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## PRME NORDIC CHAPTER

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### 15.1 Introduction

One could say that the concept of Sustainable Development was, if not invented, then at least popularized in the Nordics by Gro Harlem Brundtland. Brundtland's 1987 UN-Report "Our Common Future" argued that Sustainable Development had to incorporate social, environmental and economic components and has been a very important and powerful narrative throughout the world ever since. In the Nordics this understanding of sustainability has permeated the educational systems from preschool all the way into higher education and academic research. The Brundtland understanding of sustainability has been (at least before the popularization of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs) a central starting point for the discussion on sustainability in most contexts. An important aspect of the PRME Nordic Chapter has been a shared notion of the importance of self-reflexivity (c.f. Cunliffe, 2009) regarding the role of higher education, and particularly the role of Business and Economics education, where the

response to pressing sustainability challenges has arguably been slow (c.f. Rasche and Gilbert, 2015; Roscoe, 2020).

Even though there are important similarities within the Nordic countries (welfare states with universal access to healthcare and free education, for example) emphasis on sustainability differs between schools. Some schools emphasize “responsible management” based on strong research environments in related disciplines whereas other schools with strong research environments in other disciplines emphasize “sustainability” in more general terms. This somewhat different language simply acknowledges the diverse nature and the notion of both “responsible management” and “sustainability.” The introduction of the SDGs has somewhat shifted the focus from a more conceptual discussion to one more focused on delivering impact.

In this chapter, we first describe the creation of the PRME Nordic Chapter in its socioeconomic and sociocultural context, elaborate on the role the Chapter plays in higher business education, introduce theoretical and empirical angles to Nordic responsible management education and conclude with a critical reflexive view on the Chapter and its future.

## **15.2 The creation and pluralistic context(s) of the PRME Nordic Chapter**

The foundations for the successful formal establishment of the PRME Nordic Chapter in 2014 can be understood in the context of some of the values and norms shared across the Nordic region, including shared notions of responsibility and sustainability, and in the long relational histories between the individual schools. Within the Nordics, cooperation is often seen positively and building of trust between stakeholders is highly valued (c.f. Strand et al., 2015), which is mirrored in the PRME Nordic Chapter. The Chapter is deeply embedded in some common social, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and histories.

While the Nordic societies are not homogeneous, they can be characterized, in broad terms, by a strong role of the state and consequential regulation of everyday life, by a high level of trust between people and toward social systems, and by seeking consensus in decision-making, which includes an emphasis on equality/egality and is reflected in e.g., comparatively homogeneous income

distribution, tax-funded free education, but also reduced incentives for competition. The post-WWII time is characterized by Nordic governments offering public services such as health care, elderly care, and education, as part of leading and governing economic, social, and environmental responsibility. In the private sector, responsibility has historically been manifested through abiding to given social norms and regulations, including the provision of jobs and the payment of taxes. Sustainability and responsibility remained firmly in the domains of the political without strong involvement of firms (De Geer et al., 2009), thus also remaining present but not very explicit in the business school curriculum. Even though the last decades have witnessed a change in this allocation of responsibilities, by which companies are becoming increasingly conscious of their responsibility toward society, the characteristics of regulation, trust and consensus have had a strong impact on the requirements for management education in Nordic HEIs. The PRME Nordic Chapter is thus best understood in these historical legacies of trust and consensus, while situated in an environment where business and business schools are expected to both increasingly adopt and shape responsibility and sustainability.

Equally important as understanding the foundations for success and collaboration, however, is to understand that relational spaces for coming together in person to openly share, discuss and debate common responsible management education (RME) histories and challenges often only need the lightest mediation. The PRME Nordic Chapter has always been active in seeking and carving out such spaces. Arguably, the PRME Secretariat has from the beginning understood its boundary spanning role (Hodge et al., 2011) in cultivating a dynamic relationship between situated science/academia and the global principles as essential for responding to the complex social challenges of Responsible Management Education (RME) particularly through cultivating and supporting such relational spaces.

Similarly, PRME Nordic Chapter has since its conception understood the value of PRME Secretariat to provide, at least in the initial phase, contextual spaces for collaboration, and recognized the institutional and personal support the Secretariat provides to bring the schools together – such as the foundational role of the PRME Manager for Regional Chapters, as well as the various relational spaces provided for both formal and informal meetings.

Arguably two of such relational spaces proved foundational to the successful establishment of collaboration and trust of the Chapter:

The first was the “Sustainability in a Scandinavian Context” conference hosted by Copenhagen Business School in June 2013. Fitting to the

outcome, the very theme of the conference was the assumption that there is something in common or even unique among Nordic organizations in how they approach sustainability, perhaps giving the initial participating schools scientific legitimacy to something they already knew – that trust and pragmatic cooperation are highly valued and needed in order to create meaning through a common “serious reading” (Solitander et al., 2012) of the Principles for Responsible Management Education.

The second foundational relational space was the PRME Summit in Bled, Slovenia, in September 2013. Here, outside of the formality that often comes with academic conferences, representatives of eight Nordic schools (Copenhagen Business School, Denmark; Aarhus University, Denmark; Lund University School of Economics and Management, Sweden; Háskólinn í Reykjavík, Iceland; the School of Business and Service Management, Finland; Turku School of Economics, Finland; Hanken School of Economics, Finland; Aalto University, School of Business, Finland) came together in an informal setting to hammer out a very Nordic consensus-driven view on PRME and the potential role and aim of a regional chapter. There is a physical artifact from this meeting that sums up a seemingly axiomatic yet somehow, in the world of business schools, almost contrarian view on the foundations of a regional Chapter, when scribbled on a napkin are the words “a non-dinner-speech approach to PRME”. This slogan, while informal, has always implicitly guided the PRME Nordic Chapter’s activities.

Such an emphasis on action and impact can also be contextualized in the emergence of a larger debate about sustainability and education that was ongoing on a global scale. Temporally the establishment of PRME Nordic Chapter coincided with a larger debate about both the changing role of business schools (through the notion of RME), and the larger question about education for sustainable development, highlighted not least through the development of the UN SDGs. Education for sustainable development (ESD) in higher education is intended to encourage individuals to become active participants in building more sustainable societies and achieving the SDGs. It is supposed to empower engagement in real and relevant social problems (Barrineau et al., 2019). Thus, within PRME Nordic Chapter the emphasis since establishment has been to jointly explore how to achieve impact through education and research.

A shift from loose to tight framing may involve changes to the curriculum, management, leadership and governance throughout an organization or network. Thus, there was recognition that PRME Nordic Chapter itself

is an actor in the development of society in a tight framing of sustainability – putting further emphasis on the question how to organize. The development of the MoU also revealed another characteristic of Nordic values and ways of organizing, when the schools showed hesitancy to recreate a more hierarchical governance system that was present in some of the previously established regional Chapters, instead trusting that the production of consensus is possible and even desirable without steep hierarchies. Yet there was recognition that a shift toward a tight framing of sustainability could not simply rely on informal cooperation. The bottom-up implementation of ESD needs to be complemented by more top-down implementation (Holmberg et al., 2012).<sup>1</sup> The formality of the MoU and the formal governance hierarchies within it serves to provide reliable ways to progress toward predefined goals of ESD (ibid).

The first MoU was finalized just two months after the meeting in Bled and signed by Nordic schools representing all Nordic countries, Norway, Island, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark. Copenhagen School of Business was elected in a consensus vote as the first official chairing school for the chapter for the period 2014–2016. The Chapter was officially established on September 13, 2014 with Hanken taking over the chapter chair mid-cycle in October 2014.

### **15.3 Role of the PRME Nordic Chapter in higher business education**

One first basic role for the Chapter is to provide a space for the dissemination of ideas and best practices between participating schools through meetings and workshops. There are several examples of such best practices that are developed at individual schools but can be communicated to the other Chapter schools. For example, at Aalto University all the courses have been mapped against the SDGs by the responsible teachers, and this information has been brought to the course descriptions so that students can more easily find courses that deal with particular sustainability themes. Our Chapter members decided in 2020 to increase opportunities for sharing and learning from each other. 2020 saw the beginning of our Chapter quarterly online “breakfasts” where members join at their own will and share, learn and contribute to collaborative projects. This book chapter is a direct outcome of our 2020 collaborative meetings.

Finally, the Chapter also contributes to PRME and the advancement of responsible management education beyond its regional borders. PRME

Nordic Chapter has always participated in PRME Global meetings, and several Nordic members have played essential roles as champions or advanced members by means of their critical perspective and steering progress.

#### **15.4 Empirical perspectives on responsible management education – what does the PRME Nordic Chapter achieve collaboratively?**

In this section some collaborative projects that have or are managed collaboratively by different Nordic PRME members are introduced.

The Chapter serves as a platform to facilitate collaborations around larger projects. One of the first concrete large-scale projects where the schools identified the possibility to cooperate and where it was clear that it was easy to prove value for both individual schools and the Chapter itself was the creation of a joint PhD course with three modules between three different Nordic PRME school locations. This joint PhD course draws from the particular profiles of different schools, gathers a critical mass of both teaching resources and students, and enables interaction and the creation of networks across the region. The course is comprised of three modules between three different Nordic PRME school locations. Students can apply from all PRME schools in the region and, if there is availability, also from other schools. The first implementation of the course was launched by Stockholm School of Economic, BI Norwegian Business School and Hanken School of Economics in 2016, and a second round was organized by Aalto University, Stockholm University and Copenhagen Business School in 2018–2019. A potential third round is currently being discussed by the different schools with the perspective of collaborative funds application to help support this initiative.

##### ***15.4.1 Common carbon literacy training & research conference***

UN PRME 2019 Research Conference was hosted by Jönköping International Business School. This was a unique opportunity for Nordic members to network further and create further collaboration. During the conference, several Nordic members took the Carbon Literacy Training codesigned by Nottingham Business School and Copenhagen Business School.

Through the PRME Working Group on Climate Change and Environment, Nordic PRME representatives have been trained to carry out our Carbon

Literacy Training. A few schools including Copenhagen Business School and Jönköping International Business School are now working on adapting the training to their local context. It can be expected to see the emergence of a Nordic Carbon Literacy training in the near future.

#### ***15.4.2 Further engaging students in transforming Nordic schools***

All PRME Nordic schools have witnessed and supported the rise of students' associations and initiatives, created with the purpose of transforming their campus for Agenda 2030. Several student organizations exist, and it is our purpose to help connect them so that they can amplify the work that is developed for the SDGs.

Efforts have been slowed down by COVID-19 lockdowns, but it is our ambition to encourage further students' collaboration across Nordic countries (e.g., Oikos Helsinki [Hanken Finland], Students for Sustainable Action [Jönköping International Business School], Oikos Copenhagen [CBS], SSE Students for Climate Action, Handels Students for Sustainability [Gothenburg]).

A Student Ambassadors Exchange program was proposed to let engaged students across the different schools share their experiences and raise engagement in other schools. This was initiated by Stockholm School of Economics and the students have already reached out to a few schools despite limitations created by the COVID-19 context.

#### ***15.4.3 Collaborative effort to map the Nordic Chapter's online education resources***

Across Nordic PRME members a focus has been on advancing sustainability education through the use of digitalization. The digitalization evolution is turning distance learning into various forms of E-learning<sup>2</sup>. Education for sustainability and for a sustainable society has across the Nordic PRME members been supported by E-learning strategies, more explicitly. E-learning has been proposed to enable, contribute to, as well as play a role in, the transition to sustainable societal patterns (Azeiteiro et al., 2015). This has made the E-learning and digitalization angle of education for sustainable development particularly relevant for PRME scholars engaged in sustainability in higher education, across the Nordics. The collaborations and conversations across the Nordic PRME schools foster traditions to advance education for sustainability.



Table 15.1<sup>3</sup> illustrates more examples of pure E-learning and blended learning mechanisms that have emerged across the Nordic PRME schools.

Within the development of mandatory online E-learning for formal education to advance education in sustainability, the options are still limited.

#### ***15.4.4 Chapter sharing sessions about strategies, tools and ideas to help facilitate a sustainability transition***

The Nordic Chapter is creating spaces for sharing about the progresses made at the different schools. The goal is to help inspire our partners, answer their questions and help them adopt some of the innovative processes for RME that were initiated at a first mover school. Time is allocated to sharing practices during the Nordic annual meeting and also during our quarterly meetings.

As a result of these spaces allocated to sharing inspiring practices, a few inspiring examples of work related to responsible management education in education, research, governance, and strategy are listed here:

- A university-wide effort toward advancing the connection between curriculum and responsibility, ethics and sustainability (RES) was initiated a decade ago by Professor Kai Hockerts. As of 2020, CBS PRME is working toward building on the foundations of RES in curricula to include linking the analysis of degree programs to three useful initiatives, or pillars, of RME.
- At Umeå School of Business, Economics and Statistics (USBE) the connection between the 17 SDGs and the Brundtland definition of sustainable development and curriculum follows an imbedded model and is certified according to ISO14001. Systematically, local learning goals on sustainability and ethics have been incorporated into curricula. In the spirit of the Nordic culture, courses are designed to encourage students to take on responsibility and an active role in the learning process, stimulate the students' curiosity and capacity for innovation, and allow for reflection and a critical approach to global challenges.
- The case of Karlstad Business School (KBS) fits well with the Nordic culture of transparent self-assessment and self-criticism. The school was looking into transformative change by implementing the SDGs to develop its curriculum based on sustainability and business societal practices. The ambition is also to integrate the distinctive ongoing studies/research and dialogues with the stakeholders within the curriculum for responsible management education.

Table 15.1 Overview of E-learning mechanisms for ESD (Source: Hueske, A-K., Pontoppidan, C.A. and Iosif-Lazar, L-C., 2020 and the other authors of this chapter).

Country	Type of e-learning	Online Learning Mechanisms	Blended Learning Mechanisms	RME Connection
Denmark			Responsible Management teaching cases (in collaboration with the Case Centre)	Digital platform for access to case-based teaching material for advancing responsible management content in course materials
	SIGMA alliance compact online course: virtual work group phase and individual virtual course phase (ECTS 7.5)	*Also available in a blended version		Course focused on responsible business for societal impact and global virtual management
		Cocreation of mini case studies and teaching notes, video case studies for blended learning		Teaching materials with a responsible management and SDG focus
Finland		Blending mechanisms of E-learning and digitalization in teaching		Integrating responsible management education through digitalization in all spheres of education
	Capstone Online course(s)			Producing SDG related videos and digital content in collaboration with PRME Champions schools used in the capstone online course: Social Responsibility Across Business Studies
		Video assignments		Foster creativity and interactive conceptual learning for ESD related topics
	Sustainability Literacy Test (SULITEST) online tool			Integrated in bachelor's level basic CSR course, supporting sustainability education and assessment of students performance against the average in Finland and the world
			AIM2FLOURISH platform	Integrated in the Strategy and Sustainability course

<p>Mandatory Social Responsibility online course (bachelor's level) Virtual summit conference with student participation</p>	<p>Course in Social Responsibility</p> <p>Part of the World in the Making course on teaching world challenges, developing solutions and presenting the ideas at the virtual conference Campaign to challenge extremism by promoting integration and raising awareness</p>
<p>Student campaign: Choose your Future online and offline activities, including an online survey</p>	<p>Corporate Responsibility and Ethics course revised based on gamification</p>
<p>Gamification and digitalization</p>	<p>Developed a CSR pilot teaching tool: Implementing CSR following a CEO's efforts to develop and implement CSR</p>
<p>Teaching methods based on film and simulation</p>	<p>Develop awareness and knowledge of responsibility in businesses (BSc)</p>
<p>Prerecorded online video lecture on green versus gray growth, sustainable business focus</p>	<p>Used in teaching, to increase awareness and knowledge on sustainability and debate topics (MSc)</p>
<p>Video interviews with CEO in companies, students, politicians – online available</p>	<p>Engage student organization in sustainability actions, create societal impact – collaboration between students, faculty, and external business</p>

(Continued)

Country	Type of e-learning	RME Connection
	Online Learning Mechanisms	
	Blended Learning Mechanisms	
	<p>GoExplorer Day</p> <p>Full-day conference Onsite meeting point for faculty, business and students – with Global Compact</p> <p>Used in onsite/online teaching</p> <p>Student survey on SDG knowledge – onsite interviews, online results, used in teaching</p> <p>New master's in sustainable finance – blended learning, mostly onsite</p> <p>SUSTAIN Program with exchange for both BI and students from two African universities</p> <p>Onsite/online course teaching in Norway and Africa</p> <p>Annual mapping of SDG focus in academic research. Online report</p> <p>Sustainability 'app' – online training course, + Workplace/intranet, for Employees</p>	<p>Increase student and external stakeholder engagement, societal impact</p> <p>Explains school commitment on sustainability to students and external community</p> <p>Systematic insight in student SDG awareness, to develop courses and actions</p> <p>Increase student learning on sustainability in core business topics</p> <p>Learn about responsible business in Africa and Global North/Global South sustainability issues</p> <p>Systematic insight in BI academic research on sustainability topics, inspire faculty.</p> <p>Student learning on sustainability and responsibility, dilemmas and opportunities</p> <p>Train staff – Increase knowledge on sustainability for school employees, inspire to develop more actions</p>

Sweden	<p>Online courses</p> <p>Course materials, films, videos, assignments, cases, quizzes shared between staff on the Canvas digital platform</p> <p>Online platform website hub for research, course, and program communication</p> <p>Business administration program includes two 7.5 ECTS A-level fully online courses</p> <p>SDG Impact assessment free online tool</p> <p>Expanding use of technology enhanced learning (TEL); integration of digital tools into education programs</p> <p>Sustainability Days for all Master's and Bachelor students (on-site pre-COVID-19)</p>	<p>Developing contextual sustainability education for future managers in the Baltic Region, students access information about responsible management and collaborate for sustainability. Also new courses on sustainable development: Economic challenges; The Firm, the Environment, and Society; The Consumer, the Environment, and Society</p> <p>Support student active learning on sustainability and ethical issues</p> <p>Integrate across university all work and efforts on sustainability</p> <p>Courses: CSR and Business Ethics and Environmental Economics and Sustainable Development</p> <p>Used in evaluating how study programs relate to SDGs</p> <p>Use of technology can help reduce carbon footprint in international research and education</p> <p>Technological tools improve dialogue externally and internally in HEIs</p> <p>The Sustainability Days cover three main themes; namely, Challenges, Responsibility and Solutions. External stakeholders play a crucial part.</p>

- Jönköping International Business School (JIBS) as part of Jönköping University is mapping all efforts related to education, research, governance, operation management and community engagement on a sustainability dashboard (this is an adapted version of Saint Joseph University, HAUB Business School SDG Dashboard, created by Pr. David Steingard). In 2020, JIBS has decided to give more emphasis to education and see how RME principles can be embedded in all programs, in all courses, to inspire and inform all students in a systematic way. In collaboration with JIBS Associate Dean of Research, surveys and interviews are being conducted with JIBS program directors and JIBS teachers to see how RME principles are being understood and included by faculty members in their courses.
- BI Norway has listed their current courses that have embedded RME principles and is now looking at ways to evaluate all courses and programs.
- At Aalto and Hanken respectively, tagging and labeling both courses and research in relation to the SDGs have been introduced. At Aalto courses are tagged in terms of their relevance and links to particular SDGs, and at Hanken all research output when registered in the research database is tagged, when relevant, to the various SDGs.

### **15.5 Recent PRME Nordic Chapter progresses**

2020 Nordic PRME Annual Meeting was preceded by a first time PRME Nordic event: a one-day virtual research symposium on RME was organized by Karlstad Business. The event was largely appreciated and may become an annual tradition in conjunction with the organization of the chapter's annual meeting.

Jönköping International Business School accepted to be Chapter Chair in 2020, for the following two years. Due to common willingness to meet more often and informally, a new tradition was successfully implemented: in addition to the annual meeting, PRME Nordic Chapter has now quarterly morning "breakfasts." These online morning "breakfasts" are an opportunity for available Nordic members to reconnect, share news, and collaborate on common project (codesigning the annual conference, codesigning the book chapter, etc.).

To help share documents in a transparent and efficient manner, we have recently chosen to create an online Microsoft Teams group where all

documents and meeting notes are shared. Nordic members can modify the documents and share them. We are looking for more ways to inspire each other and to cocreate impactful projects. One way is to help our students collaborate more toward the SDGs.

Although the Chapter is chaired by one school, all members always seek collaboration. Another example of this can be seen in the contribution of the Nordic Chapter to the UN PRME Global Chapter Forum, October 8, 2020 where Jönköping International Business School represented by Guénola Abord-Hugon Nonet offered to facilitate a round table about Covid-19 and Responsible Management Education. Karlstad University and BI Norway supported this initiative and joined the panel.

Through these collaborations, members find inspiration and see the need to have more meetings and also platforms to share their stories and ideas, to help others make similar progress.

## **15.6 Critical perspective and potential next steps**

While the Nordic countries are generally well known for advancing thought-leadership and actions in sustainability (Morsing and Strand, 2014; Strand and Freeman, 2015; Strand et al., 2015), contemporary practices do not always meet the standards often envisioned.

A report published by KPMG and FSR – Danish Auditors<sup>4</sup> shows that only a few large Danish companies report on their own climate impact according to the internationally recognized reporting standard, Greenhouse Gas Protocol. This means that companies' climate data do not provide reliable benchmarks for investors and consumers. More specifically, the review of the companies' climate reporting shows that 88% of the 2,000 largest Danish companies have completely opted out of reporting on either their climate impact or disclose their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Such illustrations of sustainability endeavors not reaching the levels we aim for across the Nordic countries will call for the Nordic PRME community to continue to collectively advance the agenda on responsible management education. Climate change education needs to be at the core of sustainability education in Nordic PRME. It has never been more crucial than today to provide climate education for all, across borders, across school systems, ages and professions.

The role of education in raising awareness as well as instituting behavioral change for climate change mitigation and adaptation is of critical importance (UNESCO 2017, 2020).

PRME Nordic Chapter members see the need to create systemic and systematic change across their schools. They have now achieved the spark of inspiration toward the SDGs and they want to accelerate these developments so that Nordic business schools fully integrate the SDGs in all areas.

This requires dialogue, facilitation, collaboration, and cross-disciplinary and multistakeholder engagement to help address all areas in research, strategy, education, governance, and community engagement and to transform operations so that universities not only learn to talk the walk but also walk the talk.

It is our hope and our common ambition to become inspiring campuses toward the goal of remaining below 1.5°C global warming and achieve Agenda 2030 together.

## Notes

- 1 Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/IJSHE-09-2019-0287/full/html#ref012>
- 2 E-learning stands for electronic learning and is a method of delivering education via electronic pathways.
- 3 This table is the collaborative result of work developed by Hueske, A-K., Pontoppidan, C. A., & Iosif-Lazar, L-C. (2020) and by the other authors of this chapter.
- 4 Source: <https://home.kpmg/dk/en/home/insights/2020/09/improvement-for-danish-companies--climate-reporting.html>

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