

Editorial 2022

Foreign languages and university studies. Four seasons in Denmark

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In the **spring of 2021** – even as the German-Danish Year of Cultural Friendship¹, postponed due to the coronavirus, was still in progress – a public debate unfolded in Denmark on the necessity of German, and of German language skills: should young people learn German at all, and what for, when we all have a command of English? Arguments against German were that Danish primary schools had a shortage of German teachers, and that German was much too difficult and disagreeable for Danish schoolchildren. There is truth in the first, because far too few teachers are being trained in foreign languages at the university colleges. However, hearing this crisis invoked as if it were grounds for abolishing German as a subject was apparently quite an alarm signal for politicians in the field of education and schooling. The most notable defence was mounted from within the liberal party *Venstre*, which backs Denmark's »Germany Strategy«, but the government itself also added its voice to the pro-German campaign.

Promptly in the **summer of 2021**, another new Danish education policy reform was passed: »Educational Opportunities Throughout Denmark«², which required Denmark's eight universities either to transfer ten per cent of student places to the country's regions, or simply to make a ten-per-cent capacity saving locally. The majority of universities had to choose the latter option because of the high costs of establishing new study centres in the provinces, and because this could ultimately only be done by separating teaching from research, libraries, archives and laboratories, which would not allay the disparities between the periphery and the centre in any way.

As always, the humanities are having to bear the brunt of these cuts. The humanities faculty in which I work will have to give up 25 per cent of its course capacity within the next ten years. The natural sciences faculty is equally hard hit. Only law has escaped the need for reductions: for who, other than lawyers, should administer the country's

¹ Cf. Jochim Grage: NORDEUROPAforum Editorial 2020, <https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/handle/18452/22088> (21.02.2022).

² Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet (2021): Flere og bedre uddannelsesmuligheder i hele Danmark, <https://ufm.dk/lovstof/politiske-aftaler/aftale-om-flere-og-bedre-uddannelsesmuligheder-i-hele-danmark> (21.02.22).

many reforms and come up with ideas for new ones! We are currently awaiting news of the specific cutbacks to our departments.

Then, in the **autumn of 2021**, the draft budget for 2022 landed on our desks, complete with a disastrous recommendation: a proposal to cut the Danish »Lectureship Scheme«, i. e. the government's co-financing of Danish visiting lecturers abroad, who teach the Danish language at universities in more than 25 countries and take charge of important cultural education including events, conferences and author visits. Denmark was to become the only Scandinavian country to have dispensed with a publicly funded system of support for its language and culture. It was said to be too expensive to administer and, according to the ministry, its task could be managed by marketing agencies using digital solutions in future.

An impressive wave of protest rose up, nationally and internationally: not just Danish visiting lecturers, but students, professors, prospective linguists, cultural actors, translators, editors in publishing houses – from all over the world – spoke out, wrote letters to the minister, sent questions to parliamentarians and made the case in the press and the media that the »Lectureship Scheme« should be preserved. A superb international effort!

Finally, in the **winter of 2021**, shortly before Christmas we were graced with two gifts at once: the Lectureship Scheme was retained, and a political majority had agreed a special funding allocation for two foreign languages, namely German and French.³

Altogether, 40 million kroner (about 5.4 million euros) have been granted for primary school teacher training at the university colleges and for foreign languages at the universities. The universities are to use the funding partly for the benefit of Germanic Studies and Romance Studies as degree subjects and partly for other degree programmes in which language skills are also necessary, such as Theology, Philosophy, History, Musicology, Sociology, Political Science, etc. The aim of the additional funding is to improve practical, receptive and productive language skills.

At present, we in Germanic Studies at the University of Copenhagen are busy developing these activities to promote practical language skills (and preparing the evaluation at the same time, in the hope that the »project funding« might turn into permanent funding). At our disposal we have four extra semester hours per subject semester over three years. While developing these programmes, I think of the Danish lecturers placed in Scandinavian or Northern European Studies departments in Austria, Germany and Switzerland, and how they accomplish this major task of teaching students Danish every year with such competence, experience and commitment. Denmark is truly a country of many reforms, not least in education policy. In comparison, the German university strikes me as a place of continuity and stability (and, to the best of my knowledge, autonomy). Let us hope that in future, both major and minor foreign languages in both countries will not merely survive but will remain vitally alive.

³ Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet (2021): Politisk flertal vil løfte studerendes evner i tysk og fransk, <https://ufm.dk/aktuelt/pressemeddelelser/2021/politisk-flertal-vil-lofte-studerendes-evner-i-tysk-og-fransk> (21.02.22).

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Contributing to this vitality of the languages and cultures of the North is one of the aims of *NORDEUROPA forum* as an organ of academic discourse about the North – be it in essays, reviews, conference reports or blog articles. Scandinavian Studies in Germany also had to contend with the threat of cuts in 2021, namely the prospect of a further reduction in departments from 12 to 10.⁴ This, too, was averted in the end due to strong protests from the national and international academic community. As the scholarly based, interdisciplinary (platinum) open access journal of a small subject, *NORDEUROPA forum* is familiar with the challenge of safeguarding its existence. Particularly for small subjects, such an organ of publication maintained by the academic community is something of great significance.

We are pleased to be enlarging not only the circle of the journal's recipients, but also the circle of its editors: to the latter group, we warmly welcome Frederike Felcht (Frankfurt a. M.) and Clemens Räthel (Greifswald). With their arrival, the editorial board of *NORDEUROPA forum* also gains two additional seats. We likewise welcome Tim Hager, who is taking over from Swantje Opitz (Berlin/Tromsø) as the new managing editor. We say goodbye to her, and to Paul Greiner (Berlin) and Christian Rebhan (Bonn), with very sincere thanks for their years of service.

In addition to the publication of academic papers, direct exchange through joint conferences is indispensable to the vitality of the academic community. With this in mind, we are eagerly anticipating events such as the 25. ATDS 2022 in Munich and the »17. Überregionalen Promovierendentagung in Bonn und Köln« and hoping that, after two years of the coronavirus pandemic, it will be a face-to-face gathering rather than a virtual one.

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⁴ NORDEUROPA-Blog (2021): Doppelbedrohung für die Skandinavistik? <https://portal.vifanord.de/blog/doppelbedrohung-fuer-die-skandinavistik/> (23.03.2022).