

THE NORWEGIAN-US FRIENDSHIP – HOW I SEE ITS FUTURE

Kenneth Sydhagen, January 2008

If you walk up to a random teenager in Oslo, and say “What do you associate with New York?”, the answer would most likely be “Sex and the City!”. If you went on with “What about Los Angeles?” They would quickly respond “The O.C.!”. You can probably go on listing every large city in the US, and they will associate it with one of their favorite TV shows.

The cultural influence from the US became significant in the years after WWII. The Marshall-plan provided European countries like Norway financial help. A total \$372 million were given to Norway alone, and as a result, Norwegians opened their eyes to the American popular culture that has been dominating Europe for decades. This can easily be confirmed by taking a look at the TV Guide. Today at the channel called TV3, all 26 TV shows are produced in the US, and in another channel, TV Norge, 21 out of 25 TV shows are American.

The close ties between our two nations go further back. Throughout the history over 800 000 Norwegians left their home country in search of a better life in the US. Most of them settled in the Midwest, in the area called the “Bread Basket” where they could find vast farmland. Reliable sources say that there are between four to five million Americans with Norwegian ancestry. This has given us a close relationship in a historical perspective.

According to the Norwegian government, the US is our most significant ally. Most of the policy towards the US is bound, and will not be changed. One of the worries expressed through the government’s pages concerning our relationship, is the dramatic decrease of Norwegian students taking their undergraduate or graduate degree in the US. In two years, the number of Norwegian students in the US has decreased with 541 students, and the negative trend continues. According to the USA Study Guide, education in the US gives you the real life experience and the global focus that contributes to make the higher education in the US one of the best throughout the world. Perhaps the US is not as exotic anymore, resulting in students seeking other nations? Nevertheless, the US is a multicultural and complex society that offers international students unique experiences.

The New York Times published an article on the 20. November last year about the announcement Norway made about shutting down the career consulate in Minneapolis in 2008. The Upper Midwest is known as the home to more descendants of Norwegian immigrants than any other region in the US. “Norway is near and dear to us, but now we feel that they have not considered us quite so important,” Ms Shirley Hansen said. She and many other Americans with Norwegian ancestry were distressed by the announcement, fearing that it might be a shift in Norway’s priorities. - Does not the country of their ancestors put significance in their existence? I believe that in our rapidly changing society, it is important to preserve and not break off good relationships.

The US Ambassador to Norway Benson K. Whitney has urged the importance of consecutively defining the relationship we want between our two nations. In our fast pacing world, I could not agree more. Constant changes and new alliances make it more important than ever to hold on to traditions and good partnerships like the one between the US and Norway.

The leaders of tomorrow, the bright students of today – what do they really want for our two nations? I firmly believe that the close ties will remain, mainly because of our strong cultural connection. In Scandinavia, we tend to have a perspective that limits your options, and focuses on the obstacles instead of seeing the possibilities. It is today known as the Jante Law, invented by the author Aksel Sandemose in his 1933 novel called *A Fugitive Crosses his Tracks*. The Jante Law describes the Scandinavian attitude, denying the individual to feel special and pleased about himself. I believe that is why the American Dream with equality and endless possibilities seem appealing to Norwegians. Who would not love to be a part of a nation built on progress and personal growth?

The platform we share through our cultures make an excellent foundation for extended partnership through education, science, business and art. Our close ties have remained for decades, and with few signs of the opposite, I hope that our friendship will continue with the strength and ambitions we have seen in the past.

SOURCES

<http://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marshallplanen>

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/20/us/20minneapolis.html?_r=1&adxnnl=1&oref=slogin&adxnnlx=1201111568-Bz3n/ZRaIKNiVXALT6tygg

<http://www.aftenposten.no/fakta/innsikt/article1514673.ece>

<http://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/2006/05/24/467099.html>

<http://www.arkivverket.no/bergen/publikasjoner/artiklar/emigrasjon/overblikk.html>

http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/dok/rapporter_planer/Planer/2001/NorskUSA-strategi/3.html?id=448572

http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/dok/rapporter_planer/Planer/2001/NorskUSA-strategi/4.html?id=448573

http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/dok/rapporter_planer/Planer/2001/NorskUSA-strategi/4.html?id=448573

<http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/politikk/article1040393.ece>

<http://www.norway.org/norwayinus/caucus/norwaycaucus.htm>

<http://www.norway-un.org/NorwegianStatements/OtherStatements/USA+og+Norge.htm>
http://www.lanekassen.no/templates/Page_6810.aspx

<http://www.usastudyguide.com/benefits.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jante_Law

Verdens Gang (VG), Number 22, Wednesday 23. Jan 2008, The TV Guide