nordic WebIndex: Two Nordic Information and Network-Technology Projects

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Background

The Nordic countries (Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden) have a long tradition of cooperation on a political level. The main forum for this is the Nordic Council of Ministers and institutions related to it. One of the institutions is NORDINFO - The Nordic Council for Scientific Information, with the main purpose to promote Nordic cooperation within the field of scientific information and documentation, principally in connection with the research library system. NORDINFO's main activity is to promote and support development projects. In 1994 NORDINFO made a strategic decision, to mark the importance of the development and use of new electronic and networked technologies in the Nordic libraries. Instead of sponsoring individual projects, NORDINFO decided to sponsor three centres of excellence in the general area of electronic libraries and information. Nordic Net Centre (NNC) is one of these centres, with the aim to support and inspire the use of network technology for information seeking and dissemination in libraries and information centres as well as in universities, government and industry. The other centres are NDLC, Nordic Digital Library Centre, situated at the National Library of Norway in Mo i Rana, and NordEP, Nordic Centre of Excellence for Electronic Publishing, situated at VTT, the Technical Research Centre of Finland, in Espoo. NDLC focus its work on digital handling of audio-visual information, photos, radio and television programmes, film, video, music and audio. NordEP's aim is to increase and promote knowledge on electronic publishing, with focus on journal publishing, in Nordic libraries, information services and publishers. These centres shall function as resource centres, within their areas of competence, to the whole Nordic library community. The three centres have a common framework NordElib, Nordic Electronic Library Projects, for collaboration and common information activities.

Resources and organization

NNC is financially supported by NORDINFO for a three-year period. During this period the funding is gradually reduced in anticipation of a growth of the centre's own income, which, eventually shall finance the whole operation. The project was announced active on April 1 1995. Actors are the Technical Knowledge Center and Library of Denmark (DTV) in Lyngby and Lund University Library (LUB) in Lund, Sweden, with DTV taking the major part. Both libraries were among the Nordic pioneers in the library application of internet tools, such as Gopher, WWW and WAIS and had already experience and competence within the field. They had collaborated before, holding a NORDINFO workshop on Networked Information Services and Libraries in 1993. The centre is physically located in Lyngby at DTV which also houses the management and secretariat, but the centre is in many ways a virtual centre being a network of Nordic experts.

Aims

In the presentation of the project in 1995 NNC's aims are:

- to support and inspire the establishment and use of networked information services in research libraries and other information centres.
- to facilitate increased cooperation between the library and networking sectors
- to promote Nordic development projects in the area.

To achieve these aims, and at the same time become self-financed, NNC works with a mixture of free and fee-based services.

Activities

Free services

NNC has set up a WWW-based information structure. It is maintained by both participating libraries, some pages being placed on a server in Lund and some on a server in Lyngby. The language chosen for the information is English, as the most widely understood language between the Nordic countries. Here the visitor finds a presentation of the centre and the different services it offers. Some of the services are directly available.

NNC runs a public **electronic conference** on behalf of all three NORDINFO-sponsored centres. It is an instrument of information from the projects and a forum for discussion on networked information services. In March 1996 the number of subscribers were ca 150, with participants from all the Nordic countries. The target group is, in a broad sense, web-masters in Nordic libraries, but the list is free and unmoderated and anyone interested can join. An archive of the messages to the list is provided through a WWW interface. The NordELIB-conference has so far mostly functioned as an outlet of information from NNC and, to a much lesser extent, from the other centres. The aim to make it a forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion has not succeeded so far. The majority of subscribers receives the information, passes it on to other, national, lists on occasion, but does not contribute themselves.

The NNC **Internet guide** is an attempt to gather Internet resources useful to libraries developing Internet/WWW services. On April 15 1996 the guide contained 143 links, mostly to resource collections. It is divided into three areas, Internet and WWW - help and training resources, How-To guides and Software for Networked information.

Internet and WWW - help and training resources contains introductions to the Internet. This is a collection of general introductions, and selected sources for different subjects (e.g. email, file formats, ftp, html, news groups, search engines), a bibliography, a collection of internet glossaries, official internet documents and standards and a collection of training resources. Software for Networked information contains links to software collections, and Usenet newsgroups that discuss www, gopher, wais. The "HowTo"-guides page is a collection of tutorials, descriptions of "how-we-did-it", e.g. Finding Internet resources in the subject area of Library and Information Science/Librarianship, Selection & Maintenance of Electronic Resources, How to Edit Netscape for Public Access Computers, How To Web Design.

NNC also maintains a www-page with links to **Nordic resources**. Among these are collections of Nordic libraries with information servers, Nordic library-related e-mail conferences and projects in the networked information subject area. The collection of Nordic library servers aims to be complete on all types of libraries and library-related organizations. It also offers a robot-generated searchable index of the pages pointed to and a list of the 99 most cited links on these pages. The project page concentrates on nordic and european projects, with the aim to be complete on Nordic projects.

Fee-based services

NNC also offers a number of fee-based services. To support these a demo and support-centre have been established at DTV in Lyngby. Here facilities for group demos and hands-on training are available for **courses** and pre-arranged demos. One of the main activities during the first half of 1995 was the planning, development and marketing of a NNC standard 3-day Internet course for libraries and information centres. It was decided to launch the pilot course in Denmark, rather than Sweden, as there seemed to be some degree of market saturation there. As it turned out it was not possible to get enough participants to go through with the course. From the other Nordic countries came a similar message, the need for general Internet courses had peaked and/or was taken care of by various national organizations and companies. The lesson of this experience is that NNC should not try to compete with general Internet courses. Instead NNC will concentrate on developing courses on new issues and focused on specific library needs.

Consultancy services are offered to organizations and libraries. NNC analyse their needs and options and helps in the basic setup of servers and services, or the development of more advanced features. Consultancy can be packaged with customized training programmes to facilitate local staff to run and maintain the services. NNC also designs and implements web-sites for public and private organizations. The area of consultancy and web-site implementation is where NNC have had most success. Commissions include, among others, an initial analysis with the scope of pointing out needs of the five libraries of the Mid-Swedish University in connection with their ambition to establish an electronic library at the university. In spring 1996 NNC is giving advice on the technical needs for each library, to 15 public library systems in Skåne, the southernmost province in Sweden, that are getting Internet access. Development and maintenance of web-sites have taken NNC outside the library community, with customers like PUF - Department for EU research funding at The Danish Ministry of Research, Nordic Transport Research (a corporation to promote transport research) and the Öresundsconsortium, who are building a bridge between Malmö (Sweden) and Copenhagen (Denmark) across Öresund. Web-site development have so far been the main source of income.

Every year NNC will arrange a **workshop** aimed at mutual information exchange and at facilitating inter-nordic project collaboration. This years workshop will discuss libraries as publishers, electronic journals, nordic projects and metadata. NNC also assists the Nordic network organizations in carrying out the NORDUNET conference with a programme track aimed at library network users. That way the goal of bringing the network and library communities closer together is served.

The Nordic WebIndex

One of NNC's aims is to promote Nordic development projects, and the first to originate is the Nordic WebIndex (NWI), a subproject within NNC. It aims to create a "national catalogue" of WWW-information in the Nordic countries. This will be achieved by setting up a service that continuously and automatically searches and indexes all available WWW-information in the Nordic countries. Every country will have a national service point with a server that gathers information from that country, using technology developed at LUB and DTV in an earlier project. The information gathered at each service point constitutes the "national catalogue" for each country. All "national catalogues" can be copied to all the other servers. This means that all catalogues can be locally available in all the Nordic countries. The distribution of data-gathering and server-functions minimizes the load on networks and maximizes the availability for the users. There will be a uniform WWW user-interface to all catalogues and a possibility to make a simultaneous search in one or more of the catalogues. Advantages of creating NWI are that it makes it possible to get a correct handling of national characters and also make them searchable. This is not possible in all search-engines available today (e.g. Lycos, Web Crawler et. al.). It brings a unified way to search among all nordic WWW-information and it would become a part of the public Nordic service within the networked information technology area.

Some spin-off effects have already emerged from this project. Through the NWI it is possible to offer link-checks and statistics to any server indexed. It is also possible to create searchable subsets, by subject or by server(s). The Swedish national library is interested in using the Swedish catalogue in a project aiming at archiving "snap-shots" of the web. The project started in January 1996 and a first service is expected to be working in the summer of 1996. More information about NWI and an experimental service is found at URL: <http://nwi.ub2.lu.se/>

The Future

NNC is now in the first stages of developing a new course targeted at the librarian/non-technician responsible for the library's Internet presence. The aim of the course will be to give insight into what possibilities there are in creating networked services, and what they demand of technology and economy. It will be distance education, using web-pages, listservs and e-mail as educational tools. A minor market survey in Norway and Sweden indicates an interest for this kind of course, and if it succeeds it will be an important step towards establishing NNC in the Nordic library community.

If NNC will become the regional competence centre it is intended to be depends on a number of factors, some I will briefly mention here. A vital factor is if NNC can keep the human competence, that in the first place was one of the major reasons why LUB and DTV got the project. Much of the credibility and interest NNC can attract in its first years depends upon the participation of these key-persons with established reputations in the Nordic library community. A political factor is the question of the future of Nordic cooperation. Three of the five Nordic countries have now joined the European Union and there are tendencies towards a decreasing interest in Nordic cooperation from these. This trend is also seen in the library world, with Swedish,

Danish and Finnish libraries increasingly taking part in collaborative projects within the EU framework, rather than within a Nordic.

Finally, the advantages of a centralistic approach, which the creation of these centres of excellence are, will diminish as the technology matures and competence grows in all libraries. It is probably a sound idea to build competence centres in a situation like today`s, with rapid changes in information technologies and information structures. That is, if the centres find effective ways to disseminate the information they gather and create.

More information from NNC and the electronic information services are found at URL: <http://www.nnc.dk/>