Initiatives
Women experts exist!
Danish KVINFO leads the way

For many years, KVINFO – The Danish Centre for Information on Gender, Equality and Diversity – has been working strategically to increase the visibility of women experts through its online database. The expert database at kvinfo.dk is free to access and can be used by anyone. In connection with the Irish presidency of the EU in 2013, KVINFO’s Expert Database was designated ‘Good Practice’ on the grounds that it relentlessly promotes the existence of women experts, despite the media’s persistent underrepresentation of women experts in its news coverage.

In the case of Denmark, recent studies show that only 2 out of every 10 experts featured on television are women. Age is a further factor when it comes to women and men appearing in the media. In the 19 to 34 year age bracket, men and women are represented almost equally; however, when it comes to those over 35, men dominate significantly – with a particularly stark discrepancy in the 50-64 year age bracket where men dominate with 77.4 per cent representation (Rikke Andreasen forthcoming). One of the challenges facing women experts is that younger women are given more media representation than older women, even though most experts are older than 35 due to the simple fact that it takes a certain number of years to actually become an expert. The figures from Denmark are particularly striking not only because Danish women are among the most well educated women in the world, but also because the figures have remained almost unchanged for the last 38 years. So salient are the figures that on March 8, 2014 the Danish journal *Journalisten* was published brandishing the title ‘Hold kæft og vær smuk’, which translates as ‘shut up and be beautiful!’ (‘Hold kæft og vær smuk’ is also the title of one of Danish literature’s most prominent feminist works written by Vita Andersen in 1978.)
At the moment of writing, KVINFO’s Expert Database contains the profiles of 1,174 women experts from all areas of Danish society – from Danish prime minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt and other politicians, to scientists, researchers, businesswomen and women from the field of culture. And with only a few clicks, journalists, conference organisers, employers – or management boards or executive committees who lack women members – can freely use the database.

Today, most new experts usually make the first move and actively request to be registered, but a designated editor also keeps an eye open for suitable candidates. In fact, we are witnessing a new trend where Danish women actually now want to become more visible. Ten years ago, 2 out of 3 women approached did not want to be registered in KVINFO’s Expert Database. Today, this figure stands at just 1 in 3 – and the number of requests from women wanting to be registered in the database has never been greater. Once they have logged on to the database with their personal password, experts can then enter their personal profile into an easily accessible matrix, which can be updated or changed at a later date. By doing so, a user takes personal ownership of her profile. An editor will approve the profile content and add any relevant subject headings to optimise database searches before an expert’s information becomes publically accessible.

The history of the database began in the 1980s when Danish state public service broadcaster Danmarks Radio contacted KVINFO as they were finding it difficult to find relevant sources to use in their programmes. In 1990, the initiative progressed to fundraising, enabling a journalist to be hired three years later who could co-ordinate programmes. In 1990, the initiative progressed to fundraising, enabling a journalist to be hired three years later who could co-ordinate programmes. In 1990, the initiative progressed to fundraising, enabling a journalist to be hired three years later who could co-ordinate programmes. In 1990, the initiative progressed to fundraising, enabling a journalist to be hired three years later who could co-ordinate programmes. In 1990, the initiative progressed to fundraising, enabling a journalist to be hired three years later who could co-ordinate programmes. In 1990, the initiative progressed to fundraising, enabling a journalist to be hired three years later who could co-ordinate programmes. In 1990, the initiative progressed to fundraising, enabling a journalist to be hired three years later who could co-ordinate programmes. In 1990, the initiative progressed to fundraising, enabling a journalist to be hired three years later who could co-ordinate programmes. In 1990, the initiative progressed to fundraising, enabling a journalist to be hired three years later who could co-ordinate programmes.

KVINFO and its regional partners have established expert databases in Jordan, Palestine, Egypt and Lebanon – all using KVINFO’s Expert Database as a template. The first of these databases was launched in 1995 under the name Kvinder på linjen [women on the line]. It was launched as a service aimed at Danish journalists who already had access to Infomedia (a general database of Danish printed media), enabling them to freely search for women sources.

That same year we realised the universal availability of the Internet, so it was a natural choice for KVINFO to make use of it and share the database with a wider audience. Consequently, the database was launched online in 1997 at kvinfo.dk and underwent a number of improvements over the following years. In 2004, the database was renamed KVINFO’s Expert Database and has since introduced the inclusion of photographs of prominent and well-known experts, further enhancing its standing.

KVINFO has repeatedly built upon its original experiences gained from the database. When, for example, KVINFO began its partnership project in the Middle East and North Africa in 2006, under the Danish Foreign Ministry’s Arab Initiative programme, it quickly became apparent for our partners that an expert database like the KVINFO model could be useful in their region.

Learning from the success of our earlier experience, KVINFO has brought in external partners who are charged with setting up the new databases. As leading players in the region, these partners bring along their already-established networks and knowledge of the country’s women experts, and they are also trusted and stable. Under the title Who is She followed by the individual country name, KVINFO and its regional partners have established expert databases in Jordan, Palestine, Egypt and Lebanon – all using KVINFO’s Expert Database as a template. The first of these databases was launched in 2010.

With its partners, KVINFO can provide IT tools and competencies, and can also facilitate knowledge sharing and exchange of experiences. Setting up and maintaining an expert database is a time- and resource-consuming task – not least in respect to constantly marketing the database in relevant contexts. All these relationship of trust with women experts in Danish society. This relationship of trust meant that women experts could feel secure in publicising their CVs and in being available when approached by the media or other interested parties. Simultaneously, the partnership with Politiken gave the database a form of journalistic ‘seal of approval’, encouraging journalists to actually use it. The expert database was initially launched in 1995 under the name Kvinder på linjen [women on the line]. It was launched as a service aimed at Danish journalists who already had access to Infomedia (a general database of Danish printed media), enabling them to freely search for women sources.
Things are easier to do for an organisation that is already known and respected and has an existing network and knowledge of local society. For an organisation that is less well-known, approaching women experts and establishing sufficient trust for them to publish their CVs online can be more difficult. However, the pay-off for those organisations that possess an expert database is that they will gain greater national prominence and connect with a more valuable network of influential women, whose skills the organisation can draw on in a wide range of other contexts.

At the same time, expert databases increase the visibility of women experts. This, in particular, is a key element in countries undergoing transition — as is the case for many countries in the Middle East and North Africa — where women, despite their tremendous involvement in the recent democratic upheavals, have been left on the sidelines when it comes to the drafting up of new regional constitutions.

Over the years, the ongoing development of the expert database has been a particular area of focus. One result of this emphasis on development has been the launching of KVINFO’s expert network meetings in 2010. Currently, KVINFO’s expert database is transitioning to mobile platforms, allowing us to be where our users are.

Because even though social media has gained great influence, the issue of women’s representation is far from solved — neither there nor in traditional media.

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**Tips for success**

KVINFO has the following tips for establishing a successful expert database:

- In building up a database, it is important to work with people from the media, so as to ensure that it contains credible consent and is convenient for journalists to use.
- If they are to be widely used, databases must be easy to find and use, be professionally designed and be free of charge.
- Have an editor who undertakes research, encourages new experts and builds relationships of trust with them.
- Put an easy search tool on the website and have technicians who can provide immediate help when something goes wrong.
- Use an easy back-end content management system, where the experts can write their own profile in specific categories.
- Nominate a specific person who confirms and proofreads the data the experts have written, so that the database is trustworthy.
- Promote the expert database to the media, to the experts and to the universities where journalists are trained.
- Place some representative pictures of some famous experts on the website. It increases the project’s credibility and produces a ‘snowball’ effect, with more experts asking to join the database.
- Remember that women in the database are really happy to meet and network with each other.

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Visual communication in higher education

We have never before in human history been subjected to such a tremendous torrent of images as we are today. Digitalisation has revolutionised our handling of images and film and people now communicate on a daily basis through visual media. But whilst we are immersed in visual representations, which largely form our self-image and our perceptions of others – we seldom encounter critical discussions on images in the public sphere, and there is cause to address this widespread visual illiteracy.

The assertion that our culture is visual is a truism, but at the same time few people seem to reflect on the impact images have on our lives and the importance of which images are disseminated in society. For the visual communicators of our age, one crucial question is who has the power and resources to disseminate images of what and who. The importance of Master’s students in visual communications critically examining what values are communicated through images cannot be overemphasised.

As far back as 1977, in *On Photography*, Susan Sontag asserted that the role of visual representation in a modern society is more significant to our perception of the world than the physical reality. Today, we live to an even greater extent through what we see and perceive on screens, and much of what we encounter visually we will never see or encounter in real life. The visual representation is thereby often crucial to how we perceive ourselves and the world around us.

In 2011, the UN body UNESCO presented an international framework for teachers and teacher education; Media and Information Literacy (MIL). Among other things, UNESCO writes that ‘Knowledge of media and information is required for democratic discourse and social participation.’ Media and information
literacy, as defined today by the UNESCO, includes a number of literacies such as television literacy, computer literacy, Internet literacy, games literacy, film literacy and library literacy. But at present, image literacy is missing from the list. One of our tasks at the visual communication programme at Konstfack is to highlight the importance of image literacy in particular, both to our own students and in relation to society as a whole.

Part of Konstfack’s efforts to reach a wider audience than its own students is Imageschool (published by Professor Joanna Rubin Dranger) which via short, image-intensive articles published online educates the public about stereotypical images of minorities. The lecture ‘Visual Power’, which has been given in a number of different contexts, both nationally and internationally, looks at historical and contemporary examples of how images and certain visual vocabulary have been used to oppress and dehumanise.

Master’s programme in visual communication with a norm-creative focus

Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm is the largest art and design institute in Sweden with almost 1000 students. Konstfack’s programme in visual communication has had different names and points of focus over the years, but has in all stages been regarded as a programme of high quality and a highly attractive prospect for students from the Nordic countries, Europe, Asia, North and South America and Africa. Over the past 30 years, the focus of the programme has been graphic design and illustration in their broadest senses, which for example includes animation. The students of visual communication at Konstfack have an investigative and multidisciplinary approach from which they borrow freely from other fields, both artistic and academic.

The Master’s programme does not primarily prepare students for the existing market, but rather sees the role of the university as an important and necessary outpost for critical and norm-challenging perspectives of visual communication. We find this especially relevant in a world formed by commercial interests in an increasingly one-dimensional manner.

In 2013, extensive work was conducted to overhaul the Master’s programmes at the school. The new Master’s Programme in Visual Communication that was launched in autumn 2014, is most probably the world’s first and only Master’s programme in visual communication with a norm-creative focus. The information text for the programme reads:

Unique to the programme is the use of a norm-creative methodology to explore how identity, norms and boundary lines are shaped and reproduced through visual culture. Tutorials, seminars, feedback, workshops and lectures mean that the programme offers a creative setting for cooperation where the focus of both the discussions and activities will be your own work.

Back in autumn 2013 we had a trial run of a norm-creative introduction course for our Master’s students, and in the evaluations we found that the students had a positive view of both content and methods.

Ways of seeing

The first part of the introduction course is named after John Berger’s TV series Ways of Seeing (BBC 1972). The series is about how we can view visual culture based on social perspectives in which we need to ask ourselves what we see, who is communicating, who we are as viewers and what this means in a larger social context. The questions we investigate in the course include: What values are produced and consumed through the creation of images? What effect does this have on an individual and on a structural level?

The course provides a broad introduction to visual communication as a force of change in society, and gives the students room to articulate, develop and reflect on their existing work in relation to an ongoing dialogue on what is conducive to the norm and what challenges it.

The modules and exercises that make up the course include:

1 The term norm creativity has its origins in norm criticism. Whilst norm criticism is primarily about highlighting norms and their privileges, norm creativity aims to find other ways of thinking and methods of developing our actions. See also Normkritik (norm-creative) Rebecca Vintagen/Settings (ed.) (Premiss 2014). In the scope of the programme, this means that we focus on the students’ work and processes to investigate how work and processes can be developed and expanded against the background of a norm-critical analysis.
Petterson illustrated the long-term strategy for as a non-Roma person. ing Ltd invested in the same opportunities with OLIKA Publishing Ltd in the creation of a series of three picture books for children from a Roma perspective. The former Swedish Government produced a long-term strategy for Roma inclusion: A Roma person turning 20 in 2032 shall have the same opportunities as a non-Roma person. This inclusion initiative, which covers five pilot municipalities, is based in Linköping, together with OLIKA Publishing Ltd invested in the creation of a series of three picture books for children from a Roma perspective. The founders of the publishing company OLlKA, Marie Tomicic and Karin Salomon, wrote stories in a contemporary setting and Marcus Gunnar Petterson illustrated the stories.

- **Feedback sessions.** In these sessions we train the students’ ability to both give and take criticism and to take the initiative to organise occasions for critique that is not necessarily led by teachers. We provide the students with tools for methodical reflection, whereby a norm-critical perspective is central.

- **Everybody’s glossary.** In this exercise, we open up for discussion on the terms that are central to the main subject area; terms which are often taken for granted and thereby seldom discussed in a more nuanced manner or based on several perspectives and contexts. The purpose of the exercise is to highlight a conceptual apparatus that the students can develop individually during the course of their education. The exercise is mainly focusing on normative concepts such as quality, taste, neutrality etc.

- **Reference library.** In this exercise, we map out our references: the sources we go to for general inspiration as well as to gather specific information. Afterwards, we carry out a norm-critical analysis of all our references and look at how we can expand our directory and bridge the blind spots that inadvertently limit our practice.

- **Sketching gender.** This is an exercise that highlights how we stage gender using body language. The exercise emphasises understanding of feminine and masculine coding whilst also revealing how shockingly uniform our impressions often are. Sketching gender impressions is a concrete platform for critical discussion on the established image of what is considered masculine and feminine, how the image is internalised in our own body language, but above all how this affects our image creation and what we can do differently.

Traditionally, course literature has not been obligatory to any great extent in the artistic study programmes. At the same time, theoretical teaching in programmes such as design and art history has tended to be divided into separate blocks, with the result that it has been unclear for the students as to how theory and practice interact. In the new Master’s programme, we set higher requirements on obligatory literature whilst constantly juxtaposing practical exercises or interpretive examples with the knowledge students acquire through theory. The theory that we offer at Master’s level is also designed to provide our students with an understanding of normative and colonial mechanisms formed the writing of history within our subjects.

Our primary reason for offering a programme in visual communication with norm-critical perspectives is to provide the students with the tools and knowledge required to develop approaches that do not (inadvertently) result in exclusion. We see it as an opportunity for the students to expand their practice in a way that will make a difference, both for themselves and for the world surrounding us in our daily lives.

In our work with the new Master’s programme, we had a pedagogical motto: ‘Teach what you need to learn.’ The motto pinpoints a point of departure that we believe is important for the new Master’s programme — the classroom should be a place that generates new knowledge for everyone in the room; students and teachers alike. Knowledge that we would be unable to generate independently. As teachers, our work is thus not only to know what knowledge we should pass on to the students; we also need to create situations or contexts that facilitate joint knowledge development. The programme therefore focuses on providing the students with the tools for action and reflection, rather than simply mediating knowledge of the area that we ourselves are familiar and comfortable with. We are thus convinced that we now offer a programme where all those involved will contribute to expand the field of visual communication.
Two years ago a couple of my colleagues at Reform – resource centre for men – felt that we had to take action.

- We found it unacceptable that some people in certain corners of the internet seek support for the assumption that all Muslim men are warriors and Muslim women are birth machines that threaten our Nordic welfare states.
- We found the attitudes and national fame of Eivind Berge from Bergen disturbing. After the terrorist attacks at Utøya and against the government on 22nd of July 2011, he expressed sympathies with Anders Behring Breivik and described rape as a legitimate taxation of women’s sexual capital.
- We strongly objected to the harassment and threats of rape and murder that feminists and women receive online.

No woman or man should be a target of such hatred, online or elsewhere. We believed that mostly men harass, and the prevention work should therefore target boys and men. It is men who are the problem and the solution.

This was the starting point of our work. However, our organisation wanted (1) more knowledge on antifeminism, (2) more attention focused on the problem, and (3) more cooperation between experts in relevant fields from all Nordic countries.

We knew that a lot of knowledge exists concerning antifeminism and that different experts and authorities deal with these problems in their daily work. However, they rarely share their experiences. Examples include:

- The police and people who work to prevent recruitment to
extremist milieus who seldom talk to gender and masculinity researchers.

- Organisations like Reform, which works with men who are marginalised and vulnerable to rhetoric that blames women for their troubles.
- Holocaust researchers with in-debt knowledge on how Jewish men have been dehumanised and portrayed as having an uncontrollable sexuality that is a threat to the nation’s women.
- Feminist activists who experience harassment and threats on a daily basis.
- Anti-racists who encounter attitudes that are both racist and against women’s basic rights.
- The equality and anti-discrimination ombudsmen, journalists and experts on hateful speech towards politicians.

With funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers, we invited these people to a two-day expert seminar. Was it successful? Yes indeed.

We cooperated. Twenty-five different experts from all over the Nordic countries participated. The atmosphere was great, there was an interesting exchange of knowledge and I think everybody broadened their horizons.

We achieved knowledge. The presentations and the outcome of the seminar were published in a report that includes ten recommendations on how to counter threats based on gender. As such, the report serves as a knowledge base on hate speech.

The expert seminar and the recommendations also got media attention from newspapers in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Some of the news reports were positive and quite a lot was negative. We had a negative review from a leading Norwegian commentator that was unfortunately echoed in Scandinavian press, and we did not manage to correct the media image. We were accused of wanting to ban criticism of feminism, and to ban men’s movements, or more precisely masculinist groups or ‘jämställdister’ as they are called in Sweden. This is not the case, and we explicitly stated that it is the threats and harassments that ought to be illegal, both online and in other public spheres. Reform had no intention of banning attitudes or political statements. We believe it should be perfectly legal for example to believe and argue that gender equality has gone too far, even if we strongly disagree.

We are glad that the report reached a big audience, and a good debate would also have been appreciated. Unfortunately, I think the misleading image of our work prevented the government and NGOs in Norway from following up on the work, as it could potentially raise negative attention.

Of course we know that the field of gender equality is not a popularity contest. However, looking back I think we could have done better had our publication been more pedagogical, for instance had it more clearly portrayed and exemplified the costs of antisexist threats and actions.

The ten recommendations from the experts are still valid. They are useful for countering hate speech and mapping the situation in each of the Nordic countries. Let me briefly highlight three of them:

Recommendation no. 2: Low-threshold services for reporting threats and harassment must be established.

While offensive, threats and harassment may not always provide grounds for legal persecution. Many targets of antifeminist harassment are also reluctant to approach the police about
their experiences. We recommend that the Nordic governments establish low threshold services for reporting antifeminist and extremist threats and harassment. This service should be accessible to women and men who are targets of antifeminist threats and harassments for participating in the public debate and for advocating for feminism or gender equality. The goal of the service must be to give social support, lower the thresholds for reporting antifeminism, and signal that threats and harassment are unacceptable and not to be taken personally.

Bringing attention to online harassment and threats targeting women often makes a difference. It is therefore problematic that a lot of women and girls still have nowhere to report violations. A recent Norwegian survey shows that 14 per cent of all youth have been harassed and received threats online, yet only 2 per cent of this group had reported the incidents to the police. The survey was published and commissioned by the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten*. One possibility would be for such a service to be organised by the national gender and anti-discrimination ombudsmen. Interestingly, the Swedish government has recently assigned the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society to act against threats and harassments online and to apply a gender equality perspective in this work. The agency has also been assigned to distribute information about where young targets can go for help and assistance.

Recommendation no. 7: *The gender and anti-discrimination ombudsperson should address antifeminism.*

The Norwegian ombudsperson has now increased her focus on hate speech, including hateful speech against women, and challenges the government to develop a national strategy to combat hateful speech. At the Nordic forum in Malmö in June 2014, the anti-discrimination offices from Norway, Denmark and Iceland arranged a side event about hateful speech against women.

Lastly, I want to highlight recommendation no. 8: *The media have a special responsibility.*

There are both positive and negative examples of how the media has facilitated a public debate with antifeminist actors. The media must ensure that it has the competence to meet extreme actors without legitimising them or their opinions. Editors of online comments’ fields have a special responsibility to ensure that their users are not made targets of threats and harassment, and that xenophobic and antifeminist sentiments are not fuelled or legitimised.

An inspiring new example from spring 2014 is the Swedish commercial television channel TV3’s *Trolljägarna* [the troll hunters]. The programme documents the horror of hateful speech and harassment online, confronts online haters and shows how those targeted could be supported.
The Author

Maria Jacobson is a columnist and author based in Gothenburg, Sweden. Jacobson specialises in investigating inequality and human rights. She has a master’s degree in science studies and has completed numerous reports and books.

The Media Watch Group Allt är Möjligt (AäM) [Everything is Possible] is one of few non-profit media monitors in the Nordic countries. The group started in 1992, three years before the UN Beijing Platform for Action came around. The Beijing Platform for Action was adopted in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and identifies Women and Media as one of the critical areas of concern. For the AäM Media Watch Group, it has served as an institutional framework to lean on:

Encourage the establishment of media watch groups that can monitor the media and consult with the media to ensure that women’s needs and concerns are properly reflected. (242 a)

As one of the founders in 1992, I will briefly describe how Allt är Möjligt has developed over the years. It all started as a reaction to stereotypical images of women in the media. Our other focus was – and still is – the systematic underrepresentation of women in news media.

Direct action

Our first idea in 1992 was direct action. We put our own slogans over pictures of women in underwear on advertising billboards of a major Swedish fashion corporation – a sort of adbusting.

When we started our activities, we saw many different reactions. Some were enthusiastic, some outspokenly negative. For instance, we met ridicule and accusations of being aggressive, militant man-haters. From the feminist movement and the media establishment, we initially did not receive much attention.

Twenty-two years of media activism

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Studies
We left action behind as we felt that our message was poorly understood. The group moved on to form a feminist base group that needed knowledge and studied for example women’s rights, media power, violence against women, gender and body politics. At this time there was not a lot of research on gender stereotyping in Swedish media. Another founder and member, Maria Edström, and I wrote a research paper at the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, University of Gothenburg, surveying all persons depicted in the largest media outlets during one day. The study, titled *Massmediernas enfaldiga typer, Kvinnor och män i mediebruset* [Images limited. Gender in the media buzz] served as a good source of information when we later wrote our handbook, and it was subsequently repeated in 2004 and 2014.

Activism again
This period of studying and discussions was a liberating time for us. After that, we felt ready to take action again. We started to talk back to the media with protest letters, fax actions, action postcards and later e-mails. We manifested ourselves at the Gothenburg Book Fair in 1994 and received a lot of attention from media and the public. One of our members, Anna Broman Norrby, found a successful way to criticise by dramatising texts from women’s magazines and making stand up activism using irony and humour. At this point we received the first requests for lectures.

Documenting, networking and consolidation
After some years we felt that we had gained a lot of knowledge and experience. Media activism started to reach the agenda in different forums in Sweden, and we had established good contacts with media critics internationally. Yet there was an obvious lack of tools to work with media literacy, so we decided to write a book. It consists of two parts: first, our view on media content and impact, and second, strategies for media activists. The book, *Allt är Möjligt, En handbok i mediakritik* [Everything is possible. A handbook in media criticism], was published in 1998. In 2004 the book was updated and a manual for teachers was published online.

Project, GMMP, in 2000 – an international survey on how women and men are represented and portrayed in the dominating news media in countries on all continents. Since then, AäM has been the national coordinator for the survey, which is repeated every five years. The global report is called *Who Makes the News* and the Swedish name is *Räkna med kvinnor!* [Count on women!].

Since 1995 we have educated and lectured quite extensively, both nationally and internationally, for being a small non-profit group. In recent years, the media establishment has become more interested in gender equality in journalistic content and we have monitored and educated some newspapers, weekly magazines and TV stations. Also other publishers, like municipalities and non-profit organisations, have requested our analysis as a tool to develop a more diverse content on the web and other outlets.

Politics
As we see it, the media often affirms and recreates gender inequality. Re-creating a gender power hierarchy in everyday media and mass culture is counterproductive to the Swedish political consensus on gender equality and a non-sexist environment.

The Swedish media system is based on self-regulation and the constitution strongly stresses that no interference should be made with the freedom of expression. Yet the constitution also prohibits discrimination based on gender. From time to time there have been political demands for legislation prohibiting sexist advertising, but so far no concrete progress has been made.

Future important activities for AäM include coordinating the Swedish part of the Global Media Monitoring Project 2015 and of course networking and participating in the discussion with larger women’s organisations.
The Association of Business Women in Iceland (FKA) has launched a 4-year project on increased presence of women in media.

Statement: Media should accept its responsibility as a power in society and be a reflection of the community emphasising women in particular. The purpose is to increase women’s presence in media. The aim is to bring together media owners, editors, journalists, government and academia for discussion and cooperation. The discussion on balanced and diversified media should be generalised. Part of this is to show that diversity in media may attract a larger audience, which in turn may increase the revenues.

The project was launched in 2013 with a meeting with Icelandic editors. The discussion was about what the problem is, why it is a problem and how can it be changed.

What’s the problem? Credit Info’s analysis of FKA data on the presence of women in broadcast media 2005-2013 showed that women’s visibility was 24 per cent in 2005 and 30 per cent in 2013. In a society with a high rate of women both in the work force and in higher education, this is unacceptable.

Why is it a problem? According to journalists and editors time and accessibility are the main concerns. Tight time frames make it hard to find sources outside their networks. Some claim that it’s difficult to get women for interviews etc.

How can this be changed? FKA has a database on its website, where over 300 business leaders are registered. FKA finds women specialists in all main news fields and helps them become specialists for the media. FKA organises seminars and workshops and works with media company owners and managers to make change within the media. The project is still in its early stages, but all involved parties agree that change is needed.
Equalisters –
crowdsourcing for diversity

Rättviseföreningen/Equalisters is a network of almost 70,000 social media users that aims to create a more democratic society by fighting the self-perpetuating cycle of underrepresentation. The organization posts various types of want ads in social media, and the network of 70,000 people contribute with tips. Equalisters’ mission is to challenge the homogenous culture among many stakeholders in society by offering constellations of diverse and talented people to counter their problems of lack of diversity.

The perceptions in society of who is suited to do what continue to limit people’s opportunities. These perceptions and presumptions are each day projected to us through media and events where people are employed to represent certain groups in society. This is based on the perception that there are no other suitable representatives or that it is too hard to find other persons that break the norm, with the required competence. Competence risks being excluded due to stereotypical ideas of gender, origin or physical abilities. Equalisters wants to spread knowledge and improve the visibility of competence. There are alternatives to what is represented today and Equalisters believes that society can gain from questioning stereotypes and bring forward a more diverse representation.

Equalisters has helped more than 500 organizations and individuals find competence that otherwise would have risked being excluded due to stereotypical ideas about gender, origin or physical abilities. The network helps projects, companies and editorial offices looking for people with a particular competence. The organisation puts out a call through an ad on social media where they gather tips from followers of people who have the requested expertise or competence but do not fit the norm. Further, the tips are compiled in lists and published on Equalisters’ website. The benefit is twofold:
1) the tips help the person who requested the competence initially and 2) the gathered tips are archived as lists in order to help people find this expertise or competence at a later time.

There are many examples of when the call-outs have led to successful connections and results. The football club IFK Holmsund reached out to Equalisters for help when they felt the need for a change in the organisation’s internal culture. They were searching for a new coach and wanted to break the on-going trend of having a male coach for a male team. One of the tips received when asking Equalisters’ followers for help was Vanessa Mångsén. She was later appointed IFK Holmsund’s new coach. As one can see, it does not have to be that hard to break the embedded structures.

Lina Thomsgård founded Equalisters in 2010 by starting a Facebook page. What kick-started the idea was when Lina attended a Swedish media gala where almost all nominees and award winners were male. Lina offered the producers help finding more gender equal representatives. Later the same evening she was at a popular nightclub in Stockholm and questioned why the DJs were all men week after week and suggested delivering a list of 100 female DJs. This became the first call on Facebook, and Lina received 120 recommendations of female DJs and ended up over-delivering when fulfilling the promise of making a list. After seeing how many tips could actually be gathered, she understood the opportunity of initiating something larger and founded Equalisters.

Equalisters is a non-profit organisation with several sources of income that are intended to support the calls, which are free and the core of the business. The income stems from governmental aid, donations, company sponsors, services rendered and sales of products through a web shop. The services rendered include lectures and workshops and provision of space for job ads on the website. The funders of the different projects include the Swedish Postcode Foundation (Postkodstiftelsen), the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket) and the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (Ungdomsstyrelsen). It is also possible for private sponsors to donate money. Furthermore, we have great volunteers and interns who contribute with their strength and knowledge.

In June 2014 Equalisters received funding from the Swedish administrative authority for innovation, Vinnova, for realising and performing a new project. Equalisters aims to develop a web-based counting device intended to help shed light on the represented norm in media. This tool will enable compilation of comparable statistics to identify the existing norms in the news industry. Vinnova provides financial support to projects aiming to increase and develop knowledge and methods that create innovations in the area of gender and diversity. The project will result in a yearly report that clearly shows the representation of different people in Swedish news. By exposing the existing norms, Equalisters aims to challenge the stereotypes and perspectives held in society.
The Authors

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Queering Sápmi – indigenous stories beyond the norm

The start of it.

A LOT NEEDED TO BE DONE, BUT NOTHING WAS HAPPENING

In the spring of 2011, few had heard of, or thought of, Saami LGBTQ people. A Google search for ‘homosexual Saami’ came up with word plays and links to racist blogs. In Norway there was LHS – a network for lesbian and gay Saami, which had initiated a research report (Fafo 2009:26). The report concluded that there was no research and that lesbian and gay Saami were rendered invisible by both the Saami community as well as the four nations. And this was not because Sápmi was more or less homophobic than other communities, but because it was a vulnerable society, and as a result of colonisation and discrimination had become a tougher society, more dependent on cohesion. A lot pointed to the fact that things needed to be done, but very little was happening, both within LGBTQ organisations and the Saami communities. Many still wondered if non-heterosexual Saami actually existed. ‘In that case, surely I would have met one?’

THE SCATHING CRITICISM: WHO ARE WE?

But who were we to be in charge of a Saami queer project? Or was it a queer Saami project? Or neither of the two? We realised early on that there was a big problem: we were not Saami. No matter how queer we were, as Swedes we had more social power than the Saami. We, who used to say, ‘Men and straight people must understand that they are privileged, and should take responsibility’. For the first time in our lives, we, Sara and Elfrida, had the power and were the ‘perpetrators’. The colonial heritage and the upper hand was in our bodies and we risked, despite good intentions, to recreate a variety...
of bad structures. Now we were the ones that had to recognise our privileges and our responsibility. To say the least, this was a very useful lesson for us. We needed help!

**THE HEROES SÁMINUORRA AND NOEREH!**

Everything came together when two Saami youth organisations, one in Sweden and the other in Norway, decided to take us under their wings: Sáminuorra and Noereh. They had discovered that by not working from a LGBTQ perspective, they were excluding young Saami people. They wanted to improve, learn from us and at the same time, help us to get better. Through them, we gained competence. We attended annual meetings and brain-stormed about how to go about doing this project.

Sáminuorra took the big decision to own the project. Noereh, in turn, chose to become our partner in order to get even better at looking at issues from a LGBTQ perspective, and to question norms. Together with private individuals as well as Sáminuorra and Noereh, we initiated a process where, over and over again, the queer and the Saami were on the agenda, renegotiated and united.

To assist us in this project, we also set up several reference groups: one queer, one Saami, one queer Saami as well as a research group and an artistic group. Their difficult but friendly questions have made us as sharp as we could have ever hoped to be.

**Things fall into place.**

**WHY LIFE STORIES?**

The basis of the whole project became stories. We had previously worked with individual life stories as themes to create social change, Elfrida with words and Sara with photos. You can always question and oppose arguments and opinions, you can never question people’s memories of their lives. Of course, you can question whether every detail is true, but not the fact that it is a memory.

And our memories shape how we grow, who we are and, thus, who we can become. In personal stories, society’s norms and matters-of-facts become clear. What we take for granted on a societal level may become patently absurd and possible to challenge when linked to an individual person’s life. Especially when it comes to a person who does not fit into the mould.
These experiences give us a new perspective on our society and on our own lives. Life stories also have a huge impact as they are being told. Once you have been taken seriously, listened to and respected, it is easier to tell your story again, to new people and in new forums. One queer Saami discussion can be the start of many others.

Meeting the participants.

OPEN ARMS
How we treat each other affects what happens during an encounter. In Queering Sápmi, we have placed great emphasis on establishing an attitude towards each other and towards everyone we meet, where we are confirmatory and heartfelt and where nothing that is said or done is ‘wrong’ in relation to us. We call it open arms. Our starting point has been that we need to feel secure to be able to talk about what is unspoken, and to think thoughts that we have not had access to before.

A broader perspective.

INTERPRETATIONS AND STAGINGS OF THE PROJECT LEADERS
Each participant we met was unique, but there were several themes that kept recurring in all the stories. The silence they had encountered. The fears – sometimes unnecessarily and sometimes for a good reason. Another common thread was the greatness of belonging to two non-normative groups, the Saami and the queer, and how this can open doors in life. We knew early on that we both thought it was important to show Elfrida’s and Sara’s interpretations, and to broaden our perspective from the individual to a more general level, to make it easier see the whole picture. We chose to convert these interpretations and main threads into staged photographs. These pictures are taken with extras from Sáminuorra’s and Noereh’s members, queers, friends and people who happened to be passing by during the shoot. This means that for a few minutes, these extras have had a queer Saami experience. By giving these stories a voice, even more people will carry the experience. These queer Saami memories become new memories in other bodies.
The creation of great things is ongoing!

THE END OF THE PROJECT IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

Nearly three years later, a lot has changed from when we first started. Today, a search for ‘LGBTQ in Sápmi’ results in thousands of hits referring to Saami magazines, the Saami Parliament’s work with LGBTQ issues, national media, queer blogs, youth organizations, novels, and more. Several Saami politicians are now open with their queer identities. LGBTQ issues are monitored continuously by the Saami media. Many Saami people are open about their sexual orientation in social media. A queer Saami movement is emerging. Not all of the progress can be accredited to Queering Sápmi. Most of it is because some brave people have decided that they have as much right to show their true selves as straight people, Swedes, Finns, Norwegians and other people who constitute the norm. But we believe that the project has contributed to this change. We have raised the question, made it a relevant topic, encountered resistance and raised it again. Together with our participants and partners, we have merged a Saami identity with the queer one, and a queer identity with that of a Saami. The project has brought people together, encouraged them and praised them. Perhaps most importantly, we have taken Saami LGBTQ people seriously, listened to them and created a platform, where the loudest and clearest voices are theirs.

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