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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

MEETING OF EXPERTS TO PLAN A STUDY ON
SCANDINAVIAN CULTURES

Copenhagen, 22-26 September 1969

WORKING DOCUMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Resolution 3.321, adopted by the Unesco General Conference at its fifteenth session in October-November 1968, authorized the Director-General "to undertake a study of Scandinavian cultures". The work plan for this project states that "this programme will start in 1969-1970 with a regional meeting, followed by research on the sea and trade routes opened up by the Scandinavians, considered as channels of cultural extension and exchange".

II. PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

2. A study on Scandinavian cultures adds a new dimension to the Unesco European cultures programme, which started in 1963 with the Balkans and south east Europe, and is now gradually extending a series of activities, in greater depth, whose purpose is to investigate and show some of the less well-known aspects, past and present, of cultural Europe.

3. In addition to the geographical extension, the proposed Scandinavian study gives a new direction to the programme, concentrating on studies in depth and an interdisciplinary approach in which culture transcends its purely physical aspects and is seen to reflect historical realities, promoting the progress of society and mankind.

4. Rather than limit the study to the Scandinavian cultures in themselves, it would accordingly be better to see them in their relations with other cultures, and investigate the cultural exchanges which developed, thanks to the sea and land routes the Scandinavians have used over the centuries. But while the past is historically vital, it should not monopolize the study to the exclusion of the present-day aspects of the Scandinavian scene and its cultural values - two in particular: (1) architecture, town planning and housing; and (2) theatre and cinema.

III. AREAS FOR STUDY

5. The present Secretariat document has been prepared solely to facilitate the work of the meeting, since it is for the experts to make whatever suggestions and recommendations they deem most likely to help make the study to the

best advantage. It may, however, be useful to put forward some possible themes for discussion when they meet in Copenhagen.

6. Historically, the cultural rôle played by the Vikings in mediaeval Europe, would seem worth studying, particularly the relations between the Scandinavians and certain peoples in central and eastern Europe, tracing the growth of the relations, based originally on trading, that linked the Baltic to the Black Sea via Russian commercial and cultural centres.

7. A possible second topic: the far-flung expeditions of Scandinavian navigators towards the West and North America, examined in the light of the sagas, epics and legends and a whole traditional literature that existed orally before it was eventually written down.

8. Linguistic studies might concentrate on the Finno-Ugric languages, using the techniques and data of modern linguistics to trace links or common origins with other European or Asian peoples.

9. On the contemporary aspects of the study, a start might be made with two themes: first, contemporary Scandinavian architecture, town planning and housing, together with the equally contemporary question of the environment or human habitat. Second, the place of Scandinavian theatre and cinema today, not only in Scandinavia, but throughout the world. The originality shown in both during the last twenty or thirty years in Denmark and Sweden deserves a closer look and a more detailed assessment of their creative influence, past and present, on the theatre, the cinema and the performing arts throughout the world.

IV. EXECUTION

10. The aims in view are:

- (a) to study and describe Scandinavian cultures both in their historical context and as a living reality;
- (b) to make studies of certain aspects of priority interest, including history, literature, linguistics, architecture and the performing arts;
- (c) to make comparative studies at the same time of relations between Scandinavian and other cultures, particularly those of central and eastern Europe;
- (d) to investigate ways and means for making Scandinavian cultures better known throughout the world.

11. The meeting could also help Unesco to draw up a list of universities, institutes and experts in the various branches of Scandinavian cultures, with a view to enlisting their aid in carrying out the programme.

12. The co-operation of the National Commissions of the Member States involved is essential, and that of certain international non-governmental organizations concerned with the human sciences and with arts and literature.

V. CONCLUSIONS

13. The experts are invited first, to propose areas and disciplines in which they consider the study of Scandinavian cultures should be undertaken, including the themes deserving priority; and second, to indicate the methods they consider the most likely to facilitate the programme and subsequently develop it.
14. The experts are naturally quite free to suggest or recommend areas, disciplines and themes - history, literature, linguistics, architecture, theatre, cinema and so on - for priority consideration.
15. They are similarly free to suggest or recommend methods and media to expedite the project, and ensure a wider and better knowledge of traditional and present-day Scandinavian cultural values.
16. A brief report from the meeting should summarize the conclusions, suggestions and recommendations agreed upon by the experts.