

Gustav N. Kristensen: Born into a Dream: Academic reforms in the Baltic Countries

Recenze:

Gustav N. Kristensen. Born into a Dream. EuroFaculty and the Council of the Baltic Sea States, Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2010

After the fall of communism from 1989 to 1991, efforts remained to reunite Eastern and Western Europe, politically and economically, but also academically. One of the channels for this assistance was the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) composed by foreign ministers from Baltic Sea States. The CBSS was created 1992 at the initiative of former Danish foreign minister Uffe Ellemann-Jensen and his German colleague Hans Dietrich Genscher. The Council originally consisted of four Nordic countries, three Baltic countries and Germany, Russia and Poland. Iceland joined in 1995 and a number of other countries participating with observer status. EuroFaculty was created by the Council of Baltic Sea States, to promote academic reforms in the Baltic countries. Now a Dane, Gustav Kristensen, has written the story about how the EuroFaculty came about and what was achieved in the twelve years it existed, 1993-2005. The book is semi-autobiographical. Of the three directors who headed the EuroFaculty the author was director himself, 2001-2005.

The book is organized in four parts. The first part, "Changing Winds", describes the Baltic fight for regaining independence. The second part, "New Waves", describes the difficult start of the EuroFaculty when an educational institution was built up from scratch. The third part, "The Battles", recounts how tough the cooperation with the EU bureaucracy and 10 donor countries can be. The final part, "Search for Excellence", tells about how the EuroFaculty students moved up in the administrative system, and how local resistance against reforms ended.

EuroFaculty at the Universities of Tartu (Estonia), Riga (Latvia) and Vilnius (Lithuania), brought new life to universities in the Baltic countries. The management of EuroFaculty was based on two governing bodies: a Governing Board, which would take care of the overall administrative and budgetary conditions, and an Academic Board which would take care of the educational content.

Each semester thus worked approximately 20 foreign teachers mainly recruited from Germany, Britain and the Scandinavian countries. Each visiting lectures could count on five local assistants, in total, a teaching staff of about hundred people. The training was conducted in English supplemented with some courses in German. Meanwhile, the EuroFaculty contributed to the publication of educational material in national languages. In the period 2000–2004 sixteen books were published in Latvian, which thus was strengthened as an academic language.

I participated in a shorter period of eighteen months in the construction of a public administration degree at the University of Latvia with the EuroFaculty as my employer. My mission in Riga was to arrange and conduct training courses in cooperation with Latvian colleagues. This was in itself both challenging and engaging. In his book Gustav Kristensen has chosen to address the story from the management's perspective, both from his own time as director and that of his two predecessors, the Estonian-Canadian Toivo Miljan and the Norwegian Arild Sæther. All three directors had their background in university teaching and had a strong focus on strengthening the academic offerings in law, economics and public administration at the three main universities in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In practice, their main job to a large extent became to ensure the financial survival of the EuroFaculty from semester to semester. EuroFaculty was financed by direct contributions from each CBSS member countries. However, each country had its own perceptions about how 'its' aid should be calculated, paid, allocated and reported. Finland paid only for Finnish teachers in a single country, Estonia. Sweden concentrated on establishing their own institutions in law and economics in Latvia. This tendency to "bilateralisation" of the project was enhanced when more and more states were drawn into this spiral away from a true multinational cooperation. The irregular transfers led to an overall lower efficiency of the given resources. Gustav Kristensen shows in great detail how this administrative chaos caused problems for the implementation of university reforms in recipient countries. Long-term budgeting was made impossible due to the member states' constitutional financial year in combination with changing governments. Payments to the EuroFaculty came to a halt every time a national officer asked for a new audit report in addition to those which already existed. For the directors, it was a nerve-racking toil. Occasionally, for the director there was no money to pay salaried lecturers. Thus, EuroFaculty's story is an important case study of the challenges in international cooperation with participating donor countries that insist on keeping national control.

Still, Kristensen took the initiative to continue the EuroFaculty even after the mandate expired in 2005, and the efforts to reform education at the bachelor's and master's level had been completed. The time was now ripe to

pursue doctoral education, an area where the Baltic countries were still far behind the Nordic countries. The economic backlash and the heavy hand of bureaucracy, however, were too strong for the initiative to be realized. The strength of the book is that it tells the story of international cooperation in real life with real people. It is addressed to all who in practical life are involved in international cooperation or who aspire to be. A weakness could be the author's personal role in the process. However, the author keeps close to the EuroFaculty documents. Gustav Kristensen makes ample use of EuroFaculty's extensive archive to write a lively and engaged account of a case of academic entrepreneurship that has set clear traces on both sides of the Baltic Sea.

